Carita Bengs

Looking good

A study of gendered body ideals among young people

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A study of gendered body ideals among young people

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**ABSTRACT**

The main objective of this thesis is to study how social and cultural norms regarding body and appearance are perceived and interpreted by young people. This is done by studying both how these perceptions affect young people and how the body is controlled and altered through practices such as dieting, exercise, plastic surgery and the use of steroids. Another question raised in the study concerns important sources of influence for how one's own body is perceived. The study is based on a questionnaire distributed to 167 young girls and boys aged 13, 15 and 17.

The theoretical framework includes both general theories of the body and gender perspectives. Four themes have been applied in order to capture central and important aspects of the ideal body. These are; the problematic body, the controlled body, the commodified body and the social body. These themes are all related both to gender and to the portrayal of bodies in mass media.

The main conclusion is that the body matters very much to many young people today, both their own perceptions of it and what others think of it. The perceptions of one’s own body is also very much gendered. Many girls have internalised a fragmented and problematised way of looking at their bodies. They report a greater dissatisfaction with their bodies than do boys. Size and shape are regarded as particularly problematic and a small and slim body is preferred. Girls are also frequently engaged in practices to alter and control their bodies and are more concerned with the state of their own bodies and how others’ view them. Boys expressed a greater satisfaction with their bodies. Their dissatisfaction is primarily focused on height and weight and indicates a desire to become bigger and taller. Exercise is the prime way for boys to alter their bodies. However, their own bodies are not as problematic as for girls; instead they seem to be more concerned with others’ bodies. Friends, together with mass media (particularly visual media and magazines), are regarded as the strongest source of influence on how the respondents (both girls and boys) perceive their bodies.

Age differences are also found. Girls display a tendency to be more dissatisfied with and be more involved in practices to alter the body the older they are. Boys display the reverse situation. The largest differences can therefore be found among the oldest. The influence of friends and media tend also to be perceived as more important among the oldest.

**Key words:** body ideals, young people, gender, consumer culture, ideal images, advertising, mass
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When I began my doctoral studies ‘the body’ was still a relatively new area of research. However, over the years it has proved to be a rapidly expanding area, attracting the interest of scholars in various fields and disciplines. Working within such an area has proved to be very inspiring in terms of the constant flow of new books, conferences etc. connected to this growth. Being part of such a development has been very exciting. It has also been difficult at times, since it is easy to get lost in this large body of work. However, over the years I came to know people who have shared my interest in ‘the body’ and who have helped me by way of sharing their knowledge, support and encouragement.

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Carita Bengs
1 Introduction

We are surrounded by images of bodies. Tall, short, slim, fat, muscular, disabled, distorted, mutilated, ugly and beautiful bodies. Some attract us; others make us envious, sad, worried, or even disgusted. Many of these images present ideal bodies. These ideal bodies meet us everywhere we go. They can be found in commercials/advertising, magazines, film, television, on posters and of course also in real life. These ideal images are widespread and in many cases even global. Moreover, they tend to embrace both men and women and people of all ages and races. People are also encouraged to measure themselves and others against these images. Such comparisons are not always enjoyable since most of us do not measure up to these ideals. Still we are frequently told that we can achieve them with hard work, willpower and money. We also learn that the body is capable of changing and that more and more things and parts of our bodies can, and therefore also should, be improved, corrected or even exchanged.

The body, judging from the ways that it is frequently portrayed in mass media, is very much a problem for people since it is in need of constant work and attention in order to be controlled, altered, improved and maintained. Mass media, moreover, often focus their attention on contradictory problems of the body. At the same time as we hear of alarming figures of eating disorders among young people (predominantly girls) we also learn that the weight of the population as a whole is increasing and that this is particularly obvious among girls and young women (age 16–24) (Lindgren 1999). These two phenomena both cause significant medical and state expenditure, not to mention individual suffering. Other examples of contradictory messages that often confuse people are those related to consumer culture. On the one hand people are encouraged to scrutinise their bodies and appearance in search of potential shortcomings, signs of age or decay. They are, furthermore, presented with a wide range of possible ‘solutions’ to these problems. These solutions promise them a happier, more successful life if they try to attain the desired ideals. On the other hand they are told not to become victims of mediated ideals, to be proud of their bodies and accept them as they are with all their faults, and not fall in to the dangerous traps of eating disorders, the use of anabolic steroids or cosmetic surgery.
Questions concerning body and appearance have, moreover, often been regarded foremost as a female concern. Not least because girls and women are specifically subjected to many of these messages and since female bodies are frequently on display. They are, furthermore, constantly reminded that their bodies are wrong and that they can and should be improved. There are, however, indications that the situation is changing, not least because men have also become important within consumer culture. Several examples and reasons can be found, such as increasing numbers of body care products aimed at men, men's new and changing roles in the marketing of these products and the role of men as consumers. Men today are frequently seen in advertisements and commercials, selling all kind of products. Their bodies, as well as women's, are commonly on display.

Judging from the attention the body receives within mass media and consumer culture, it is not an overstatement to suggest that we live in a culture that is obsessed with the body and its decoration, change and improvement. A plenitude of activities is available for our continual attempts to maintain and alter the body or simply to keep it attractive, healthy, fit and in shape. Such activities tend to occupy more and more of our time, money and energy. The market for body and health enhancement products, activities and services is also constantly expanding. The beauty industry is reported to be a rapidly growing area of the service sector in Sweden today (Söderström 1999:2). Moreover, we come, to an ever-increasing extent, to learn both from commercials and popular media content as well as public health campaigns that this work with and on the body is our personal responsibility. We are, for example, responsible for what we eat and drink and for any dangers (physical, psychological, biological, chemical and so on) that we expose the body to. We are, furthermore, responsible for how we look and for keeping the body young, healthy and fit; something that often is presented as a desirable goal in commercials and popular media content.

However, this individualisation of responsibility stretches far beyond the limits of one’s body. People today are urged to take a greater responsibility not only for their own bodies but also for their own lives and their own welfare. For instance, this can be seen in questions concerning health issues such as the intensified discussion of the increasing weight of the population, in education and
unemployment policies and in welfare and social services.\(^1\) This is also something that may lead to increased pressure on the individual. Personal responsibility for the body can therefore be seen as a reflection of a larger societal trend to place more and more responsibility on the individual.

The body, its size and shape also becomes important for the image we want to create of ourselves and for how we will be judged by others, as the body is used frequently to categorise and value other people. The body therefore also becomes important in our relation to other people. Since an attractive body and appearance is also presented as something worth striving for, this makes many people concerned with the state of their bodies, with their health, weight, appearance and with ageing. Striving for a perfect body is, however, an activity that young people, perhaps more than adults, are engaged in. This thesis is concerned with the relationship between these ideal bodies and the bodies of young people.

**The young body in focus**

Why then is the ideal body worth studying? Is there any problem with the promotion of a healthy, fit, sexy and young body? In many respects there is not. What becomes problematic, however, is the connection drawn between the body and identity, between social worth and personal responsibility for keeping or achieving the desired body.

Although all population groups are encouraged to strive for an ideal body, certain groups such as women of all ages, and young people of both genders can be regarded as particularly targeted by mass media attention and consumer culture products and services. In this thesis I have chosen to focus on young people, both girls and boys, for several reasons. First, because of the presentation of youth and a youthful body as an ideal within consumer culture; second, because questions concerning body and appearance may be especially important for young people as they are in a transitional phase from childhood to adulthood where changes in the body are very prominent and when their awareness of social ideals might be increasing; and third, because much of the mass media

\(^1\) The new personal responsibility for the employment of personal care-takers among disabled people and the administration of the future income pension are two examples of how more and more areas of people's lives have come to be regarded as personal responsibilities.
content concerning body and appearance is frequently aimed at young people, for instance in youth oriented magazines.

**Aims**

The overall aim is to study how social and cultural norms regarding body and appearance are perceived and interpreted by young people. The intention is also to study how these perceptions affect them and how the body is controlled and altered through practices such as dieting, exercise, plastic surgery and the use of steroids. Another intention is to see to what degree young people feel a demand or a pressure to change or adapt to existing ideals (or their images of the desired body) and if they do, in what way they try to do it.

The central questions at issue in the study are:

- How do young people perceive their own bodies?
- How are social and cultural body ideals perceived and how do they affect young people?
- How important are these ideals and what kind of action is taken to alter the body in order to achieve the desired body?
- What are the most important sources of influence about ideal bodies and appearance for young people?

**The research project**

The present study is part of a larger interdisciplinary research project consisting of three separate parts: a questionnaire, a body measure and a 7-day recording of dietary intake. The empirical material for the thesis is based on the questionnaire. The questionnaire, which is described in detail below, consisted of a large set of questions regarding perceptions and attitudes towards the body and ap-

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2 The project involves co-operation between the Departments of Sociology, Paediatrics, and Epidemiology and Public Health at Umeå University and the School Health Services in Umeå.

3 The body measures were conducted by a physiotherapist. These measures include height, weight and estimations, as well as actual measures, of the size of different parts of the body. The 7-day recording of dietary intake is based on a self-reported recording of everything eaten during a week. This is done with the help of special diet diaries according to a school-based model used in earlier studies (Bergström et al 1993, 1995). A specially trained domestic science teacher was responsible for the recordings.
pearance and different ways of altering or changing them. The questionnaire was introduced first in the data collection to reduce the risk of influence from the other parts of the project. The body measure and the recording of dietary intake then followed the questionnaire. The three parts have been analysed separately (Bergström et al 2000).

Young people from three different age groups (13, 15 and 17 years of age) are included in the project. Moreover, the project is both cross-sectional and longitudinal, whereby the youngest pupils in grade seven were invited to participate again two years later, when they were in the ninth grade. This opens up the possibility of doing a longitudinal follow-up of the individuals as well as the group regarding all three parts of the project: the perception of the body, the dietary intake and the body measures. It also creates the possibility of evaluating a possible time trend. The thesis is, however, based on the first main cross sectional sample. The longitudinal follow up will be analysed separately.

**Ethics**

Prior to the study, the respondents were given both written and oral information about the study. This was done both by an information letter sent home to the teenagers and their parents or care giver before the study, and by more in-depth information of the different parts of the study given by those responsible for them in connection with the distribution of the questionnaire. The respondents were also informed that participation was voluntary.

The study was approved by the research ethics committee of the Medical Faculty at Umeå University and the personal records are approved by the Swedish Data Inspection.

**Participants and Participation**

A total of 167 pupils from two schools in the municipality of Umeå\(^4\) were invited to participate in the study. A total of six classes are included; two each from grades seven and nine in primary school and two from grade two in upper secondary school. The students in these grades were 13, 15 and 17 years of age. Schools and classes were chosen in consultation with the School Health Service, the School principals, and responsible teachers. The questionnaire was com-

\(^4\) A town of about 104 000 inhabitants situated in the northern part of Sweden.
pleted in the classroom during a lesson and cinema tickets were distributed by lottery as a reward for the students who participated in the study.

The different age groups were quite evenly represented, as can be seen in Appendix 1, Table 1. The representation of girls and boys is also quite even for the participants from primary school, while the figures from upper secondary school differ somewhat. In total, there are about ten percent more girls than boys. A total of 162 respondents answered the questionnaire. This means that five pupils did not participate in the study. The main reason for this dropout is absence from class at the time of the data collection. No particular pattern can be found for the dropouts as they include both girls and boys from all three age groups. As no additional data about the respondents are available it is difficult to say more about the dropouts. However, since they not in any systematic way differs from the rest of the sample and especially since the dropout rate is very low, it can be stated that the dropout does not affect the results.

Participation varied quite a lot between the different parts of the study. One reason for this is the differences in the data collection procedure. The questionnaire was distributed and completed in the classroom during an ordinary lesson, which contributed to the high rate of participation (97 per cent). The other two parts of the data collection were more complicated to administrate. A description of the respondent’s social situation, that is, their parent’s marital status, their living conditions and the socio-economic status of the family can be found in Appendix 1, Table 2. It is worth noting that the last variable, socio-economic of the family, which is based on parents’ occupations, was difficult for the respondents to answer. Due to this fact, using this variable is somewhat problematic. The distribution indicates a large number of white-collar workers and professionals and considerably fewer blue-collar workers. The extent to which social position affects the results in this study is difficult to judge; however, when the variable is tested in relation to other variables only insignificant differences are found. This can, of course, be a result of the low dispersion and response rate. The variable has therefore been excluded in the analysis.

5 The participation rate was 162 for the questionnaire, 152 for the body measures and 123 for the recording of dietary intake. There was only one pupil who dropped out on all three parts of the study.
6 For example, the participants were asked to make an appointment for the body measure, and in the case of the recording of dietary intake they were to register everything they had eaten during a week. The two latter parts, especially the recording of dietary intake, therefore required a greater effort from the participants.
Since the intention of the study is to focus on ‘normality’, the focus of the study is not the occurrence of eating disorders or other related problems. The sample constitutes a ‘normal population’ in the sense that it targets young people without previously known bodily related problems, such as eating disorders and the like. To achieve this, school classes and/or programs that focused on these issues in particular were excluded.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire was tested in a pilot study in the Autumn of 1994 in two seventh grade classes (Bengs 1994). The revised questionnaire was then distributed in the Autumn of 1995 to 162 pupils from two schools in the municipality of Umeå.

The questionnaire is quite extensive and contains a total of 76 questions, of which most included a number of separate items (see Appendix 2). Most of the questions are multiple choice but there are also other types of questions with open-ended answers or fixed alternatives. As well as questions where the respondents were asked to describe their own body and their desired body, they were invited to evaluate their body and appearance according to a scale and also to comment on a photo of a young woman. Finally, the respondents had the opportunity to express their own point of view regarding the questionnaire, the questions or other subjects they deemed important. The questionnaires were identical for all the three age groups. Separate questions were, however, asked of boys and girls in relation to puberty development and body shape.

The questions are organised in different sections, which are introduced with a short heading. These sections can be divided into six main themes.

1. Perceptions of body and appearance.
2. Views of the bodies of others and of ideals.
3. Practices used in order to control or alter the body (such as dieting, exercise, plastic surgery and the use of steroids) and attitudes towards these practices.
4. Habits and behaviour in relation to food intake, leisure time, schoolwork and social networks.

The pilot study found that the questions functioned satisfactorily and that they were perceived as important and urgent; however, at the same time they were also sometimes seen as private and a little difficult to answer.
5. Influence from different people and from mass media.
6. Puberty development and health.

The thesis is mainly based on the five first themes, leaving puberty development and health to be developed in other forums. Leisure time activities, schoolwork and social networks are other areas that have not been included in the present analysis.

The questionnaire was also used to obtain information about age, gender, educational level of parents and family structure.

There are of course several areas that were not included in the questionnaire. One such is sub-cultural belonging. This is not, however, an irrelevant question as particular youth cultural styles and sub-cultures may be connected to the body in different ways and be expressed through different styles. However, as the point of focus for this study is more related to the body itself rather than style, I chose not to include questions on this topic. Sub-cultural belonging and particular youth styles have also been the focus of many earlier studies, particularly those found within the British Cultural Studies tradition, whereas the body itself is researched less often. Another area not touched on more than briefly is sexuality. Like the issue of sub-cultural belonging, this is a topic closely related to the issue of the ideal body and the construction of both femininity and masculinity. Of itself it is a significant topic that needs to be further explored in relation to young people and the body. It is, however, not within the scope of this study to cover this relationship. Ethnicity is yet another area that I chose to leave out, although the perception, understanding and ways of relating to the body may differ according to different cultural connections. However, in the present study the participating respondents were ethnically homogenous.

When writing a thesis like this certain choices have to be made. Here I will briefly comment on the choices made about the theoretical portion of the thesis and leave the methodological justification and discussion for Chapter 5. In terms of the decisions about theoretical material, I have chosen to focus my attention on some of the areas that interest me most and that I have found useful to understand young people’s perceptions of their bodies. These are first, the theoretical development of the sociology of the body, and second, theories regarding the construction of femininity and masculinity. Each of these constitutes a chapter of the thesis. I am, of course, aware that as a consequence of
these choices, some other areas have been less developed, such as youth culture, identity and identity formation.

Further, as is perhaps inevitable, the theoretical part of the thesis also tends to raise more questions than can be answered in the empirical study. I hope this will not disappoint the reader too much but instead serve as inspiration for new studies and new questions.

Structure

The thesis is divided into two main parts. The first part is theoretical and outlines the theoretical points of departure for the study. The second part is mainly empirical, but includes a discussion of theories and studies that are relevant for an understanding of the young body. The relatively new and expanding theoretical field of the body, what can also be referred to as the sociology of the body, is discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter introduces the body as a focus of research, outlines some of the reasons for this new development in theory, and includes a brief introduction to some of the major approaches found within the field. This is followed by an overview of the theoretical work on the body found within feminism, which has a long tradition of studying the body, and an examination of the more recent developments within Men’s Studies. The chapter ends with a discussion of how these different theoretical approaches are used in this study. The impact of gender is further discussed in Chapter 3, where the concept of the gendered body and the various ways that gender can be seen as socially constructed is discussed. The first part of the chapter focuses on how gender is ‘worked’ into the body and how masculinity and femininity can be seen as actively acquired. The second part of the chapter focuses on the impact of consumer culture and mass media in this process. In Chapter 4, four interrelated themes are highlighted in order to capture central and important aspects of the ideal body. These are based on the theoretical framework presented in the two earlier chapters. The themes also structure the following empirical chapters where they are discussed in relation to the young body in particular. These four themes are; the problematic body, the controlled body, the commodified body and the social body. The first theme, the problematic body, refers to the many ways in which the body and issues around it are regarded as problematic. The second theme, the controlled body, is centred on the different ways that this problematic body needs to be controlled or regulated and discusses different aspects of control. The third theme, the commodified body, focuses on con-
sumer culture and the ways in which the body is seen both as a commodity and a focus for consumption. And finally, the theme of the social body focuses on the body’s importance both for the individual and in the intersubjective realm. As each theme incorporates issues about both gender and the impact of the media, these two aspects are addressed in all of the themes. After discussing the body in general and the adult body in particular, the focus turns to the empirical material where the young body is highlighted. In between the theoretical and empirical sections, some of the methodological considerations on which the study is based are discussed in Chapter 5.

The second and more empirical part opens in Chapter 6 with a discussion of the problem of not having the 'right' body. Young people's perceptions of the body, its size, shape and parts, are addressed here. Chapter 7 mainly deals with the ways that young people themselves control their bodies, the way that its size and shape are managed, the strategies young people use to alter it and the investments they make. A question that is also addressed is if and to what extent the body also can be regarded as a 'project' for the young people in this study.

Different influences, including the media as well as personal sources, is the theme of the first section of Chapter 8. The second section of the chapter takes a close look at ideal images and the important features of an ideal body. The first section of Chapter 9, the last empirical chapter, contrasts the previously discussed ideal bodies with the respondents' views of an alternative image; what I refer to as a 'ordinary' body. The second section of the chapter follows with a discussion of the impact of others' views of one's own body. The importance of the body for young people themselves and the importance of other people's views are some of the areas discussed in this chapter, as well as the general issue of the attention the body receives. Finally, Chapter 10 consists of a concluding discussion where important findings are further elaborated in relation to the theoretical themes raised in the first section.
2 The development of body theory

The theoretical part of this study begins with an overview of some of the reasons for the current interest in the body and an outline of how the rapidly growing area of the sociology of the body has developed. My objective is not to fully cover all the research that has been done within this field, but to introduce some of the major theoretical approaches that have influenced much of the contemporary work on the body. Three major approaches can be singled out as especially important: the naturalistic approach, the social constructionist approach and the phenomenological approach. These are each introduced briefly, as are some examples of recent work that attempts to combine them. This is followed by an overview of feminist research on the body and of some of the more recent theoretical work on men's bodies. The chapter ends with a discussion of how these different theoretical approaches are drawn on in this study.

I begin this theoretical discussion by briefly looking at why and how the body has come to such popular and academic attention today.

The body as a new field of research

Interest in the human body seems to be more and more widespread today, both within popular culture and academic research. This attention to the body is a rather recent phenomenon within many academic disciplines. During the last decade it has become a topic within its own right in several disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. This is particularly evident within sociology. Interest in the body is, however, not only sociological or academic; it can also be seen as a social and cultural phenomenon. Social interest has emerged around issues related to different political movements (for example feminist movements and pro- and anti-abortion campaigns) and through a concern for public health, which is evident in health campaigns and prevention programs.

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8 This introduction to the development of body theories makes no claim to fully cover this rapidly expanding empirical and theoretical field. There are, due to my specific focus, several other important texts on the body that have not been included in this presentation. Most of these references can, however, be found in the work of Bryan S. Turner, Chris Shilling and Arthur Frank (mentioned later).
Within the cultural sphere, health, the body and its maintenance are also central issues. Deborah Lupton (1995) shows in her work that issues connected to medicine, disease and illness are common in both elite and popular culture. These topics are discussed in everything from informative programs to autobiographies, magazines, novels, popular fiction, film, television dramas and soap operas. The proliferation of many popular TV series and soap operas set in hospitals or other medical environments is just one example of this interest.

How then has the body managed to capture such attention in research fields when the human soul rather than the human body was traditionally the key concern for intellectuals? Through some of the more theoretically oriented literature we can identify a number of different explanations for this shift. Most of the work seems, however, to agree on a number of influential reasons. Chris Shilling (1993) presents four major social and academic changes that are also mentioned and further developed by other scholars such as Bryan S. Turner (1996) and Kathy Davis (1997a). Since several of them are also important for this thesis, they will be briefly introduced here and developed further in the coming chapters.

Shilling (1993) identifies the rise of second wave feminism as a key factor in the development of interest in the body. This influential movement not only focused on the body and its importance in general, but also highlighted the female body and specific concerns related to it. Questions regarding reproduction, fertility and abortion are some of the most important ones raised by feminism. These issues highlighted women’s lack of power over and rights to the body, and through this women came to ‘reclaim’ their bodies from male control and abuse. In this way the body also became a political issue.

A second influencing factor, according to Shilling, is the changing demographic pattern in Western societies, specifically the trend towards an ageing population, which is becoming a growing medical and economic problem. Issues connected with the ageing body include the low status of care work for older people (Widding Isaksen 1994), and loss of bodily control or dependency, which may contribute to processes of infantilization (Hockey & James 1993, 1995). Additionally, questions concerning body image among older people have also been raised (Öberg & Tornstam 1999) as well as the negative identification with the exterior of the body. Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth’s (1993) concept ‘the mask of ageing’ is one such example. The mask refers to a perceived gap
between the exterior of the body and appearance and the feelings of personal identity. As such it is described as a disguise that conceals the essentially youthful self or the ‘true’ identity of the person beneath.

The rise of consumer culture, which is linked to the changing structure of modern capitalism, is regarded by Shilling as the third influencing factor. Several contemporary scholars have analysed the impact of consumer culture on the body (see for instance Featherstone 1993, 1994). The body becomes important in consumer culture for many reasons; not least because it can be regarded both as a commodity and as a focus for consumption. The importance of the body within consumer culture will be discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4.

The fourth and final factor that he mentions is related to new technological and medical advances that have come to change earlier understandings of the body. These have resulted in an increased potential to control the body, which has been accompanied by a crisis in its meaning. We are now able, among other things, to control, change and improve our bodies in a whole variety of ways. Advances in transplant and plastic surgery, artificial insemination and in vitro fertilisation are but some examples of the new medical and technological advances available (plastic surgery is also an issue that will be addressed later on in the thesis). It is now possible to change and alter the body in so many ways that the boundaries of the body are no longer obvious. This has led to a crisis in the meaning of the body. New questions have been raised about the body and its boundaries such as, what is the body? Who does it belong to? And when does its existence start and end? Moral and ethical questions pertaining to the new technologies are also highlighted, so, for example, feminists and bioethicists raise concerns about new reproductive technologies, genetic engineering and so on (see Sarah Nettleton 1995).

The neglected body

Although the body is very much on the sociological agenda today, this has not always been the case. It was not until the mid 1980s that it emerged as a research area of its own. While today the body is a rapidly growing field of inter-

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9 While the body came rather late to be an object of study within sociology, it has long since caught the interest of anthropologists. Since the body is also a rather new topic on the Swedish research agenda, I would like to briefly say something about the recent Swedish work here, as
It is interesting to note that classical sociologists rarely dealt explicitly with the body. However, the body was not entirely absent in earlier theoretical work. Shilling (1993:24) describes classical sociology as having a dual approach to the body. By this he means that the body, instead of being completely neglected, has become something of an 'absent presence' in sociology. This can be seen as part of a legacy that can be traced back to the foundation and development of the discipline.

Bryan S. Turner, often referred to as the founding father of the sociology of the body, has devoted much of his theoretical work to the question of how the early work of classical sociologists such as Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim dealt with the body and why they have failed to generate an explicit sociology of the body (see Turner 1993:a, 1996). Others, however, such as Anthony Synnot (1993), argue that scholars like George Simmel and Thorstein Veblen dealt a little more explicitly with aspects of the body in some of their work. Simmel (1965), for instance, was interested in the aesthetic significance of the face, and, according to Synnot (1993:93), Veblen can be said to have developed the first sociological theory of beauty as early as 1899. For Veblen (1986:101), beauty was not only related to things but also included humans. A beautiful woman was, for example, also to be regarded as a symbol of status. Another more recent example is Marcel Mauss' (1979) interest in how different body techniques' are developed in relation to the social and cultural context.

I will not go into details about these early theoretical developments here, as it is the objective of this introduction to focus rather on the development of theories that deal more explicitly with the body. However, some comments can be made about the various explanations of this neglect of the body. Several factors have

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most of the work that is addressed in this chapter has been completed overseas and in an Anglo-Saxon context. The Swedish research agenda has developed rapidly, resulting in a rich variety of studies from different academic disciplines. There are many historical studies of the body, for example, some interesting pieces of recent work include the thesis by Claes Ekenstam (1993) on the body and its history of ideas, and Karin Johannisssons' (1995) work on the history of the female body and her more recent book on the medical body (1997). An historical perspective is also applied in Eva Palmblad and Bengt Erik Eriksson's (1995) sociological work on the politics of the body. Other disciplines such as ethnology and pedagogy have also contributed to this growing field of work (see for example Lundin & Åkesson 1996, and for work on the relationship between the body, exercise and gender see Fagrell & Nilsson 1998). There are also studies focused more specifically on body building (Johansson 1997) and gym culture (Söderström 1999). Men's bodies have also been addressed in some recent work (Ekenstam et al 1998, Nilsson 1999). Work related to the young body is rare but some studies are examined in Chapter 5, where studies focused on the young body are discussed further.
been put forward as contributing to this situation. Of course, one key explanation is that many classical sociologists dealt with structures rather than individuals. However, Turner (1992:37) points to two other main factors. The first is sociology’s concern with the social meaning of social action at the level of values and belief, and the second is the implicit acceptance of the Cartesian tradition and its mind/body split.

Cartesian thought has contributed to a view of the body as problematic, as it focuses on the mind as that which defines humans as social beings (Shilling 1993:9). The mind is seen as superior to the body in the sense that it governs and rules the body. By contrast, the body is simply viewed as a container for the intellect or as a machine directed by instructions from the soul. Turner describes the principal features of the Cartesian myth to be “...the separation of mind and body, the subordination of body to mind and the associated dominance of cognitive rationalisation” (Turner 1996:10). In light of this, the body cannot control itself, instead it needs to be controlled by the mind or by the mind of others.

Cartesianism has come to play a major role in the development of body theories both because much of the earlier neglect of the body within sociology can be attributed to it, and because much of the later theoretical work critiques its division between mind and body. Furthermore, it has often been argued that this division has to be overcome in order to develop a sociological theory of the body.

**The body in focus: three approaches**

The rapidly emerging interest in the body does not constitute a particularly homogeneous field. There are many contributors stemming from different academic disciplines, and as a result they tend to draw on a wide range of theorists and theoretical perspectives. Three different approaches can, however, be singled out as important; a naturalistic approach, a social constructionist approach and a phenomenological approach. These three approaches have all very different points of departures in their ways of understanding the body. While the naturalists hold the belief that body is a real entity, which can only be analysed adequately as a biological phenomenon, the constructionists view the body as

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10 Some of the major sources of criticism can be found among theorists within the fields of phenomenology, postmodern theory and feminism.
shaped, constrained and sometimes even invented by society. Clearly these two approaches are very different from one another and therefore represent very different ways of understanding the body. Phenomenology, the third approach, is regarded by some as a bridge between these other two. The phenomenological way of understanding of the body is based on 'lived experience', on the way people interpret and experience their own bodies and their everyday lives. We will take a closer look at all of these theoretical developments below.

**The naturalistic approach**

Within the naturalistic approach, the body is primarily seen as pre-social. All human behaviours and social relations can be explained in terms of their biological basis. Differentiation and classification of bodies is something that has largely occupied scholars working within this approach. The justification of sex differences with reference to the body has been given particular attention. This has led to a focus on genitals, the size of different parts of the body e.g. the brain, hormones and so on. It is often pointed out that this focus on bodily differences has come to justify inequality, oppression and male domination. The (white) male body has come to be viewed as the norm: a norm, which other bodies are compared to and, as a result, the female body is regarded as both inferior and pathological. Sex differences are, however, not the only area that has been targeted. There have also been frequent attempts to use this perspective to legitimise the subordination and oppression of black people.

Furthermore, it is often argued that the interest in and rise of naturalistic ideas also coincides with periods of specific social and historical events. For example, the development of sociobiology in the 1970s, a rather late development within the naturalistic approach, coincided with the economic crises and the rise of second wave feminism (Shilling 1993:48). A strong interest in the naturalistic approach can also be seen today, with the search for genes to explain more and more varieties of human behaviour such as homosexuality and alcoholism. David M. Buss’ (1994) book about human mating is another recent example. Here, it is claimed that genes determine our choice about a suitable partner for reproductive means. Although many contemporary scholars seem to be influenced by the naturalistic approach, others question its premises, including femi-

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11 Sociobiology, which focuses on biologic and genetic differences to explain a wide range of human behaviours, was at this time one of the most influential theories of women's inferiority.
nists and most of the theorists working within the field of the body. Instead, they place more hope in the constructionist theories that focus on the impact of social and cultural influences; something that is almost entirely neglected by the naturalistic approach.

**The constructionist approach**

Social constructionist theories highlight the outside forces and shared social and cultural beliefs that affect the body. For example, the body is seen as influenced by language, ideology, discourse and knowledge, although the extent to which the body is seen as influenced by these factors varies enormously. Another feature of this approach is an interest in the body in terms of its meanings in relation to other people.

The social constructionist view has had an important impact on the development of theories of the body. Two of the most influential social constructionists are Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman. They have both dealt a little more explicitly with the body than earlier sociologists and as Shilling (1993) puts it, each has contributed to the naming of the body as a theoretical space.

Foucault can be regarded as one of the most influential writers within the sociology of the body. His work has had a great impact on the development of theo-

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12 See for instance the work by Ulla Holm (1995) and Claudia Lindén (1995) for some examples of Swedish work. Connell’s (1987) work on the gendered body also expresses a critical view of the naturalistic approach. However, he recognises that biological as well as social forces affect the body, but rejects both radical social constructionist and biologist approaches. He points out that many of the biologist and sociobiologist writings on the body have a tendency to exaggerate the differences between men and women instead of looking at similarities. Their focus on biological differences helps to develop social categories, which in turn come to justify different types of inequalities between individuals, for example between males and females, different races etc. However, these inequalities have no permanent foundation in the body, but come to reflect back on it. The highlighting of differences and the early attribution of gender identities, for instance seen in the way we dress, interact with and view babies and young children, is one example of how this social categorisation works. Connell uses the contradictions that can be found between social processes of categorisation and the bodily bases on which they rest as the starting point for his analysis of how gender is produced. See Chapter 3 for an extended discussion of his work.

13 Besides the work of Foucault and Goffman, there is a wide range of approaches within social constructionism. Shilling (1993) identifies four major influences on the view of the body as socially constructed. These are, besides the work of Foucault and Goffman, the anthropology of Mary Douglas and the recent work on the history of the body, which is represented by the work of Thomas Laqueur and Ludmilla Jordanova. The work of the latter two also offers good critiques of the historical development ‘of the naturalistic approach’.
ries of the body, especially many feminist studies. Foucault is particularly interested in the history of the body, the effects of power on it and on those institutions that govern it (see Foucault 1993). Goffman, on the other hand, has a slightly different approach. While Foucault focuses on structures and on the effects of discourse, Goffman (1966, 1990, 1995) instead is more concerned with personal behaviour and micro-interactions, that is how individuals perceive themselves and others. The work of both Foucault and Goffman has also been a source of inspiration for more recent theoretical developments by many contemporary scholars.

Two such examples are the respective attempts of Bryan S. Turner (1996) and Arthur Frank (1993) to develop a sociology of the body. They are both based on the view of the body as socially constructed. The prime focus is on the different ways that the body can be seen as problematic and in need of control, two common themes in the sociological work on the body which is explored further in Chapter 4 together with Foucault’s and Goffman’s own work.

In Turner’s (1996) general theory of ‘bodily order’ the body is foremost a societal problem. His theory deals mainly with how societies, through different institutions such as law, religion and medicine, try to deal with the problem of the body, here represented by different illnesses. It is based on four societal tasks; reproduction, regulation, restraint and representation (also referred to as the four ‘r’s) that are all central to social order. In short, the body becomes a problem for society as for various reasons it is in need of control and regulations. For instance, the population growth has led to various means of controlling reproduction, and the growth of urban societies has caused a need for regulation of space. On an individual level, the problem of the body is one of restraint, which refers to the control of desire, passion and need. Representation, the last task, is related to expanding consumerism and the mass market, and has resulted in a new way to relate to the body. Each societal task is represented by its own illnesses that threaten to ‘break down’ the body. Sexuality, especially female sexuality, and male anxieties about the loss of control over women are two themes that run through the typology.

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14 The theory was originally published in the first (1984) edition of the book.

15 The Foucauldian influence here is strong and can first be seen in the focus on the regulation of bodies in society, particularly through sexuality and the development of governing institutions, and secondly, on the two levels at which these processes work: the bodies of individuals and the bodies of populations.
Frank’s (1993) 'action theory of the body', on the other hand, is concerned with the body as more of an individual problem. This can be seen both as a development of Turner’s approach (the general theory of 'bodily order') and as an alternative to it. For Frank (1993:47), the body is not foremost a societal problem; instead it is a problem for itself, which makes it an action problem rather than a system problem. This gives individuals a more active, problem solving, role since they are not only seen as controlled by external forces.

There is a range of different ways to regard the body as socially constructed. What these approaches have in common is that they regard the body as a receptor of social meaning. The body is seen as affected, shaped, controlled etc. by various outside forces including individuals, institutions and social expectations. However, a problem with the social constructionist approach in general is that there is a tendency for the human body to be reduced to these social forces. One consequence of this is that the notion of the individual as an agent, or actor, tends to be neglected. This also means that some of the work within the perspective has difficulties to overcome the dual approach, which characterised many of the classical sociologists and made the body become an 'absent presence'. Shilling argues, for example, that "The body is present as an item for discussion, but absent as an object of investigation" (Shilling 1993:99). As a result of this they tend to reproduce the dual approach but in a different form.

**The phenomenological approach**

While the body can be characterised as a generator of meaning within the naturalistic approach and as a receptor of meaning within the constructionist approach, it can be regarded as a source of experience within the phenomenological approach. One way to describe the difference between how the two latter approaches might look at the ideal body is to say that while the constructionist approach is interested in how ideas about the ideal body is mediated by social, cultural or historical processes the phenomenological approach instead focuses on the individual experiences of being too fat or too thin.

The phenomenological approach is thus concerned with the 'lived body'. It focuses on the importance of experiences of the body in everyday life, in the

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16 Frank (1993) is in part critical of Turner’s typology, which he finds too functionalist. His action theory is, in fact, based on this critique.
work with and on the body, and in relation to other people. Subjectivity is seen as located in the body, such that the embodied and experiencing body becomes central. For example, the phenomenological approach has inspired feminist researchers to focus on women’s bodily experiences and sociologists to concentrate on the experiences of illness among patients.

Phenomenology has been seen as a way to bridge the gap between the former two approaches. Many scholars within the field of body theory have argued for a more embodied and active view of the individual, something, which they argue, have often been neglected in earlier theoretical developments. One of them is Turner (1996:26), who points out that:

... the sociology of the body must be grounded in some notion of embodiment in the context of social interaction and reciprocity. An adequate sociology of action would thereby start with an assumption about the embodiment of the agent, the role of this embodiment in the endless reciprocities of everyday life.

Phenomenology can in part satisfy this need since it highlights the embodied social actor, that is an individual that both is and has a body.

**Methodological pragmatism - an attempt to combine the approaches**

Another way to achieve a more embodied and active view of the individual can be found in some of the recent theoretical developments that have tried to combine the insights from each of these approaches. Turner’s (1992, 1996) and Shilling’s (1993) recent work are two such examples. Their respective work can be seen as taking seriously the critique that the embodied social actor has been neglected in much of the earlier work on the body. Moreover, they both, try to bridge the gap between the different perspectives: Shilling, by combining social constructionist and naturalistic views, and Turner by combining phenomenology with social constructionism (or as he prefers to name them, foundationalist and anti-foundationalist perspectives). Turner argues that even though the

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17 This approach is inspired by the work of Maurice Merleau Ponty.
18 It is worth noting that the terms naturalistic and social constructionist in Turner’s work (1992) are replaced by the terms foundationalist and anti-foundationalist. These two perspectives are not equivalent but are to a certain degree parallel. Broadly speaking, the foundationalist per-
perspectives are different they can be used together in what he calls 'methodological pragmatism'. With this he means that "the epistemological standpoint, theoretical orientation and methodological technique which a social scientist adopts, should be at least in part determined by the nature of the problem and by the level of explanation that is inquired" (Turner 1992:57). The emphasis given to either of these issues depends on the kind of research undertaken.

The unfinished body

Shilling (1993) suggests a slightly different way to overcome the limitations of naturalism and constructionism (discussed earlier), namely to combine the two and 'take seriously the body as a phenomenon that is simultaneously biological and social' (Shilling 1993:100). He suggests that this entail three aspects. First, that the body at birth itself is the product of evolutionary processes, which are affected by social as well as biological processes. Secondly, that the body as it develops is taken up and transformed, within limitations, by social factors. And finally that the body is not only affected by social relations but forms a basis for and enters into the construction of social relations.

In this new approach the body is seen as unfinished, as an entity which changes and develops throughout the individual's life and which is affected by its participation in society. Its meanings are not given at birth. The body is therefore in need of constant work and this work will also change its meanings. On this basis, Shilling develops the notion of the body as a project. The body is also part of the individuals self-identity. It displays who we are and/or who we want to be. In short, one can say that we become our bodies. The work that is invested in the body also affects self-identity. Shilling (1993, 1997) argues that it is in this sense that the body can be regarded as a project. He writes:

Shilling (1993) uses the work of scholars like Pierre Bourdieu, R.W Connell, Norbert Elias and Peter Freund to develop this line of argument. These scholars all, in their own way, combine biological and social views of the body.
Recognizing that the body has become a project for many modern persons entails accepting that its appearance, size, shape and even its contents, are open to reconstruction in line with the designs of its owner. Treating the body as a project does not necessarily entail a full-time preoccupation with its wholesale transformation. However, it does involve individuals being concerned about the management, maintenance and appearance of their bodies....

(Shilling 1997:69)

Of course, it could be argued that this is nothing new and that people have always cared about their bodies. This way of looking at the body is, however, more reflexive and less bound up with traditional rituals or ceremonies. Nor is it a specific interest of any certain group but is instead, in Western contemporary societies, open to a mass audience (Turner 1994:xiii). As such, it is closely related to the individual’s self identity and should be regarded both as an individualised engagement with the body and as an individual responsibility.

The healthy body is probably the most common example of a body project. Plastic surgery and bodybuilding are two other common body projects in which people invest time, energy and money. There are both advantages and limitations associated with the body as project both for the individual and for the society as a whole. Due to various reasons such as age, physical or economic conditions, not everyone has the desire or ability to change their bodies according to their wishes and there are also certain risks involved, depending on the activity chosen. Despite these limitations, there may also be advantages associated with a greater awareness of and attentiveness to the body. Healthier lifestyles and prevention of disease are two such examples. Moreover, “Body projects provide individuals with a means of expression, and a way of feeling good and increasing control over their flesh” (Shilling 1997:71).

What both Turner and Shilling acknowledge in their work is that the body is socially constructed and that to a certain degree it is unfinished, or at least capable of being altered. For both of them, the body is seen as in need of work and this work is undertaken by an active individual.
**Critical voices**

Although recent theoretical developments have tried to deal with some of the shortcomings that have been identified within the different approaches outlined above, still others have not been addressed. For example, Turner (1994, 1996) argues that there is still no single overarching theory of the body despite the abundance of theoretical work on the body. He regards the existing state of the sociology of the body as in many respects both underdeveloped and disappointing. The limited amount of areas of research within this sociology is a key issue in this regard.\(^\text{20}\) However, Turner is not only critical of the theoretical work on the body. He also hopes that a sociology of the body can be important and contribute to other areas of sociology, for example, the sociology of health and illness (see Turner 1992).

Another line of critique has been directed towards the strong emphasis on theoretical research, and critical voices have been raised about the excessive devotion of theory (see Connell 1990, Wacquant 1995). As a final critical remark, one can also note that little consideration has been given to the gendered body within the general sociological theory of the body nor by many of the scholars mentioned above. This issue will, however, be discussed now when we take a look at the development of feminist theories on the body and of the much less explored but growing area of Men’s Studies.

**Feminism and the body**

Interestingly, nearly all of the theoretical approaches mentioned in the previous section lack a discussion on the gendered body. However, feminism is, as noted earlier, often regarded as one of the major contributors to the current interest in the body. This is not least because it recognised and made explicit the significance of the body long before it was introduced on the sociological agenda. This early interest is, however, not always noticed outside feminism itself. Kathy

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\(^{20}\) The new preliminary research program sketched out in the first volume of the journal *Body and Society* (1995) can hopefully overcome these limitations. In short, the research program includes topics that already are well known issues in contemporary sociological theory such as the symbolic significance of the body, the understanding of the active role of the body in social life and further explorations of the differentiation between gender and sex. It also suggests a further development of newer areas such as the relationship between body and technology and the sociology of sport (Featherstone and Turner 1995).
Davis (1997a) points out that while feminism as a political movement is often acknowledged for its influence, many of the 'new' male body theorists seem to be reluctant to draw upon feminist scholars. This is somewhat puzzling since much of the feminist writing on the body includes empirical studies often focused on women as embodied and social actors; issues that were identified in the previous section as shortcomings of recent developments in the body theory.

The body has always been important for feminist scholars. Much of their work has focused on reproduction and on women's embodied experiences of menstruation, pregnancy and menopause, as well as health and sexuality (cf. Martin 1987, Young 1990, Haug 1987). The body is also important because it is central to the impact of different power relations affecting women, such as medical and scientific power. These aspects of power have also contributed to the fact that the body has become a political issue for many feminists who struggled to gain control over and rights in relation to their bodies. For example, one very influential text related to the women's health movement is the book Our Bodies Ourselves produced by the Boston Women's Health Collective (1971). Other issues that have been discussed by feminists include the representation of women's bodies, body image, eating disorders and cosmetic surgery (Bordo 1995, Davies 1995, Wolf 1992).

Feminist research on the body, like other theoretical approaches to the body, is generated out of a diversity of disciplines, theoretical perspectives and methodologies. Taken together with feminism's rather long history, this diversity makes it difficult to describe this work. However, the three approaches outlined in the previous section is one way to do it, as feminist work on the body also can be framed this way. When doing so one finds that although some feminists can be placed within the naturalistic approach, most of them try to avoid this biologistic determinism. The distinction between sex and gender, discussed below, has been a useful aid in doing so. However, many feminists have found the social constructionist approach more useful. The concept of gender and the focus on power relations has in part contributed to this. Within this approach, the work of Foucault has proved to be especially useful for feminists, and he can be regarded as one of the most influential theorists for feminist work on the body. Moreover, much of the feminist work on the body has, emphasised an embodied, but somewhat less applied, phenomenological understanding of women's bodies. When presenting the feminist work on the body I have chosen to draw on three problematics that Davis (1997a) uses to sum up this wide range of work. I find this to be a fruitful way since it gives a good overview of this
very diverse work and highlights specific areas that feminists have worked within.

### Three problematics - one way to categorise feminist work on the body

Davis (1997a:7) has chosen to cross the boundaries between different topics and different theoretical and methodological approaches when she describes the past three decades of feminist research on the body. Instead, she identifies three problematics: difference, domination, and subversion that feminist research has been centred around.

**Difference**, the first of Davis’ themes, has played a central role in feminist work on the body, mainly because there is a tension about how the body should be conceptualised. On the one hand, many scholars were afraid of using the body to explain socially constructed differences between the sexes because they could easily be used to “… naturalize differences based on gender, ‘race’ or sexuality” (Davis 1997a:8). These differences could be used to legitimise social inequality (as is done within the naturalistic approach, as documented in the previous section). On the other hand, they were afraid that if differences weren’t acknowledged, specific features of women’s embodiment would be ignored. As a result, two separate and opposing feminist approaches have developed. The first strand rejects the body altogether as a basis for explaining differences while the second treats difference as essential to understanding embodiment.

The sex/gender distinction that developed in the 1950’s and 1960’s can be seen as a solution to the scientific belief that biology determines women’s societal roles. This distinction became a way of moving beyond biological determinism (cf. Moi 1997). With the sex/gender distinction, ‘sex’ refers to biological differences while ‘gender’ refers to social or constructed differences. The former is often seen as invariable while the latter is variable. A distinction is therefore made between the female body and femininity and the male body and masculinity, something that will be further explored in Chapter 3. Although it has been criticised, the sex/gender distinction that provided an initial a solution to

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21 Fear and rejection of the body as a basis for explaining difference can perhaps be explained by the fact that women throughout history have often been equated with the body, a connection that did not prove to be entirely positive (cf. Bordo 1995).
the problem of the body is still widely used by many contemporary feminists. Many scholars working within this strand have focused on social and cultural implications for women and their bodies leaving individual experience to be somewhat less explored.

Individual experiences came thus to be central to the second strand that treats difference as essential for understanding embodiment. Embodiment is understood as different not only on the basis of gender but also in regard to ‘race’ and sexuality, which has implications for the individual opportunities and limitations. This strand is represented by some French feminists (for example Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva) and by phenomenology.

Phenomenology has been regarded as a fruitful way of capturing women’s lived experience of having a female body. Several scholars working within the phenomenological tradition argue, however, that little work has been done within this tradition (cf. Young 1990, Marshall 1996). The personal experience of the theorist or author is a common base for phenomenological work on the body. This is also the point of departure for studies based on memory work, which is another way of exploring women’s experiences of their bodies. The memory work by Frigga Haug and her colleagues (1987) is a well-known and often cited project where the female experience of sexuality is in focus. Another example of memory work, this time by a single researcher, is Karin Widerberg’s (1995) work on the relationship between body, sexuality and knowledge.

In Davis’ second theme, ‘domination’, women’s embodied experiences are linked with practices of power. Although the initial attention was focused on male domination and female subordination, this approach has come to address a wide range of other kinds of power, which have made women victims of oppression. Representations and objectification of women are some of the issues that have caught the attention of many feminists, as well as women’s work on the improvement of their bodies through such diverse practices as dieting, exer-

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22 Helen Marshall’s (1996) work on pregnancy is one example of a phenomenological project that can be placed within the much explored field of reproduction. One of the most influential texts within this approach is, however, Iris Marion Young’s (1990) essay ‘Throwing Like a Girl’. While this text mainly focuses on movement, a much less explored issue, other aspects of women’s bodily experiences like pregnancy, clothes and breasts are highlighted in some of Young’s other essays.

The third theme, 'subversion', can be regarded as a reaction to what is perceived as an exclusive focus on domination. To counteract this, notions of agency and subversion have been introduced. Many empirical studies have explored the active role individuals play in contemporary body regimes where the body can be seen both as a site for acts of resistance and rebellion as well as compliance (cf. Smith 1988, Lesko 1988). The relation between women and the body is also frequently connected to their active work on/with the body.

A second strand of thought has also developed where

...attention has shifted from agency and mundane embodied practices of individuals to symbolic possibilities of subverting cultural gender norms through the body. It is argued that practices like cross-dressing, 'gender bending' or transexuality disrupt or subvert the homogenizing cultural norms of gender

(Davis 1997a:12)

This approach is associated with (Post)feminist theorists of the body such as Elspeth Probyn, Judith Butler and Elisabeth Grosz and with 'Queer theory' theorists.

Feminist scholarship not only introduced gender and power relations to the analysis of the body, but also emphasised women's embodied experiences. Accordingly, a common theme is the oppression of the female body, and in exploring this, the social constructionist view has been very influential. The aforementioned way of organising the feminist work on the body helps to highlight some of the specific areas that feminists have worked within. What becomes obvious when examining all the three problematics, and especially when different studies are related to them, is that many studies often deal with more than one problematic at the same time. It is, however, still a useful way of describing a long and very rich tradition of work. We will be returning to some of the issues that have been discussed here in the chapters to come.

23 This theme is further developed in Chapter 3.
After this brief examination of the feminist approach to women's bodies we will now turn our attention to men's bodies and the much more recent theoretical development of Men's Studies.

**Men's studies and the body**

While as we have seen, there is a wide range of feminist work on different aspects of the female body, until very recently the male body has remained something of an 'absent presence', in the field of body research. Despite this lack of attention, the body seems to be of great importance for men as well as for women. This can be seen in the growing field of cross-disciplinary studies of men and masculinity that have emerged under the name of ‘Men’s Studies’ or ‘Critical studies of masculinity’ as it is sometimes also called.24

Feminist theory and the women's movement have strongly influenced the interest in the study of men and men's bodies. Similarly, some of the bodily issues that feminists have dealt with partly correspond to the issues that scholars working in the field of Men’s Studies have focused on, although from a different point of view. David Morgan (1993) identifies four bodily aspects of men's lives and behaviour that are the subject of critical inquiry. In one way or another, these can all be related to the women’s movement. The first is the oppressive body, where the male body is studied as a site for the oppression of women. The second concerns the body as a site for emotions and the expression of feelings. The third focuses on the body and fraternity, where male identity and the positive feelings of being a man, male bonding and male friendship are targeted. The fourth aspect deals with the healthy body.

While some themes seem to correspond to the ones that feminists have addressed in their studies of the female body, others are less developed. Different aspects of the relationship between media and women is an area that the women’s movement and feminist scholars have focused much attention on. Comparatively little attention has, however, been given to men and the media

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24 I have chosen to refer to this field of study as Men’s Studies as it is the most widely used name. The focus on the body is just one aspect of what is otherwise a very diverse field of study where the main objective is to problematize masculinity. Many studies therefore take their point of departure from social constructionist theories. See for instance (Ekenstam et al 1998) for an introduction to some of the Swedish work in this area.
(Craig 1992) and to social definitions of masculinity in the media (Fejes 1992). However, these issues have been more in focus in recent work, as we will see in Chapter 3. The attention and impact of body ideals on men is another area of research that has received limited attention (Edwards 1997, Dotson 1999). The focus on embodiment and men's experiences of their bodies are two other rather undeveloped areas. Morgan (1993:70) argues that 'men and ideas of masculinity are both embodied and non-bodied'. While the link between men, bodies and action makes it easy for us to regard images of men in sport, at war and in doing sex as highly embodied, other images are less often interpreted in this way. The context of medicine and illness is one such area where the male body often becomes disembodied (Petersen & Lupton 1996:81). Morgan further suggests that the mind/body distinction, where men are associated with reason, rational activity and are often regarded as less emotional, might be another reason for the neglect of men's bodies.

Furthermore, women are often regarded as more embodied than men. This belief is not only seen in scientific work but is also expressed through popular culture and popular imagination (Morgan 1993:69). Morgan argues that this is not the case; women are not more embodied than men are and nor are men more embodied than women. Instead he suggests that:

The relationship between men and women and embodiment are different in character rather than degree, and the difference lies in a complex triangular relationship between gender, embodiment and power rather than in any straightforward physiological determination.

(Morgan 1993:84)

Yet theorising the male body and male embodiment is still in need of much more attention. R.W. Connell, who is one of the most influential scholars in the field and who has also focused his attention on the gendered body, comments in his later work (1995) on the importance of the development of theories of a more embodied masculinity. He argues that we need to acknowledge bodily experience in order to understand the relationship between men's bodies and masculinity. In contrast to his earlier work where he spoke in favour of a combination of the biological and social approaches (1987, see also note 12), Connell (1995) argues that neither of these approaches, nor a combination of the two, can help us get a better understanding of the relationship between the two. Instead he suggests that:
A rethinking may start by acknowledging that, in our culture at least, the physical sense of maleness and femaleness is central to the cultural interpretation of gender. Masculine gender is (among other things) a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex. Bodily experience is often central in memories of our own lives, and thus in our understanding of who and what we are.

(Connell 1995:52-53)

In short, what this suggests is the importance of emphasising the body as a source of experience. Also included in this view is the notion of the individual as active. With help of life-history interviews Connell tries to illustrate how bodies are experienced and understood in social interaction and how they are both objects and agents of practice. He (1995:61) introduces a new term, 'body reflexive practice', which can be described as a circuit between bodily interaction and bodily experiences. Social relations are important in this view, and it is not only the individual’s life that is formed through body-reflexive practice but a social world.

Through body-reflexive practices, bodies are addressed by social processes and drawn into history, without ceasing to be bodies. They do not turn into symbols, signs or positions in discourse. Their materiality (including material capacities to engender, to give birth, to give milk, to menstruate, to ejaculate) is not erased, it continues to matter. The social process of gender includes childbirth and child care, youth and ageing, the pleasures of sport and sex, labour, injury, death from AIDS.

(Connell 1995:64–65) (emphasis in original)

One can conclude that the social constructionist approach has been highly influential both for the general theory of the body and for scholars working with issues of the gendered body. Moreover, the focus on embodiment and the view of the individual as active are other aspects that can be identified as important in many studies of women’s and to some extent also men’s bodies. We will now see in what way these theoretical developments can be useful for this thesis.
The point of departure for this study

The theoretical framework of this study is influenced by both Shilling’s and Turner’s approaches that try to bridge the gap between the different theoretical positions exemplified by naturalist, social constructionist, and phenomenological perspectives. I also believe that by combining insights from different approaches one might better understand the importance of the ideal body in contemporary society, especially as the aim of the study is to capture both the socially constructed ideals and the young people’s own experiences and ways of relating to their bodies.

One reason for this strategy, that is, to use a mix of different theoretical approaches and perspectives instead of choosing a particular one, is that it is still a rather new area of research, which requires further theoretical exploration and development. I also find advantages with such a strategy as it may help to explain, for example, how the socially constructed ideal body is understood and experienced by young people. I regard the body and thereby also the individual to be affected by both biological and social processes, and he or she may understand and experience these both very individually and in a collective manner. Since my main interest in this study lies in the issue of socially constructed ideals and the social aspects of the body, I draw most of my theoretical influences from this approach. I am also influenced by the phenomenological approach, although my choice of method does make it difficult to draw more extensively on it.

This means that I view the body as socially constructed, in the sense that its meanings, ideals and so on are shared with other people and that these vary both within cultures and historically – although in today’s global culture they also tend to be quite similar. Furthermore, this view implies that people are affected by outside forces. Two important sources that will be in focus for this study are mass media and social relations. Mass media is important because it provide people with images of ‘normal’, extreme, grotesque and ideal bodies. Other people and social relations are important because they may illustrate social and intersubjective aspects of the body. Both these sources will be further developed later both theoretically and empirically. Moreover, by regarding the body as a lived experience one may acknowledge the claim that the body matters to people and that we experience things and feelings with it. Experiences of

25 At least in Western societies.
satisfaction or pride with the body, or experiences of a body that deviates from what is considered as “normal” may have an impact both on how we perceive ourselves and others, as well as how we interact with other people.

The body can also be seen as unfinished, both in a biological and social sense. As children we do not know how we will look as adults. We grow up, reach a certain height, and develop a particular body size and shape. This bodily development is the result of a complex mixture of hereditary dispositions, environmental factors and individual habits, and can to a certain degree be controlled by the individual through for example food and exercise habits. In order to become fully accepted into society, the body is also in need of constant work and/or education; something that various sources, such as parents, school and mass media help to provide. The view of the body as unfinished may, moreover, help to explain why many people are so engaged in their bodies and constantly work on them; a work that even may become a project for them. Furthermore, it is important to stress the view of the individual as active. The individual can be regarded as active ‘creators’ of their own bodies by participating in work on/with the body. Such work may also contribute to the acquisition of gender identity. Although much of this ‘work’, as we will see, can be related to regulating and/or restraining outside forces, bodies are not to be regarded as totally susceptible to the influence of regulating and/or restraining forces. Instead, the individual is also able to exercise certain control over their own bodies as actors.

Moreover, it is important to understand the body in the process of action and interaction. In this study, the notion of young people as actors is studied through their willingness to work on/with their bodies and through their attitudes towards different ways of altering it (particularly with the help of diet, exercise, plastic surgery and anabolic steroids). The sense in which these activities can be seen as projects is also addressed. The aspect of interaction included in the study focuses primarily on how the body is perceived by others. Young people’s view of other people’s bodies and of the ideal body is also addressed.

I also argue that aspects of gender are central to understanding of the ideal body. While much of the previous work has been centred on women’s bodies and on femininity, this study will also include men’s bodies and masculinity. I will take a look at how ideals and representations of the gendered body both differ and coincide, as well as how the respondents perceive their own, others’ and the ideal body.
So far I have only briefly discussed the influence and development of theories that apply a gender perspective to the body. This and some of the other aspects that have only been touched upon above are now further developed in the two following chapter. Chapter 3 attends to the construction of gender, of gendered bodies and gendered ideals, while Chapter 4 goes on to explore four themes that capture central and important aspects of the ideal body. These themes are based on the theoretical framework presented in this and the following chapter.
Gender is an important aspect to take into account when understanding the ideal body. This chapter illustrates how gender is socially constructed in various ways. The first part does this by focusing on how gender is acquired and by exploring some of the ways in which masculinity and femininity can be actively worked into the body. In the second part this is followed by a discussion of consumer culture, particularly the different ways that the ideal body is constructed for men and women in advertising and commercials. I begin here by examining how gender is acquired.

Working gender into the body

The body is deeply implicated in the construction of gender. As described in the section on feminism and the body, gender is by social constructionists' seen as social. Therefore, it is not something that we are born with or passively acquire; rather, gender is something that we learn and do, something that has to be 'worked' into the body. The body is important in the construction of gender because it is through our bodies, our way of moving, acting, dressing and so on that our gender is expressed and experienced. The construction of gender identity starts when we are born and can be seen for example in the way babies and small children are named, dressed, taken care of and talked to in accordance with their sex. Children and young people learn what it means to be a girl and a boy and later to be a woman and a man both through interactions with other people, parents, friends etc. and in response to representations in advertising, television, books and magazines (Hargreaves 1994:148). In this chapter, specific attention is given to these mass media representations of gender and the gendered body. The acquisition of gender can be understood as a process, and, as Jennifer Hargreave's (1994:150) describes, it is a result of an "... active engagement in a world of gender images which are put to practice on a day to-day-basis and hence become part of everyday life - a 'lived condition'". The experience and understanding of gender changes throughout life and is also constantly being negotiated, for instance in relation to other people (of both the same and the other sex) and in different settings such as the home, the school and the workplace.
In this sense the body can also be understood as unfinished and in need of work, or can be interpreted through what Connell (1987) refers to as 'transcendence'. Transcendence is a way of working gender into the body and, as noted earlier, masculinity and femininity are embodied through this work. This work, or our social practices, can be recognised as everything that is done to the body, for instance, the way we take care of the body, the way we exercise, dress and so on.

The acquisition of gender can therefore to be regarded as an active process. I now proceed by taking a look at this process in relation to ideal bodies and the acquisition of masculinity.

**Masculinity and the Body**

Masculinity is often assumed to be something fixed and 'true'. Moreover, as Connell (1995:45) states, "True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies - to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body". However, in other work Connell (1990:89) argues along with many others, that this is not really the case; masculinity should not be viewed as something inherent in the male body. Instead it should be regarded as a social definition of certain characteristics. Becoming male is a social process involving different social practices. Masculinity, like femininity, is not just one 'thing'; it involves a whole range of processes, and as such the bodily uses associated with it are also diverse.

Different types of masculinities can therefore exist at the same time. While some of these may be regarded as more dominant or hegemonic others are subordinated, these different forms of masculinities are always constructed in relation to each other as well as in relation to women. Hegemonic masculinity is also a question of domination. Connell (1987:85) notes, "The meanings in the bodily sense of masculinity concern, above all else, the superiority of men to women, and the exaltation of hegemonic masculinity over other groups of men which is essential to the domination of women". The subordination of certain
groups of men (such as gay men) is related to heterosexuality, which is regarded as the most important component of hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is an important type of masculinity as it can be understood as the culturally idealised form of masculine character, or what could also be described as the ideal image of masculinity as presented in mass media and popular culture (Connell 1990). Hegemonic masculinity is therefore very public, but there need not be any correspondence between cultural ideals of masculinity and the actual personalities of the majority of men.

The public face of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily what powerful men are, but what sustains their power and what large numbers of men are motivated to support. The notion of ‘hegemony’ generally implies a large measure of consent.

(Connell 1987:185)

*Masculinity expressed through sport*

Connell (1983:22-25) points out that there are four ways for men to confirm masculinity through the body and to express hegemonic masculinity. These are sport, work, especially manual work, sexual activity and fatherhood. Sport has been argued to be especially important. Connell (1995:54) even argues that “...sport has come to be the leading definer of masculinity in mass culture”. Considering this, and as sport can also be regarded as particularly important for young men, (not least because this is one of the few definers of masculinity available to them), this is what we will focus our attention on here.

Sport can be described as a combination of force, skill and the occupation of space (Connell 1983). The outcome or result of this combination is power. Sport can therefore be regarded as empowering for the participant. The size and shape of the body are particularly important when displaying power and skill through sports. Bodies that are tall, heavy and strong are seen as favourable in many sports, and male athletes possessing these physical traits are often regarded as male ideals. Toughness, hardness and aggressiveness are other characteristics often associated with both masculinity and sport that are highly valued. Whitson further argues that “... demonstrating the physical and psychological attributes

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26 For a further discussion of hegemonic masculinity see R.W Connell (1987, 1995).
27 Although sport will be focused on here, this does not mean that other images of masculinities not are regarded as important.
associated with success in athletic contests have now become an important requirement for status in most adolescent and preadolescent male peer groups" (Whitson 1990:19). But these bodily characteristics, or the lack of them, can also provoke anxiety about the body among both young boys and men (Connell 1983).

Hegemonic masculinities are culturally exalted, as we saw earlier. "To be culturally exalted, the pattern of masculinity must have exemplars who are celebrated as heroes" (Connell 1990:94). In the case of sports, athletes can be argued to be such heroes. As such, they can become important to men, and to young men in particular, both because they represent 'famous-exemplars-of-masculinity' who perform well in sports, but also because they may be equated with an ideal male body. This argument is supported by Trujillo (1995), who, in his study of American football, argues that media representations of male athletes and sports reinforce hegemonic masculinities. This is displayed both through the discourse of sportscasters and through production techniques. Body building advertisements are another example of how dominant images of masculinity are sustained (White and Gillett 1994). This association between masculinity and sport is also found in cultural representations aimed at children and young people. For instance, Hargreave (1994:149) discusses children's comics and magazines where sports and other physical pursuits are presented as central for boys (but not for girls).

However, hegemonic masculinities are by no means stable and can be challenged, for instance by technological and economic changes, as well as by changes in the relationships between the sexes. Since masculinity is so closely related to the body, gender can become vulnerable. When the body fails to perform as expected, for instance as a result of physical disability, this might become a problem (Connell 1995:54). Several studies have also focused on these kinds of issues, especially in relation to sports, sport injuries and ending of professional sport careers (cf. Messner 1992). Health, illness and disease are other examples of how men's bodies become vulnerable (Petersen & Lupton 1996, Lupton 1998). Bodily decay or ageing is another example of what may subvert dominant constructions of men and masculinity (Hearn 1995).

In sum, masculinity is strongly oriented around sports and the development of a strong, muscular body. This connection is especially strong for young men as they have less access to other ways of expressing hegemonic masculinity. Cultural representations of sports and athletes play an important role in the spread-
ing, reinforcement and sustaining of such ideals. Power and dominance are also a central part of the construction of masculinity. How then is the concept of hegemonic masculinity related to femininity and how is femininity worked into the body?

**Femininity and the body**

Connell (1987:183) argues that "...there is no femininity that is hegemonic in the sense that the dominant form of masculinity is hegemonic among men". Furthermore, Connell (1987:187) argues that it is likely that actual femininities are more diverse than masculinities, which makes it somewhat difficult to distinguish particularly important forms of femininity. According to him, the pattern of femininity that gets the most cultural and ideological support is what he terms 'emphasized femininity' (Connell 1987:183). This form of femininity is oriented towards accommodating the interests and desires of men by accentuating compliance, nurturance and empathy, and, as with hegemonic masculinity, has a very public face. Such femininity is organised for younger women around themes of sexual receptivity and for older women around motherhood. Furthermore, it is performed, and performed especially for men (Connell 1987:188). Further, it can be argued that beauty, which is a theme that is heavily promoted by mass media and popular culture, is presented as both central to femininity and a way for girls and women to confirm femininity through the body. Furthermore, it is something that is also performed especially for men. Beauty might not be included in Connell's description of 'emphasised femininity', but from my own understanding it could be argued that it is consistent with some of his other characteristics, at least for young girls. At any rate, scholars frequently address the importance of beauty for women, and this is also an issue that is addressed in the discussion to come. Different theoretical perspectives that have been used to understand women's beauty practices are addressed, as well as some examples of how they have been adopted.

The close link between the body and masculinity can also be found with femininity. Many scholars, among them Bordo (1995:17), have argued that women are closely linked to their bodies and furthermore that women's lives are centred on the body. This includes both care for others' bodies and the care, beautifica-

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28 It is important to note that this femininity is not allowed to be a threat to hegemonic masculinity.
tion and improvement of their own bodies. Girls’ and women’s involvement in
the beautification of their own bodies can therefore be seen as a way for them to
acquire femininity. This is, as we will see later, also strongly encouraged by
images, products and services offered by consumer culture. Techniques of
femininity are, among other ways, acquired and displayed through clothes,
looks and gestures (Craik 1994:13). Femininity has sometimes also been re­
ferred to as a masque or as a masquerade (cf. Björk 1996, Tseëlon 1995). This
way of looking at the body can in part be related to Judith Butler’s (1997)
idea of ‘performative gender’, whereby gender identity is seen as actively created
and the performance elements of gender are emphasised.

Femininity expressed through beauty

Women’s involvement in the beautification of their bodies seems to be a much
more problematic issue than men’s acquisition of masculinity through sports.
As Davis (1995) points out, there are several ways of looking at the relationship
between beauty and the female body. She argues that many feminist scholars
have been particularly preoccupied with this subject and that moreover, they
have tended to cast a critical eye on women’s quest for beauty. This has been
expressed through two different theoretical perspectives for understanding the
beauty practices women are involved in. The first regards beauty as oppression,
while the second sees it as a cultural discourse. Power relations are focused on
by both of these theoretical perspectives, as well as how the practices of beauty
work to control or discipline women. Femininity is, in the first perspective, seen
as women’s shared experiences of oppression. Power is primarily a matter of
male domination and female subordination. In the second perspective, feminin­
ity is instead regarded as a diverse experience where the body is given a multi­
plicity of meanings from various discourses, such as medical-, scientific- and
mass media discourses. Power is thereby seen more as “... the vehicle through
which femininity is constituted at all levels of social life” (Davies 1995:50).
However, both these perspectives are close to a view of women as passive cul­
tural dopes. A slightly different approach is applied by feminist scholars who
instead view women’s beautification and improvement of their own bodies as
embodied and as a way for women to be active and creative. It is worth noting
that these feminists also, to a certain extent, draw on the two theoretical per­
spectives described above.

29 See Chapter two in Davies (1995) for an extended discussion of these different perspectives.
Dorothy Smith (1988) is one such example. She both treats femininity as a discourse and regards women's engagement in their bodies as active and creative. Media, or the 'text' play an important part in her understanding of how women acquire femininity. She suggests that femininity, as it cannot be defined as a determinate or unitary phenomenon, should instead be viewed as a textual phenomenon. However, the text should not only be regarded as an isolated mass media product; instead, it should be seen as part of the practice in which it is embedded and which it organises. Femininity is, therefore, in Smith's view, something that women actively create themselves in relation to texts and to other people. Femininity should thus not simply be seen as an effect of patriarchal oppression, nor should it be seen as passive socialisation. She writes:

I want to view 'femininity' as a social organization of relations among women and between women and men which is mediated by texts, that is, by the materially fixed forms of printed writing and images. We must not begin by conceiving of woman as manipulated by mass media or subject passively to male power, but recognize when we speak of 'femininity' that we are talking about how women's skills and work enter actively into textually-mediated relations which they do not organize or produce.

(Smith 1988:39)

Smith (1988:39) uses the concept of 'textually-mediated' discourse to capture the interplay between the active and creative subject and the organisation of her activity in and by texts around consumption. This discourse includes the text as well as women's talk, work, skills and social relations.

... to address femininity is to address a textual discourse vested in women's magazines and television, advertisements, the appearance of cosmetic counters, fashion displays, and to a lesser extent, books. These are constituents of the social relations they organize. Discourse also involves the talk women do in relation to such texts the work of producing oneself to realise the textual images, the skills involved in going shopping, making and choosing clothes, making decisions about colours, styles, make-up and the ways in which these become a matter of interest among men.

(Smith 1988:41)

Smith’s view of women’s relation to beauty stresses active and creative participation whereby women relate to their bodies as objects; that is, objects of work.

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30 By text she means "... the more or less permanent and above all replicable forms of meaning, of writing, painting, television, film etc" (Smith 1988:38).
However, other scholars such as Cathy Schwichtenberg (1989) and Susan Bordo (1995) are more critical of notions of agency to describe women’s interactions with their bodies. Instead they stress the oppressive character of beauty.

**Femininity expressed through sport**

Whereas studies on masculinity emphasise physical activity and sport as a definer of masculinity, considerably less concern is expressed for its importance as a definer of femininity. The physical activities that women are engaged in have often instead been linked both to the display of beauty and to the oppression of women. For instance, Young (1990) argues that the differences that can be found between the ways that women and men move, make use of their bodies and occupy space have nothing to do with anatomy or physiology but with women’s situation as oppressed in contemporary society. She claims that “For the most part, girls and women are not given the opportunity to use their full bodily capacities in free and open engagement with the world, nor are they encouraged as much as boys are to develop specific bodily skills“ (Young 1990:154).

Young (1990) considers that there are few examples of physically active girls and women. Although this situation has probably changed considerably over the last years, not least as a consequence of the many women who participate in sports, the media coverage of sport and sport events is still dominated by male athletes. Sport has, for women much more than for men, also come to be linked with the physical display of beauty. Women engaged in sport are also more likely to face requirements for them to look good. Moreover, images of the female athletic body have frequently come to objectify and sexualise the bodies of female athletes (Hargreaves 1994:158 ff). Female muscularity has thereby, at least to a certain extent, come to be regarded as both sexy and feminine.

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31 Young (1990) notes that women tend to use less space and that female movements are more closed and restrained than male.

32 Sports are for men much more frequently associated with power and strength.

33 An example is the recent demand (November 1998) from the International Volley Ball Association to make the female players ‘sexier’. In order to achieve this, they wanted to establish a new dress code, which exposes the players’ bodies more. Similar propositions were earlier made to female soccer players where they have been encouraged to wear clothes (skirts) that emphasise their femininity.
Women's participation in aerobics, a sport dominated by women, is another example of a physical activity that has been regarded by some scholars as an illustration of how the oppression of women works (cf. Lloyd 1996, Macquire & Mansfield 1998 and Markula 1995). In all of these studies, the practice of aerobics is related to the social and cultural ideals presented through different, but interdependent, sources such as the media and the fitness industry. While Moya Lloyd (1996) focuses solely on how aerobics is presented in different texts (including aerobic videos, fitness magazines and women's magazines) Joseph Macquire and Louise Mansfield (1998) also include the embodied experiences of the participants. Pirkko Markula (1995), on the other hand, extends her study to also include women's reactions to the ideals. In all three studies aerobics is found to be a way to achieve a slimmer body and thereby an ideal "feminine" body. Lloyd (1996:88) even argues that anorexia and aerobics are partially constituted by the same discursive framework. Her view of aerobics can, as I see it, be regarded as close to the view of women as cultural dopes. In comparison to Lloyd, the other two authors are more nuanced, especially Markula (1995), who stresses that women's relationship to body ideals is contradictory. The women in her study actively participated in this type of exercise, and thereby conformed to the ideal, but at the same time they criticised and questioned both the body ideals promoted by mass media and the portrayal of those doing aerobics. She further points out that many women also participated for reasons other than improving their bodies (Markula 1995).

In sum, femininity is closely linked to the body, especially through processes of beautification and improvement of one's own body. This relationship is often seen as more problematic than the acquisition of masculinity through sports because this work can be seen as oppressive; a connection that can be found both in relation to beauty and sports for women. An alternative perspective, however, emphasises women's engagement in their bodies as active and creative without seeing them only as victims. This last approach is the one I adopt in my study. However, this does not mean that I do not acknowledge the oppressive and discursive aspects of bodywork.

It has also been pointed out that both masculinity and femininity are closely connected to images presented in mass media and popular culture, as well as to social expectations and intersubjective relations. These influences should not be regarded as passively acquired; rather this process involves an active participation in the shaping, maintenance and negotiation of gender.
The link between gender and consumer culture, raised earlier, is now further developed by way of looking at the importance of mass media in the construction of gender.

**Media content as gender manuals**

Many of the pre-existing cultural conceptions around femininity and masculinity are reflected in mediated and non-mediated communication where they tend to be both reinforced and reshaped (Strate 1992). Definitions of masculinity and femininity are, moreover, a product of the interplay of various forces (Kimmel 1992). Images and mass media representations of men and women are regarded as important in the construction and shaping of gender and in how femininity and masculinity are understood. They inform us about positive and negative characteristics, what we should aspire to and avoid (Kimmel 1992) and may, as Smith notes in the case of women’s magazines, work as sources of information:

> Women’s magazines are a major source of information about changing images, new tools, materials and instructions. Young women learn both the arts and doctrines of femininity from such texts, each providing the standards and practices of a femininity diversified by age, class race and 'style of life'.

(Smith 1988:46)

Advertising is also said to contribute significantly to our socially constructed definitions of masculinity and femininity. Lance Strate (1992) even argues that commercials, in his example, beer commercials, can be regarded as a manual for masculinity (this argument may of course also be applied to femininity).

**Reinforced gender definitions**

Gender is not only defined and shaped through mass media. Diane Barthel (1992:138) argues that consumer goods may also define and reinforce definitions of what is masculine and what is feminine. Several studies also indicate that media content in general tends to reinforce traditional gender definitions and present stereotypical images of women and men. From his analysis of different empirical studies of the images of men in television, Fred Fejes (1992) concludes that these images do not deviate much from the traditional patriarchal notion of men and masculinity. He writes:
Men are powerful and successful, occupy high-status positions, initiate action and act from the basis of rational mind as opposed to emotions, are found more in the world of things as opposed to family and relationships, and organize their lives around problem solving". Moreover, the masculinity portrayed on television is white, middle class heterosexual masculinity.

(Fejes 1992:12)

Research on men and advertising indicates a similar tendency to show stereotyped presentations of gender roles (Fejes 1992) and uphold the myth of masculinity and femininity (Strate 1992). This tendency is also seen in Anja Hirdman's (1996) study of TV commercials in Sweden, where she concludes that:

The traditional dichotomy, which men and women have long been fitted into, constitutes the essence of the message presented by TV commercials: women represent the passive, the dreaming, indulging, the caring. Their primary occupation is their care for others or themselves according to constant beauty rituals, which are built on the image of the female body as problematic. The images of how to become/be a woman that are displayed – also found in commercials directed at female children – show a narcissistic care of the self that is integrated with a female self-perception that is confirmed through the male gaze.

In contrast to the more diversified picture of manliness/masculinity where changes can be seen – although the traditional picture of men as supporters, enlighteners and experts still persists – femininity appears as a static, everlasting (natural) condition where the care of one’s own body, beauty care, is and will remain the woman’s foremost duty.

(Hirdman 1996:50) (My translation)

It is suggested here, and substantiated by other studies of commercials and advertising, that the picture of masculinity is not only more diversified but that it also tends to be more adaptable and less static than the picture of femininity (Holmqvist 1988/89, Nowak & Andrén 1981).

**Feminisation of culture**

Despite the often massive focus on ‘traditional’ masculinity in mass media, many scholars argue that a feminisation of culture has taken place. This is asso-
ciated with a simultaneous sexualisation of masculinity. While earlier in advertising men were seldom or never associated with sexuality or sensuality, these associations have today, as will soon be exemplified, become quite common (cf. Nowak & Andrén 1981, Holmqvist 1988/89, Holmqvist 1989, Wernick 1991, MacKinnon 1997).

Tove Holmqvist (1988/89), in her study of changes in Swedish magazine advertising during the 1980’s, found an increased feminisation and sexualisation of masculinity. Men were more often portrayed as sexualised objects and involved in activities that were connected to spheres that were earlier more associated with women (for example the home and personal beauty care). Several explanations have been given for this feminisation. Holmqvist (1988/1989) relates it to changes in the gender system, while Barthel instead argues that it is related to the role of the female consumer.

Advertising has encouraged a ‘feminization’ of culture, as it puts all potential consumers in the classic role of the female: manipulable, submissive, seeing themselves as objects. The feminization of culture is evident in men’s advertisements, where many of the promises made to women are now being made to men.

(Barthel 1992:148)

Let us now turn to some examples of how masculinity and femininity are represented in advertising and how this feminisation might be expressed.

**Femininity on display in ads and commercials**

Content analysis of American television commercials indicates that messages about attractiveness are commonly associated with women, and that moreover, they may function as a vehicle for attractiveness stereotyping (Downs & Harrison 1985). As indicated earlier, care for others as well as one’s own body is a central theme in women’s lives both on and off the screen. Care for the body is particularly obvious in commercials for hygiene/cosmetic products where women dominate. The female body is often prominent in these com-

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34 In general, men were not found to be feminised in this sense in Hirdman’s (1996) study of TV commercials. The only men portrayed in such a way were those depicted as foreigners.

35 While men tend to dominate most areas in TV commercials, women dominate, both visually and verbally, in commercials where hygiene and cosmetic products are presented. The oppo-
mercials, and is increasingly portrayed as a problematic commodity that can be both improved and altered. Furthermore, sexual/erotic references (for example, self-touching) are common, as is the tendency to use fragmentation techniques, that is, a focus on individual body parts.

...the trend in beauty commercials has been towards an increased focus on women’s bodies whereby parts of the body are shown without the face. A result of this is that the degree of “pure” voyeurism has increased, since the observer is not “disturbed” by a returning gaze. This fragmentation technique of focusing on body parts increases the degree of objectification of women’s bodies in TV commercials, as the representation of women focuses increasingly on the body and on different body parts alone – to be a woman is to be a body.

(Hirdman 1996:35) (My translation)

This fragmentation technique is also frequently seen in magazine advertising, where parts of women’s bodies, and to a certain extent men’s also, are on display. Moreover, Hirdman found that men are seldom seen in TV commercials for beauty care products, and when they do occur it is without the same connotations that can be seen to be associated with women.

Women and men in commercials are also portrayed as having different relationships to food. For instance, in the case of sweets, women are often associated with indulgence, while men instead tend to sell the product with references to power and strength. The way they eat also differs. Men chew and swallow their food, while women are seldom seen eating; instead they just lick, suck or taste small pieces of it. The connection between food and sexuality, sensuality or erotic allusions is also frequently seen in advertising (cf. Hirdman 1996, Konsumtverket 1994). Women’s relation to food and eating can therefore be understood as problematic, while for men it is seen as something natural or even empowering.

site relation is found in magazine advertising, where women instead tend to dominate in most areas (cf. Holmqvist 1988/89).

This last aspect is particularly obvious in advertisements for dietary supplements in body-building magazines (cf. White & Gillett 1994).
Masculinity on display in ads and commercials

While men are seldom seen in TV commercials promoting hygiene and cosmetics products, they are more frequently found in magazine advertising for these kinds of products. In these ads, masculinity is often emphasised to legitimate beauty care products for men; as they are products traditionally associated with women. This can be seen in product names and in shapes and colours of packaging (Barthel 1992, Craik 1994). Another frequently used technique is the display of muscular male bodies and their association with sex and power.

This can be seen by a quick glance at commercials and ads in women’s and men’s magazines, which reveals the fact that it is no longer only women, but now also men who are displayed wearing little or no clothes. The upper body and especially the abdominal muscles appear to be parts that are specifically highlighted on men. These naked or partly naked men are found both alone and/or accompanied by other men or by women. In some of these cases, a man is in a state of undress, often in front of women, or he is naked together with women who are dressed, either in their own clothes or in men’s clothes that appear to have been borrowed or taken from him. The reverse situation, naked or partly dressed women found together with dressed men, has been associated in earlier studies with sexually discriminating advertising (cf. Konsumentverket 1987). Although many of these “new” ads tend not to be regarded as sexually discriminating, it is still interesting to note that the relationship between men and women in ads, to a certain degree, seems to have changed. Men are, for example, today often portrayed as ‘toyboys’ and/or sexual objects in ads and commercials where the bare flesh of their bodies is on display for an actual or implied female audience.

However, a much more common way to portray men in advertising is to emphasise activity. While femininity, as presented in advertising, is often related to activities where the own body is in focus, masculinity is often portrayed as more

37 See also Wernick (1991) for other examples of this relationship and Holmqvist (1988/89:21) for examples of what she refers to as a “reversed asymmetry in the relation between the sexes”, where women appear to be tough, hard and in control while the men are more passive. The presence of women in such ads may also help provide ‘cover’ for potential homoeroticsm (MacKinnon 1997:107).

38 A recent commercial for Coca Cola provides an illustrative example of the display of the male body for a female audience. The commercial shows a group of women gathering together in an office for their “regular appointment”: to observe a well-built male window cleaner, dressed only in a pair of jeans, who passes the window outside the office.
extroverted and active. Active masculinity is both stressed in advertising in general and in perfume advertisements in particular (Craik 1994). Work, sports and sexual activity (areas that Connell (1983) argues to be important definers of hegemonic masculinity) are some frequently used forums where this active masculinity is expressed (Strate 1992). The men who appear in these forums are often well-established role models such as sport stars (Barthel 1992). Fatherhood, another important definer of masculinity, has become especially evident with the appearance of ‘the new man’; a more recent role model (Barthel 1992, Craik 1994). ‘The new man’ represents a more emotional and relation-oriented man. Together with another new role model in advertisements; the ‘ordinary person’ who has done, or is doing, extraordinary things, he has become much more common (Barthel 1992).

The sphere of nature is yet another important arena associated with both ‘commercial’ masculinity and femininity (Hirdman 1996, Wernick 1991). There are, however, quite different ways in which nature is related to women and men. Hirdman (1996) discovered that ‘women as nature’ was a frequent theme found in TV commercials for hygiene and cosmetic products. Women function here as representatives for naturalness/nature. The role of nature for men is instead about escape: a place of refuge away from the city and the technology associated with it. Different commodities are also promoted with the help of nature, and men are frequently portrayed in such settings (Wernick 1991:57).

Similarities between the ways masculinity and femininity are presented are not only found in relation to processes such as the feminisation of culture, but also expressed in the representation of the body as an object.

**The body as objectified**

While the objectification of women’s bodies is frequently discussed, the objectification of the male body is much less explored. However, today the male body can also be said to have become an object of desire, much in the same sense as the female, although not yet as common. As such it is often invested with sexual

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39 Cars, male fragrances and tobacco are some examples of commodities frequently associated with nature.
codings and may be regarded as an object of both a female and a male gaze. These objectified images of men have, however, not replaced earlier representations of masculinity; instead they come to co-exist. The old code has thereby not been broken; it has instead changed so that both men and women can be both objectified and objectifying (Wernick 1991).

The impact and significance of this objectification of men has also been discussed by theorists (cf. Holmqvist 1988/89). It is suggested that men and women may react differently to this objectification, not least because it is related to the power relations between the sexes (Holmqvist 1988/89). Further, these trends might appear to express an equalisation of gender status, but as Wernick (1991:66) argues, that this equality is not always the one we might dream of. Instead

It is the equality, rather, of self absorbed, and emotionally anxious, personalities for sale. With the make up mirror dangled invitingly before them, men, like women, are being encouraged to focus their energies not on realizing themselves as self activating subjects, but on maximizing their value as circulating tokens of exchange.

The tendency to objectify both men’s and women’s bodies should perhaps rather be seen as result of an expansion of commercial interest.

In sum, what we have seen so far is that there are both differences and similarities between how women’s and men’s bodies are viewed and treated, as well as how femininity and masculinity are presented. The most apparent tendency is the one that points towards an increased correspondence between how images of ideal men and women and masculinity and femininity are expressed in different mass media content. This trend invites and raises a whole range of different questions, particularly around the meanings of new portrayals of men and masculinity. For example; How are these new, partly feminised and objectified masculine images affecting young boys and men? Have images of the ‘new’ sensitive family man with an athletic, muscular body (complete with well-defined abdominal muscles) become a new male ideal amongst men them-
selves? While I do not answer all of these questions in the present study, they provide the contemporary context for the research and demonstrate important directions for future work.

The following chapter returns to the sociology of the body and to four important themes that are central for an understanding of the ideal body. Issues of gender, together with mass media, continue to be highlighted through this chapter.
Four themes in a sociological understanding of the body

The primary focus of this thesis is the ideal body and its importance. In order to get a better understanding of its role and significance for young people today, I have chosen to focus on four themes that I argue are central to examining the importance of the ideal body. These four themes can also be found within the general field of the sociology of the body that, despite its rather short history, has dealt with a plenitude of research topics and themes. While all of my themes are part of this theorising, they are not always explicitly recognised or formulated in the terminology I construct here.

The four themes that will be discussed below are the problematic body, the controlled body, the commodified body, and finally the social body. The first theme, the problematic body, refers to the many ways in which the body and issues around it are regarded as problematic. The controlled body, the second theme, is more centred on the different ways that this problematic body needs to be controlled or regulated and addresses different aspects of control. In the third theme, the commodified body, consumer culture and the ways in which the body is seen both as a commodity and a focus for consumption within it is discussed. And finally, the theme of the social body addresses the importance of the body in intersubjective and interactional relations.

Although the themes are interrelated and sometimes difficult to strictly separate from one another, I will make an attempt to present them separately for the sake of clarity. Furthermore, I have chosen to organise the empirical parts, at least in part, according to these themes. The theoretical discussion in this chapter is more general, while the empirical part develops these themes more specifically in relation to the young body.

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41 For example, the theme of the problematic body runs through all of the other themes and relates to different modes of change or control. Both these themes, as we will see, are also linked to the third and fourth themes of the commodified and social body.
Before I go on to explore these themes and the links between them I will briefly revisit the issue of gender. Gender can be regarded as an underlying theme that is related to all of the themes presented above. Issues of gender are therefore raised within each theme. The importance and impact of mass media is yet another issue that is addressed in relation to the different themes, as all of them are also expressed in various mass media content.

The problematic body

Today, the body is frequently referred to as a problem, and as such is addressed at the levels of global governance, the nation state, civil society, communities and individuals. At a global level, questions concerning overpopulation, starvation, health and the spreading of disease are some of the problems that are raised. At a national level, other matters are on the agenda, such as the 'greying' population, decreasing birth-rates, people's increasing weight, the spread of eating disorders, and so on. On the individual level, on the other hand, questions are focused more on one's own body and its shortcomings, may it be its ability to do work or other physical activities, reproduction, its health status or its size or shape. The body is also constantly exposed to many risks and dangers, such as war, and natural and environmental disasters, just to mention some of the more severe. These, as well as natural processes such as age and decay, both threaten us as individuals and make the body a problem for governments, institutions and individuals.

The view of the body as problematic is also commonly adopted in much of the theoretical work (both the older and the more recent developments) on the body. (In the previous chapter I touched upon this issue although more implicitly). One important contribution to this view is the Cartesian separation of mind and body. As described earlier, in this view the mind is seen as superior to the body, which by contrast is seen as unruly and in need of control. The division of mind and body is also closely connected to Christian theology. As a result of this, the body came to be viewed as a threatening, difficult and dangerous phenomenon in need of control. Practices such as asceticism and dieting can be seen as two ways of controlling and regulating both the body and the self, and thereby also the soul, as well as desire and sexuality (Turner 1982, 1996). This view of the body as problematic is elaborated in Turner’s (1996) and Frank’s (1993) more recent theoretical attempts to develop a theory of the body (see Chapter 2).
In the beginning of Chapter 2, the growing concern with the body was explained by identifying four major reasons. The view of the body as problematic is clearly expressed in all four. Three of these reasons are particularly relevant to this thesis and are therefore further developed here and in the following themes. The first reason is feminism, which critiques the problematising of the female body. That the body has often been regarded as especially problematic for women is partly seen as a consequence of Cartesianism and religion. The female body has often been seen as a threat in relation to religion, and within Cartesian thought, women have been associated with the body, matter and passion while men have been associated with the mind, spirit and reason (Turner 1996:12).

Many feminists, among them Susan Bordo (1995), have discussed the impact of Cartesian thought on different aspects of women’s lives, such as education, work and reproduction. She argues that the connection between women and the body has proved to be a very negative association for women. She writes:

The cost of such projections to women is obvious. For if, whatever the specific historical content of duality, the body is the negative term, and if woman is the body, then women are that negativity, whatever it may be: distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death.

(Bordo 1995:5) (emphasis in the original)

Such negative associations have also come to have consequences for the way women relate to their bodies, the way they are held responsible for how they look and behave, and how they come to blame themselves for physical flaws or failure to improve themselves. The close relationship between female body and beauty ideals is particularly relevant here. There are also indications that women themselves have adopted a problematising view of their bodies. For example, women are frequently found to have a more negative body image than men. Moreover, young girls also tend to overestimate their body size more than young men do (Bergström et al 2000). Accounts of such problematic relationships can also be found in studies where women’s own bodily experiences are the focus (cf. Haug et al 1987, Widerberg 1995). Sexuality is another related area in which this theme is expressed. In relation to sexuality, women’s bodies have often been seen as threatening and contaminating, and as possessing and passing on disease (Petersen & Lupton 1996:78).
The rise of consumer culture is the second reason for a growing concern with the body. Consumer culture has come to refer to the body as a continual problematic, as it is portrayed as imperfect and always in need of change no matter how good one looks, how old one is, or if one is a woman or man. No body is perfect. There is always something that can (or should) be improved. Questions concerning body and appearance have, however, often been regarded primarily as a female concern. This fact is emphasised through the attention directed towards the female body in cultural products and in mass media. Girls and women are also specifically subjected to many of these messages, not least because they are regarded as an important consumer group. Through these messages, they are constantly reminded of the plasticity of their bodies and the numerous ways of changing and improving them. However, as is further discussed in the third theme of the commodified body, where consumer culture is focused on, there are indications that this tendency has also come to include men since they have become more and more important within consumer culture.

A third relevant reason, related both to this and the following theme, is the increase in possibilities and potentials to control, change and improve the body. If the body is regarded as problematic or unruly in many different ways, for example due to ill health, age or weight, it is thereby also regarded to be in need of a range of controls and regulations. Further, medicine has displayed a tendency to regard the female body in particular as problematic. This is illustrated in Karin Johannisson’s (1995) historical work on the social construction of medical conditions, where the female body and its illnesses are especially targeted. Alan Petersen and Deborah Lupton (1996:79) further illustrate how women’s bodies, both historically and today, have not only been seen as different and more problematic, but also as more prone to illness, more dependent on medical care etc. than men’s. Women are also much more frequently asked to be responsible and to be engaged in medical surveillance of their own bodies, for example breast cancer screenings, in a way that is not the case for men. This can of course be regarded both in a positive and negative manner. It is, furthermore, an issue that recently has been raised and questioned by men themselves.

A related area, in which we place a great deal of trust to help us solve the many problems related to the body, is the development of technology. Technological

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42 Prostate cancer screenings and public information on self-examination is, however, one recent example of how men can also be asked to engage in medical surveillance of their own bodies.
and medical innovations are often sought in order to protect the body from decay, death as well as global risks.

**The frail body**

I began this theme by giving a broad indication of some different ways in which the body can be seen as a problematic in relation to the many threats and dangers to which it is exposed. This can also be referred to as the frailty of the body and of the human being (Turner 1993:181–184). The awareness that the human life is finite and that there is a wide range of dangers, or risks, that threaten it, like diseases, lack of food, environmental disasters etc. as well as other natural processes such as age and decay, contributes to the notion of the frail body. There are different social arrangements, or social institutions (for instance the state, law, church and medicine) that are to take care of, or protect, the individual from this frailty. These are, however, not always able to function as effectively as one would wish. Turner (1993:b) argues that these institutions are in many ways precarious, and that in spite of new technological developments and modernisation they have become even more precarious, such that they appear to be part of the problem instead of the solution. The spread of AIDS is one such example, where despite both medical advances and new technology there is still no cure. Our faith in the new medical technology therefore reveals its limitations and our frailty.

This notion of the frail body and the awareness of global risks, especially different kinds of health risks, has also made Turner (1992) suggesting that we have entered a new type of society, the somatic society, in which the body has a prominent place. The somatic society is "A society within which major political and personal problems are both problematized in the body and expressed through it" (Turner 1996:1). The somatic society is structured around regulating bodies. Health campaigns and health promotion are but some examples of how the body is controlled and protected against many threats and dangers.

In sum, it is clear that although the body in general has been seen as problematic in most of the theoretical developments, as well as within consumer culture, women’s bodies are often regarded to be particularly problematic. Furthermore, it can be concluded that when the body is seen as problematic, it is often regarded to be in need of control or regulation. Some of the different ways in which the body can be controlled is what we turn our attention to now.
The controlled body

Control and regulation of the body is, as already indicated, a central theme in the sociology of the body. We have already touched upon one very important reason for this, namely the rather common view of the body as problematic or unruly, which requires it to be controlled and regulated. This section will elaborate this point and discuss the different ways in which the body is and can be controlled.

The body can be controlled in many different ways and for various reasons. David Morgan (1996:14) observes that the body is implicated in many systems of control, reward and punishment, for example the deprivation or inducement of food, restrictions on liberty or physical movement and less directly various forms of emotional control.

Moreover, control can be both external and internal. External control can be exercised both from outside forces such as the state or by other institutional agencies such as schools, prisons, hospitals etc, but it can also be exercised by other people close to the individual such as family and friends. Societal control has already been touched upon with reference to Turner’s theoretical developments and his notion of the somatic society. This kind of control is very important but is not the main interest of this study, as aspects of internal control are instead the focus of attention. Internal control is often understood as individual exercise of self-surveillance or self-regulation, which is often associated with a shift towards internalised control and an increased focus on individual responsibility. This can take many forms and concern various aspects of people’s lives. It can, for example, be related to the health of the body, interactions with other people, or with manners, something we will return to in a moment. Internal control can also have a more positive connotation, referring to the individual’s increased opportunities to change, improve and take charge of the body that new technology and medical advances, for example, have enabled.

Several scholars have observed a shift in the way the body is controlled. Both Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias, two of the most influential writers on this issue, have described how societal control of people has gradually been transformed into a more internalised control. This shift to some degree characterises modern society.
This becomes evident in Foucault’s study of discipline and punishment (Foucault 1993), where his historical descriptions of changes in power and punishment in prisons demonstrate a shift from a focus on the body to the mind. The brutal bodily punishments within the prison system of the nineteenth century gradually came to change and became less physical and more focused on the mind. This is particularly well illustrated by the description of Bentham’s development of the Panopticon, which was regarded to be the ultimate instrument of surveillance. Through the construction of the Panopticon, prisoners could be, constantly observed by other people without knowing if or when this occured. This awareness would then encourage them to monitor themselves and to exert self-control. This design was also a source of inspiration for other public buildings where people can be observed, such as hospitals, schools etc. Morgan (1996a:115) even argues that the family setting is also a panoptical setting, in the sense that parents routinely exercise surveillance over their children’s activities at all times and in all places.

Elias’ (1989) work on the civilising process is another way to describe the changes in the practice of control. Elias outlines how the historical processes of civilisation have come to influence the body as well as behaviour and personality. Even though the body is not central to his work, changes in, for example manners come to have an impact on it. His work offers a long-term view of the effects of individualisation, rationalisation and socialisation of the body. From this point of view, the body can also be seen as unfinished, as it is in need of constant work or education to become fully accepted into society. As Elias shows through his historical references, this work is also an ongoing process.

**Individual responsibility**

Although control is still exercised by outside forces, today there is an increased focus on self-control. The fact that the body has become a site of options and choices, which to a large degree is a result of advanced medical and technological development as discussed earlier, has given people new and expanding opportunities to change, reconstruct or cure the body. This knowledge can also be understood as increasing opportunities for individuals to control their own bodies. At the same time, individuals have, also come to be responsible for their own health and wellbeing by avoiding potential risk factors and risky behaviours that they ought to be knowledgeable about. Self-control and discipline can therefore be seen as defending individuals from potential health risks as well as helping them to maintain a healthy, young and attractive body.
The healthy body is also of interest to the state in the sense that a healthy population reduces medical and other expenses. Therefore many health promotion campaigns and interventions, as well as commercials, emphasise individual responsibility. Women seem to be particularly subjected to such messages, for they are not only asked to be responsible for their own bodies (as discussed in the first theme) but are also frequently regarded to be responsible for the care of others’ bodies, for example through their roles as mothers. The work on the bodies of others is often thought of as reproductive work within the family, including child rearing, emotional work and maintenance work such as cooking and cleaning. This work also includes responsibility for family hygiene and ensuring of the health of the family members. (Petersen & Lupton 1996:73 ff.). Women’s responsibility for work within the family has also been discussed by Morgan (1996), both in relation to the care of the body and in relation to food. Lupton (1998) also points out that the connection between women and their responsibility for both their own and others’ bodies is also used by popular media and advertising. However, women are also over-represented in care work outside the home, not only in relation to the care of children or ill people but also in relation to the elderly. Lise Widding Isaksen (1994) has shown that women tend to be engaged in a lot of both paid and unpaid work related to the bodies of elderly relatives or friends. This kind of work is not regarded as being particularly high status or prestigious. She states that the more bodily related the work is, the less status it attracts. This fact comes to have an impact on the wages of the women working in this ‘care sector’. This way of looking at the body is also associated with issues of subordination, partly because women are traditionally associated with care work, and partly because of the low status of this work. She claims that female work with the bodies of others illustrates how gender roles are reproduced.

In sum, the relation between control and the body has changed greatly over the years. Today, the trend is very much towards self-control and individual responsibility, something that women seem to be particularly subjected to. The discussion of control and self-control in particular continues in Chapter 7, where it is explored in relation to the young body and to the empirical findings of this study. We therefore leave this theme now, and instead focus our attention on consumer culture, which, among other things, can also be understood as a way to control the body.

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43 This link can be found both in an historical context and in contemporary Western societies.
44 This and related aspects are also discussed in Chapter 3.
The commodified body

*Life's short. Make an impact. If you are not born with it. Buy it.*

(Ad for a male fragrance - Samba Natural Man)

This quotation illustrates that body and appearance matter, that they can be changed or modified, and furthermore, that beauty and an attractive body can be bought. In short, the body is a commodity not unlike other commodities such as a bottle of perfume. The body can also be used as a commodity to display power, prestige and status. These and related issues, is what this section addresses. This theme focuses on the importance of the body within consumer culture. As stated in the introduction, consumer culture is, one of the most influential reasons for the growing interest in the body. Consumer culture becomes important in relation to the body because it displays both the ideal images of the body (through advertising and popular culture, among other things) and the ways these ideals can be attained. The body is therefore viewed as a key factor in the process of consumption, as it can be regarded as both a commodity and a focus for consumption. People therefore need to consume the products and services on offer within consumer culture in order to maintain and preserve a healthy, young, physically fit and attractive body; something that is also presented as a goal and something worth striving for.

Individual bodies are also both commodified and ‘consumed’ by other people. As such, they become objects of the gaze. This becomes obvious both in relation to images and to ‘real’ bodies displayed through, for example, commercial beauty contests, fashion, bodybuilding or striptease shows, or more explicitly through prostitution.

Mass media and especially advertising constitute important parts of consumer culture, not least because they can be argued to be among the most important mediators of body and beauty ideals. However, they also constantly emphasise the cosmetic and health benefits of body maintenance as well as promoting consumer culture values in general. The body is presented as plastic, that is, capable of changing, with the help of consumer culture goods. The responsibility for this change is placed on the individual who, by his/her own energy and bodywork, has to bring it about. This, often daily, maintenance work can also be seen as a way to control the body and appearance. The intense interest in the body has
also created a basis for the expanding market of experts who offer advice and
guidance; a field that has developed within consumer culture. A great number of
people have come to rely on experts, such as mass media, advertising, therapies
and self-help books, in order to manage their lives and relationships (cf. Feath-
erstone 1993, Giddens 1995). These sources help to guide people to achieve and
maintain an ideal body or to get ‘the most out of life’. Although there are a great
number of self-help books and specialist magazines focused on different health,
sport and fitness activities, people do not need to go to them in order to get in-
formation about how to best take care of the body: it is enough to read the ordi-
nary newspapers, where health, fitness and beauty are common themes. These
themes have also proved to be a saleable commodity, and popular Swedish tab-
loids often produce supplements where health and diet advice, exercise plans
and routines, appearance and much more are discussed, much in the same way
as in women’s magazines or self-help books.

Featherstone (1993:171) points out that the emphasis upon body maintenance
and appearance suggests that the body can be divided into two basic categories;
the inner and the outer body. The inner refers to the concern with health and the
optimal functioning of the body, while the outer body refers to appearance and
the movement and control of the body within social space. Featherstone
(1993:171) argues that the inner and the outer body become conjoined in con-
sumer culture and that the outer body is prioritised as ‘...the prime purpose of
maintenance of the inner body becomes enhancement of appearance of the
outer body’.

Consumer culture’s intense interest in the outer body or the surface of the body
can be seen through the wealth of images of ideal bodies that are frequently on
display, and also in the attention that people pay to their own and others’ bodies.
Consumer culture has been important in providing the means for this display
through the re-structuring of social space. Changing material and interactional
conditions have also increased people’s opportunities to both display their own
bodies as well as consuming other bodies. Shopping centres, the beach, the
modern bar and the gym are but some examples of such places where bodies are
on display. Featherstone (1993) argues that this has led to a new personality
type, the ‘performing self’, for whom appearance and the display and manage-
ment of impressions are important.

However, body maintenance activities are not only influenced by mass media or
consumer culture. Preventive medicine and health education has also helped to
place the responsibility for health and the body on the individual (Featherstone 1993). There is furthermore, a strong similarity between the ideals that each promotes (Petersen & Lupton 1996:80). Although it is primarily women and their bodies who have been in focus in all of these discourses, we now turn to see how the physical appearance of men today, together with their role as consumers, is becoming more and more important.

**The emergence of a consumer-oriented masculinity**

Many people associate women with the care of body and appearance. In some cultures, they are also traditionally seen as more fashionable than men. Moreover, throughout history, women are regarded as the most important consumer group and many commodities are especially aimed at them (cf. Craik 1994, Bocock 1992, Corrigan 1997). Women and their bodies have likewise frequently been used in advertising to promote all kind of products. This female dominance has, however, come to change over the years.

Several scholars have noted that there has been increasing attention directed towards men’s physical appearance. This trend is especially visible within consumer culture, where men and men’s bodies have earned a prominent place (Wernick 1991). For example, men’s bodies are often seen in today’s advertising and commercials, where they are used to sell and promote a wide range of things. Morgan (1993) argues that this increased attention on men’s physical appearance points to the elaboration of consumption-led masculinities. “The healthy body, the stylish body and the athletic become part of a range of bodies that are available in commodified form” (Morgan 1993: 87). Similarly, Andrew Wernick (1991:65) argues that men (as well as women) have been forced to create their own selling ‘package’.

More and more products are also being designed exclusively for a male market. For instance, the market for cosmetic products aimed at men, which started in the mid-1960s, has expanded considerably over the years (Craik 1994:171). Likewise, an increase in body enhancement practices such as training and weight reduction programs, fitness centres, beauty salons and cosmetic surgery that are pitched at a specific male public can be seen. Different magazines fo-

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45 Craik (1994) remarks that the market for men’s cosmetics was initially established as a medico-hygienic technique. Today’s market includes a wide range of products such as deodorants, skin and hair care products as well as an extensive and lucrative scent market.

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cusing on men's fashion and appearance have also become more common. One example of the latter is the international magazine Men's Health, which focuses on issues such as health, physical appearance, sexuality and sport. Accordingly, advertising and commercials frequently portray men and men's bodies. The almost exclusive use of women as fashion models, whereby femininity has been equated with appearance and bodily attributes, is now changing as the use of male models has increased (Craik 1994). This may lead to new constructions of masculinities and new role models for men.

In sum, the body is central and has many functions within consumer culture. Some of the most important are its role as commodity and as a focus for consumption. The ways in which the body is presented also comes to have a great impact on people's perception of their own and others' bodies, as well as on their behaviour. While body care and its products have traditionally been associated foremost with women, this is an area which has come to include men. Let us now turn to the last theme, where the body and its relation to other people is discussed.

**The social body**

In a sense, this theme is also oriented around both the body as a problem and the issue of control, although in this case social control, a kind of control that takes place in interaction with other people. The social body is understood here as meaning both the importance of the body for the individual, where its connection to identity is central, and its importance in relation to other people. This section therefore takes a closer look at some of the social aspects of the body, especially how societal and cultural norms and values about body and appearance has come to be linked to individual identity. The discussion is centred on the negative view of body fat and the link between the fat or obese body and stigma.

Social interaction and 'micro' relationships as a subject of inquiry has a long tradition within sociology, and is a well-developed area. However, the tendency to neglect the body can also be found here. Even so, there are exceptions, such

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46 'Men's Health' was originally published in the United Kingdom. The Swedish edition came in 1998. See Clas Barkman (1995) for a description of the early British edition of the magazine. Another similar Magazine is 'Fitness Man'.

The body as a source of information

The body is important in social interactions with other people because it ‘gives off’ information to those around. In Goffman’s (1966) language, this information is referred to as the ‘shared vocabularies of body idioms’ or what we today often call non-verbal communication. ‘Body idioms’ can be described as the non-verbal messages that we send out about ourselves, like the way we express feelings, dress, the way we move or our way of using gestures etc. This kind of information can be used to classify both others and ourselves, as well as to grade people hierarchically. The way that the body is managed and presented therefore becomes important since ‘shared vocabularies of bodily idioms’ is a key component of managing social behaviour in public.

The first appearances of a person is important and often enables us to anticipate the category and attributes of the individual or what can also be understood as the individual’s ‘social identity’ (Goffman 1990:12). Individuals attach meanings to this information and come to act according to it. The body can be regarded as an important mediator of the relationship between people’s self-identity and their social identity, in the sense that the individual internalises and becomes affected by the social meanings which are attached to particular body shapes and performances (Shilling 1993:82–83). Other peoples’ views of, for instance, body ideals, may thus affect the way individuals perceive their own body as well as their way of perceiving others’ bodies.

Furthermore, the body is regarded as an important part of self-identity. As such, it is often believed to display who we are or who we want to be. In short, one can say that we become our bodies. Anthony Synnot (1993:2) argues along these lines when he states that the body is ‘the prime symbol of the self, and the prime determinant of the self’. The connection between body and identity becomes particularly well illustrated by bodily change, especially in those cases

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⁴⁷ I will only briefly make use of some of his theorising to illustrate how his work can be applied to this theme, particularly his concept of stigma. For a more extensive discussion of how Goffman’s work can be understood in relation to the body, see for example Shilling (1993:82–88).
where the change is sudden or unexpected, for example, the loss of a limb in an accident or a severe illness such as stroke. But slow and anticipated changes such as puberty, pregnancy and menopause may also change self-concepts dramatically (Synnot 1993).

The 'good' and the 'bad' body

Societal and cultural norms and values about body and appearance, typical of the time and cultural setting the individual lives in, are powerful in shaping the individual’s bodily identity. The way we look, take care of and present ourselves to other people is therefore important both for the individual and for how we will be judged by others. Although most people acknowledge that it is unfair and probably inaccurate to judge a person’s value on the basis of their physical appearance, this is common practice. David Kirk (1993:7) points out that values attributed to different body shapes have also become important:

Physical appearance is not only widely utilised as a means of summing up a person’s character, but body shapes more generally have over time come to act as symbols, signifying particular social values.

Some body shapes are therefore more highly valued than others. Susan Benson (1997), and many other scholars with her, has noted that body fat is commonly viewed in a negative way while thinness and muscularity is positively evaluated in many contemporary Western cultures. She argues that this is much more than a question of aesthetics.

The bad body is fat, slack, uncared for; it demonstrates a lazy and undisciplined ‘self’. The good body is sleek, thin and toned. To have such a body is to project to those around you - as well as to yourself - that you are morally as well as physically in shape.

(Benson 1997:123)

This positive way of viewing the slim body, found in contemporary Western cultures, comes to signify (among other things) youth, health, a healthy lifestyle, self-control, discipline, sexual attractiveness and beauty. However, other cultures sometimes display a contrasting view, where a slim body on the contrary may be associated with poor health, ageing and suffering. Accordingly a fat body can, in other cultures, also be invested with positive connotations (Johansson 1996a, Popenoe 1997). The fat body should also be understood in rela-
tion to the impact of historical and economic situations. I will, however, not develop this line of argument any further here.

It is not easy to measure up to ideals. The line between what is considered to be a 'bad' and a 'good' body is both thin and vague, and varies not only according to the cultural, historical or economic setting but also with other factors such as age and gender. Although we are generally told to fear and fight everything that is connected to an ageing body, for example, grey hair, sagging flesh, wrinkles etc, it can probably be argued that there is often greater acceptance of shortcomings in an old than in a young body. Natural signs of ageing may therefore not be as problematic or damaging for older people as they may be for younger people who still are able to 'fight' them. When it comes to gender, there is much evidence to indicate that the female ideal is more confined than the male. Staying young, for instance, judging from the large number of products that can be used to preserve youth, seems to be more important for women. The same goes for the necessity of obtaining and maintaining a slim body. Although it can be argued that a fat body today is out of favour and even regarded as unacceptable for both men and women, a fat man is still, at least to some degree, more tolerated than a fat woman, which has much to do with social, cultural and historical norms (cf. Bordo 1995:204–212).

The shape of the body has also come to be connected to character and morality. This link is expressed by authors such as Thomas Ziehe (1986:35), who argues that obesity can be regarded as a consequence of flaws in personal character, and Featherstone, who also stresses individual responsibility of looking after the body.

Self preservation depends upon the preservation of the body within a culture in which the body is the passport to all that is good in life. Health, youth and beauty, sex, fitness are the positive attributes which body care can achieve and preserve. With appearance being taken as a reflex of the self the penalties of bodily neglect are a lowering of one's acceptability as a person, as well as an indication of laziness, low self-esteem and even moral failure.

(Featherstone 1993:186)

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48 See for example Peter Stearns's (1997) book "Fat History" for further reading on these issues, as well as Karin Johannison (1995) who discusses how the understanding of women's bodies has changed over the years.
This mean that we are personally responsible for how we choose to present ourselves, for what we choose to do or not do with our bodies and our appearance, and thereby also for how we will be defined and treated by others.

**Stigma - an illustration of the social importance of the body**

Goffman’s (1990) concept of stigma works as a good illustration of the meaning and importance of the body in social interactions, as it is particularly concerned with different bodily deviations as well as the norm that constructs the identities that are acceptable.

Stigma was historically a phenomenon intimately associated with the body, mostly in very negative terms. In ancient Greece, the concept referred to ‘bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier’ (Goffman 1990:11). Such signs were often cut or burnt into the body and could, for example, indicate that the bearer was a slave, a criminal or in other ways an unreliable person. More recent understandings of the concept are somewhat broader and concern three different types of stigma referring to the body, the character or to a tribal stigma (often characterised as race, nation or religion).

Different kinds of disabilities or physical defects such as being blind, as well as medical conditions such as diabetes and epilepsy, are some examples of the many bodily ‘deviations’ that can cause a stigma. Deviant appearances, ugliness and obesity are others. Obesity as a stigma is also what I focus my attention on here. Although Goffman himself fails to list obesity as a stigma, other studies have discussed it as such (cf. DeJong 1980, Rothblum 1992, Bengs 1997). I argue that in contemporary Western cultures, obesity is not only considered to be a ‘bad’, but can be regarded as a physical deviance and a stigma, and moreover, that mass media help to promote this idea.

Goffman was particularly concerned with the interactional aspects of stigma, that is when the stigmatised and the non-stigmatised meet in face-to-face interaction. One of the more important aspects of stigma is therefore its visibility or to what degree it is known. The terms ‘discredited’ and ‘discreditable’ are used to discuss how obvious a stigma is to others (Goffman 1990:14). When the stigmatised assume their difference is visible or known, they will find themselves in a situation where they are discredited. When they instead believe that no one knows or sees the stigma, they are discreditable. In order to keep it a
A lot of things may happen in the interaction with others. However, we will only briefly touch upon some interactional aspects that the stigmatised individual may experience in interaction with other people. The many different reactions that the stigmatised individual may meet depend on the nature of his stigma. Some common reactions include avoidance, starring, disgust and commenting to mention some. Direct or indirect comments or normative judgements about the body shape, the fit of clothes, eating or exercising habits etc. may, furthermore, be part of the reactions that obese people meet. In many cases these comments are very damaging for the individual and for the self-esteem.

Instead of focusing on the experiences of stigmatised people themselves or what is happening in the interaction with non-stigmatised people, which was Goffman's main interest, I have chosen to focus more on the role of mass media in presenting images of stigma and stigmatised people. The impact of mass media was not something that Goffman himself touched upon more than briefly. However, it can be argued that mass media today have come to play a much more important part of people's everyday lives than previously.

**Mass media and stigma**

It can be argued that encountering stigma is not only something that happens in a face-to-face interaction with other human beings, but instead may also involve media representations of stigmatised people and/or attitudes and values associated with different stigmas and with the life situation of the stigmatised. Such mass media representations may affect both those who are stigmatised and those who are not. For instance, the stigmatised themselves may help to create alter-
native images of their own stigma, which in turn may help them to raise their 'status' and change public attitudes and values, and at the same time ordinary people may get a better understanding of how they experience their situation. It can therefore be argued that mass media become important because they may help to promote positive images of stigmatised people and thus counteract stigmatisation. But, on the other hand, media may also have the opposite effect, in the sense that they may help to sustain and emphasise negative images of stigma.

Accounts of stigmatised people in mass media are an established phenomenon. Literature especially has long showed an interest in and portrayed stigmatised people and their fortunes (Pryse 1979). Recent studies have also come to focus on the portrayal of stigmatised people on TV and in movies, while fiction in particular has proved to have a tendency to portray people with physical disabilities in a stereotyped and prejudiced way (cf. Bogdan et al 1982, Longmore 1985, Ljuslinder 2000). The connection between physical appearance and personality is also commonly expressed in mass media. Anthony Synnot (1993:96) refers to this as a 'beauty mystique', where the beautiful are good and the ugly are distorted or evil. He argues that this 'beauty mystique' can be traced back to old fairy stories with their moral that virtue and beauty wins. The tendency to create and reproduce such stereotypes can also be found in literature, as well as other cultural products such as film and theatre. The 'beauty mystique' becomes most apparent when it is presented visually, for example, in films, TV or in advertising (Synnot 1993:96–99).

Stereotypification, that is the normative expectations that exist regarding both conduct and character of an individual or a group of individuals, continues to uphold different stigma (Goffman 1990:68). Stereotypification becomes especially active in contacts with strangers or mere acquaintances, for example individuals or groups who we know little or nothing about or have never met in person. Mass media, through their 'impersonal' mediation, may contribute to sustaining such processes of stereotypification.

Mass media may also become part of the stigmatisation process through the way they present ideals and stereotypes. The norms that Goffman (1990:152–153) deals with concern identity or being. Failure or success at maintaining such norms has a very direct effect on the individual. Some norms, for example, those connected to physical appearance, take the form of ideals and constitute standards against which almost everyone falls short. Hence ideals and stigma
are closely connected to each other, in the sense that ideals and the deviations from them come to define what becomes a stigma. The non-stigmatised and the stigmatised share this knowledge. Negative evaluations that are attributed to the stigmatised may be believed and accepted by them, or in short internalised. It must therefore be seen as important for the individual to strive to avoid being stigmatised since through, for example, interactions and mass media accounts, s/he become aware of what it mean to have a certain stigma. It can, furthermore, be argued that awareness of both ideals and the different stigmas that are associated with the body is important in young people’s view of their own and others’ bodies, as well as in terms of the strategies or practices they adopt in order to acquire the desired body and appearance. The social importance of the body can therefore also be reflected in people’s willingness to attain their ideals, or in other words in the blood, sweat, tears and money they put into this work.

In sum, societal and cultural values are effectively spread both by mass media and people. The favouring of an ideal body that is young, slim, fit and toned will therefore have great consequences for individuals’ sense of self, as the body is believed to be closely connected to our identity. Consequently, those who, for various reasons, cannot reach these ideals, risk being questioned or regarded as having a bad character, low morality etc. Stigma can be seen as an illustration of the social importance of the body. The importance of the concept for this study is the interpretation it offers of shared knowledge of prevailing norms, why individuals strive to be/pass as ‘normal’, and the awareness of both what is regarded as stigma and what it means to have one.

**The four themes in conclusion**

In conclusion, these themes are central for an understanding of the ideal body. Together with gender, they constitute the framework for analysing and interpreting the empirical findings of this study. As I have already summed up the most important aspects of each theme, this conclusion instead gives an example of how these four themes may work together.

The obese body is used as a brief illustration of how the themes may work together in constructing the process of favouring the ideal body and condemning the obese body. Today, obesity has increasingly come to be seen as a problem. The weight of the population is increasing, with a changing health and illness pattern as a result. Since obesity is often accompanied by an increased risk of
getting related illnesses, it contributes to increased medical expenditure. In fact, there is little evidence that obesity today is seen as anything but a problem. This causes increased control, medical as well as official. Prevention and intervention campaigns are called for to inform the population on how to avoid these risks. These often emphasise individual responsibility in controlling and disciplining the body by way of lifestyle changes, exercise and the control of food intake. Another way of gaining control is to put trust in new technological and medical advances that may help to find causes and new solutions. Consumer culture, on the other hand, offers solutions through their products and services. They also promote the thin and healthy body as an ideal and let the consumer know that bodies are plastic and therefore able to change. We are once again reminded that the work that is needed to achieve an ideal, slim, body is our own responsibility. The social aspect of obesity is often very damaging for the individual. The obese body is frequently regarded as a 'bad body', with a whole range of negative attributes connected to it such as shame, low self-esteem, discrimination etc. Such a negative view of obesity is found at all levels of society, from family and friends to employers, health professionals and so on. All of these aspects may further contribute to make obesity a problem for the individual.

Aspects of gender, as I have showed, can be applied to all four of the themes, which suggests that the ideal body need to be understood as gendered. Women’s bodies are in many cases particularly prone to be regarded as more problematic, more controlled, commodified and more affected by societal and cultural norms than are men’s. The empirical part advances from this premise to see if this tendency can also be found among young people.

Young people's view of their own bodies and the ideal body will be addressed in the second part of the thesis, to which we now turn. The empirical parts both return to some of the issues that have been raised here and in the earlier chapters, and develop them more specifically in relation to the young body. But before this, some methodological considerations are discussed.
This chapter will introduce the empirical part of the study, first by discussing some methodological aspects of the study and second, by giving a short description of the empirical section of the thesis.

One can conclude from the theoretical part of the study that a wide range of different theories and theoretical perspectives proliferate, and that much of the early work on the body has in fact been theoretical. The prime focus for this work has been on bodies in general and on the adult body, particularly women's bodies, leaving the bodies of men under-researched. Equally, little attention has been paid to the young body, especially the young male body, and on the construction of masculinity (Phoenix 1997:6). Swedish studies on these subjects are even more rare. Studies of young people have instead often focused on different aspects of youth culture, such as style, fashion and identity work.

Food, eating and eating disorders, an important topic requiring urgent attention, have also tended to attract significant interest (both in Swedish and in foreign studies) when the young body has been studied (see Edlund 1997, Edlund et al 1999 for examples of recent Swedish studies). However, much of this attention has come to focus on young people with eating disorders, a group for whom the body is already defined as problematic. This approach to a large degree has also tended to exclude boys, as compared to girls they are less frequently affected.

The importance of the body for young people in general, without any known connections to eating disorders or the like, is on the other hand an under-

52 However, certain aspects of the young body have been attended to in two recent Swedish theses. The first, by Annelie Liukko (1996), analyses childhood experiences of food, eating habits and body weight; the second, by Anette Göthlund (1997), focuses on young girls, images of femininity and identity work.

53 The otherwise dominant medical and psychological explanations for eating disorders have also been broadened by a discussion of cultural influences (see Garner et al 1980, Garner & Garfinkel 1980).
researched area. It is to the young body and to different methodological approaches that we now turn.

**How can young people's bodily experiences be studied?**

One problem in studying the young body is how to gain information on children/teenagers' experience and perception of their bodies. Common approaches are to let them speak about, write stories or diaries about different aspects related to their bodies, or make drawings of them. A variety of these methods are used in different research settings. Many studies of children's relations to the body are built on ethnographic work, where participant observation in schools as well as interviews with pupils are common ways of studying these issues (see James 1993). Some studies have focused on emotions and embodiment in the school setting (see Bendelow et al 1996, Mayall 1998 and Prendergast & Forrest 1998), whereas other studies, particularly those of teenagers, have focused on the school as a place where different aspects of regulation are practised. Shirley Prendergast's (1996) study of ordering and regulation of bodily experience in secondary schools in Great Britain are one such example. Another example is David Kirk and Richard Tinning's (1994) study of young people's experiences of the body in relation to school physical education lessons. Nancy Lesko (1988) has studied yet another aspect of regulation, namely, how schools' policies regarding dress code and physical movement restrict young girls' bodily expressions. Other qualitative approaches have also been used in the study of body image. Målfrid Råheim (1994) has, for instance, studied how young Norwegians experience their bodies through written accounts of their experiences of the body. Other studies have combined different approaches, for example, Anita Harris (1995) who has studied Australian youth and the development of gender, and Sharlene Hesse-Biber (1996) who has studied the American 'cult of thinness' by using both interviews and questionnaires.

A slightly different approach is to start out from adult accounts of childhood. This method of working can include both the experiences of the informant and the researcher. Anneli Liukko (1996) is, for instance, interested in how early experiences of the body and of eating can be used to gain information about the informants' perceptions of their childhood. She uses the method to reflect on

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54 Some of the studies described below have combined qualitative and quantitative methods, although the emphasis seems to be placed on the qualitative approach.
how these early experiences have shaped the interviewees' own picture of themselves as adults.

Written accounts of early experiences of one's own body can also be found among researchers themselves (see Widerberg 1995, Haug et al 1987). With the help of memory work, these authors recall and use their memories to understand their adult feelings about the body. This work can be done with a variety of aims. Frigga Haug and her colleagues have explored their bodies in relation to sexuality, while Karin Widerberg has looked at its relation to knowledge and the gaining of knowledge. What this work implies is that early experiences of the body may have an impact, even in later life, on the way we regard, use and view our bodies. Women have tended to use the practice of memory-work much more frequently than men, with the result that work on early experiences of the male body is less developed. However, one example of male memory work is Martti Silvennoinen's (1994) writings on his memories of his childhood. A similar approach is taken by David Morgan (1996b) who uses his own childhood experiences to illustrate the learning of masculinity and how to become a man, and R. W Connell (1995) who uses life-history interviews to understand men's bodily experiences.

**Methodological considerations**

An important question when studying young people's body ideals is, of course, the choice of methodological strategy. What is the best choice; a more in depth qualitative analysis, or a more general or superficial quantitative analysis? One important issue is the objective of the study. In this case, it might be preferable to combine the two strategies, and this was in fact the original idea behind this study. In its early stages, the plan was to conduct a questionnaire and to supplement it with a reception analysis of TV commercials. During the development of the project, this idea evolved more and more in favour of other approaches such as a more extensive questionnaire and more evident interdisciplinarity. This new interdisciplinary approach has, of course, also brought new possibilities with it, principally an excellent opportunity to compare both actual eating habits and the actual size of the body with the perceptions of each held

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55 A combination of the two approaches has been used in two of the master level essays (CD-uppsatser) that have been carried out within the project during the Autumn of 1996 and Spring 1997 (Nilsson 1997, Westberg 1997).
by the participant. A more extended collaboration is also planned, where the different parts of the study are put together, although the present work has been more focused on each part separately.

As there are so few Swedish studies focused on young people's perceptions of their bodies and on important sources of influence, I chose to use a questionnaire to study these relationships in order to reach a wider group. One of the positive aspects of using this method is its explorative potential, which may help to identify important areas and raise new questions that need to be studied further. Other arguments for a quantitative analysis include the awareness of the delicacy of the questions. As some questions regarding body and beauty may be experienced as indiscreet and therefore delicate to talk about, I instead chose the questionnaire where it might be easier for the respondents to express feelings, habits etc and still retain their anonymity. There are, of course, also limitations with this strategy; especially important are those that are related to depth of knowledge. One does not know more than what is specifically asked, and underlying assumptions, reactions, values etc are difficult to ascertain. It is also difficult to know why a certain strategy to alter the body is chosen instead of another. However, I regard this study as a starting point for further studies of young people, their perceptions, and the importance of the body, and the sources of influence that affect them. The rather extensive questionnaire and, to some extent also, the outline of the questions (with open ended and accompanying questions) may in some way also help to address what is gained through of a more qualitative approach.

**Analytical strategies**

Different analytical techniques from the computer software package program SPSS (Norusis 1990) are used in analysing the data. Besides the use of regular comparisons of percentages, factor analyses have also been used. Chi-square analysis was used for comparing frequencies. The levels of significance employed are presented with asterisks in the last column in each table and are as follows (*) p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01 and *** p<0.001. Due to the rather small number of participants, the lowest level of significance is set to 0.1 and marked (*).

Factor analysis (see Kim & Mueller 1978, Norusis 1990) has been used to identify underlying, not directly observable, patterns of interrelated variables. These
patterns can be seen through a small number of factors that represent relationships among a larger set of interrelated variables. The correlation between the variables is seen as a result of their sharing a common factor. The objective with the factor analysis is to explain the correlation between the variables with as few factors as possible and with factors that are meaningful. After computing and analysing the correlation matrix the factors are extracted. The next step included a transformation of the factors with the help of orthogonal rotation (Varimax) to get a simpler and a more interpretable solution.

The purpose of using factor analysis was on one hand to reduce data, and on the other to help to create new variables. This is done on the basis of the factors extracted from the analysis. Out of these factors and the interpretation of them, different additive indexes are constructed. In these indexes, each included variable is contributing equally to the new variable, without considering their specific factor loading. The presentation of variables included and the interpretations of the results are presented further in relation to their use.

The empirical analysis performed in the following chapters uses gender and age as background variables. Other common background variables, such as the social position of the family (class), have been tested with poor results. This has therefore been excluded in the present analysis.

To make the discussion less wordy, the respondents in the following chapters are referred to as girls and boys, although other expressions such as young women and young men perhaps would be a more appropriate choice, especially for the oldest.

**Empirical introduction**

In the second part of the thesis the young body is focused on, both theoretically and empirically. This section consists of four different chapters that each deals with different aspects of the young body. The chapters are related to the four

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56 Factors with an Eigen value greater than or equal to 1 were selected for further analysis. The Eigen value and the proportion of total variance explained by each factor are presented in the two last columns in each table.

57 The variable itself is also difficult to use since the answers are so poor. It turned out that many respondents had great difficulties in describing the educational level of their parents as well as their present occupation.
themes described earlier; the problematic, controlled, commodified and social body, and also evident here is their tendency to be interrelated.

Each chapter begins with a short introduction to the theme in question with particular attention paid to how the young body can be related to the theme. This is done by considering both theoretical discussions and earlier studies of young people and their relations to the body. This will be followed by empirical analysis.

Two important dimensions will be in focus in the analysis, namely, gender and age. Gender, as seen in the theoretical discussion, is an important issue to take into account when studying the body. Age is another. In earlier studies, the ideal body turned out to be important in relation to people of various ages; children as well as old people. The impact of age and gender is further discussed in relation to Chapter 6, where the different ways that the young body might be seen as problematic is in focus.
6 The body as problem

'A lift for your shape.'

Fesse Up are the stockings for those of you who have thought about starting to exercise for years but never really got started; or for you who have started but are not satisfied with your efforts. Fesse Up lifts and shapes your behind, slims your thighs and holds in your stomach.

(Ad for stockings -DIM – in Damernas Värld 1996, No 11:10, (My translation)

The above text (used in an ad for stockings) returns us to the tendency, discussed earlier, to problematize, fragment, objectify and control the body; issues that are addressed in this and the following chapters. In the ad, the text is accompanied by a photo of the lower part of a very slender woman. She is standing up, with most of her back and her legs facing the viewer. She is dressed only in a tight black top that leaves part of her waist bare, and a pair of thin black stockings that cover her long and lean legs. The ad is a good illustration of how the ideal body (most often the female body) is constructed and presented both as fragmented and problematic, as well as in need of control and/or correction. The ad works in several ways. Firstly, it fragments and objectifies by only focusing on the lower part of her very slender body. Secondly, as with many other ads, it focuses on specific parts of the body identified as ‘problem spots’; here as well as in many other cases, these are represented by the stomach, thighs and bottom. These problem spots are referred to by the combination of both visual and textual references. Thirdly, it tells the reader that the body is in need of correction and that something ought to be done about its imperfections, and finally, it gives the reader advice on how they should cope with their ‘unwanted’ or ‘unruly’ bodies. The responsibility for this change is thereby placed on the individual. All of these ways of interpreting the ad are important to take into consideration when studying young people’s relations to their own bodies. This ad is one among many others but it is no exception.

This chapter focuses its attention on the body as a problem, in relation to how it is presented within consumer culture where the ideal body is in focus. It illus-
trates what the respondents’ regard as an ideal masculine and feminine body through their perceptions of their own bodies’ merits and shortcomings. The initial discussion returns to the earlier theme of the body as problematic, but relates this to the young body, rather than, as before, to the body in general. The empirical section of the chapter then gives a brief descriptive overview of how the respondents’ perceive their own bodies; its positive aspects as well as its imperfections. This includes a discussion of the respondents’ overall satisfaction with the body, its different parts, and its size and shape.

Before turning to the empirical findings, some of the ways in which the young body has been identified as problematic are discussed.

Some problems facing young people

Young people (and of course also people in general), as discussed earlier, are presented with a view of the body as something that ought to be attractive, fit and in good shape and health. They also learn that the body is plastic, or capable of changing or improving, and finally that they themselves are responsible for their own bodies and for this work. Mass media’s intense interest in the ideal body helps to create a view of the body as problematic; of at risk of not fitting into ideal images, not being the right size or shape, not being healthy enough, of not having the capacity to do what is expected of it (for example in sports), and so on.

The view of the body as problematic is particularly common in many ads and commercials (including the ad presented in the introduction to this chapter). They present a confined range of bodies regarded as ideal bodies, and help to identify both the preferred and the problematic body, or the cultural stereotype, as well as spots/parts in need of correction. Women’s bodies are frequently portrayed as especially problematic in many such ads and commercials.\(^{58}\)

Since this way of portraying and addressing the body is quite common, one can expect that young people are used to this way of judging and looking at both

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\(^{58}\) Although to a certain extent, men’s bodies are also presented as both problematic and fragmented, this is, however, much less pronounced and they are less often presented with such explicit solutions on how to achieve the ideal body.
others’ and their own bodies, and furthermore, that they have come to both internalise and act according to it.

Earlier studies have also suggested that cultural values of beauty are acquired at an early age. By the age of seven, and possibly even earlier, young children have acquired adult cultural perceptions of attractiveness, wherein a dislike for the obese body is commonly expressed (Feldman et al 1988:191). The size and shape of the body are therefore important criteria for what is judged as attractive and socially acceptable (O’Dea 1995:57).

Allison James (1993:105), who has studied the meaning of the body for children, discusses five important aspects by which the young body may be understood as particularly significant for children. These are height, shape, appearance, gender and performance. These five aspects were found to be frequent conversation topics, as sources of ridicule and distaste, as well as objects of desire and admiration. Moreover, they were a common ground for the beginning and ending of social relations. James discusses these aspects in relation to the importance of different cultural stereotypes that came to have an impact on the way the children perceived themselves as well as others. Being short, fat or excessively thin, for example, were negatively viewed and were also sources of jokes, nicknames, teasing and bullying.

It seems to be important for children to possess a body that conforms to an average shape and size. If the individual deviates in any way from the ‘norm’, the body can be understood as a problem. These deviations can be related both to ‘ordinary’ and to ideal bodies. A body that does not follow the ‘normal’ growing rate assigned by height and weight charts, or shows a late puberty development may for instance cause anxiety and distress for the individual. One can also expect that young people want to look and be like everybody else and therefore strive to be ‘normal’, or to pass as ‘normal’, not least to avoid being teased or bullied.

The impact of gender and age on the perception of the body

The notion that men and women experience, relate to and work with their bodies in different ways was expressed in the earlier theoretical part. The perception of the body is also found to be different among men and women. Most studies have pointed out that women seem to be more dissatisfied and have a
more negative view of their bodies than men. Women's more frequent dissatisfaction is also something that seems to include girls and women of all ages.

Youth and a youthful body are positively valued today. Following this, one would expect to find older people to have a more problematic relationship to their bodies than younger. Even so, there are indications that this is not the case, at least not for women. Women's experiences of their bodies tend to change over the life course and older women tend to be more satisfied with their bodies than younger (see Hesse-Biber 1996, Öberg & Tornstam 1999). Many young people tend to display a problematic relationship to their bodies, especially girls, and this dissatisfaction with and dislike of the body, particularly its size and shape, seem to affect younger and younger children. Young girls are found to dislike specific parts of their bodies and to be involved in activities that will enable them to reduce weight (see Harris 1995, Råheim 1994, Edlund 1997). However, dissatisfaction with the body is not to be regarded as an exclusively female problem; there are also indications that young men today have also become more dissatisfied (Hesse-Biber 1996:104). This is, however, a much less explored area.

Much of the attention that young people pay to their bodies seems to be focused on size and shape; and weight in particular is reported to be a frequent cause of distress (Furnham et al 1990, O'Dea et al 1996). Young people who have a negative view of their bodies are more commonly those who are overweight (Folkhälsoinstitutet & Socialstyrelsen 1993). The body is also sometimes perceived as bigger than it actually is. Results from the part of the project where respondents' made visual size estimations of their bodies show that a majority of both the girls and the boys tended to overestimate their body size (Bergström et al 2000). Overestimations of these parts have also been found in other studies (see Goodyer 1992:77 in Craik 1994:67).

In sum, bodily difference may cause distress, anxiety and worry among young people. It may also be the cause of unwanted attention, bullying or comparisons. In order to find out how the respondents view their own bodies, including merits and shortcomings, it is now time to turn to the empirical material. Some of the

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59 The parts that were most frequently overestimated were the waist (girls +46%, boys +31%), thighs (girls +41%, boys +27%) and buttocks (girls +42%, boys +22%). It should be noted that 28 medical students (18 men and 10 women with a mean age of 28.3 years) are included in these results. However, no major differences were found concerning the age of the respondents.
questions that are addressed here include; How do young people view their bodies and their appearance? What do they like and dislike about their bodies and how do they want it to look? To what extent do young people perceive their bodies as problematic? And in what ways are they problematic? How does this view differ between girls and boys and different age groups?

**The actual measures**

Before turning to the respondents’ perceptions of the size and shape of their bodies, I will start by giving an overview of the respondents’ actual body measures; that is, their height, weight and their Body Mass Index (BMI). These measures seem to vary quite a lot in the sample, both between the age groups and within them (see Appendix 3, Table 1). The largest differences are found among the boys, especially the youngest, where both height and weight differences were particularly marked. In grade 7, about 50 cm separates the shortest boy from the tallest, and 40 kg separates the lightest from the heaviest. The weight differences are even higher among the boys in grade 9. Girls, on the other hand, display a more even distribution between the age groups, but large differences can still be found within them, particularly for weight. The smallest differences are found among the oldest respondents. One reason for this variation is of course gender; another is the variation in physical and puberty development. The latter two may be particularly helpful in explaining the large variation, especially in height but also weight, among the youngest boys. Likewise, an earlier puberty development among girls is a probable explanation for their more stable distribution. Large bodily differences may, as has already been discussed, cause distress, anxiety and worry among young people and may be the cause of attention, bullying or comparisons. In order to find out how these young people view their own bodies, their overall satisfaction with their bodies is now addressed.

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60 The main focus is on the body. It is worth noting that their perceptions of body and appearance were studied separately. The questions on appearance refer to the face and the hair.

61 Body Mass Index (BMI) (kg/m²). The respondents’ BMI values are comparable to current Swedish reference values (Bergström et al 2000).
The overall satisfaction with the body and appearance

Overall satisfaction with the body and appearance was studied through the following two questions: ‘Are you satisfied with your body?’ and ‘Are you satisfied with your appearance?’ ‘Appearance’ here refers to the face and the hair. The responses show that dissatisfaction with the body and appearance is relatively widespread among the respondents and that the body proved to be a greater source of dissatisfaction than did the face. Approximately every third person can be characterised as dissatisfied with the body, compared to every fourth person who expressed dissatisfaction with appearance. The dissatisfaction was, in both cases, especially noticeable among the girls.

More than twice as many girls than boys (or 43 and 17 per cent respectively) reported that they were dissatisfied with the body. These gender differences were further reinforced when controlling for age. Table 6:1 shows that the most striking gender differences are found among those in upper secondary school, where approximately half of the girls are dissatisfied, compared to only five per cent of the boys. This indicates that both gender and age are important factors for the way in which the body is perceived. Moreover, girls’ dissatisfaction with the body tends to increase with age.

Table 6:1. Girls’ and boys’ perception of the body at different grades. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of the body</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th>Grade 2 s.s</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>p</th>
<th></th>
<th>n.s</th>
<th>**</th>
<th>***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

62 To get an idea of the respondents’ overall perceptions of both body and appearance they were asked to place themselves on a scale, ranging from ‘Yes, completely’ to ‘No, not at all’. The scale was then divided into nine parts where one (1) denotes that they are not at all satisfied while nine (9) denotes full satisfaction. The answers have been divided into three categories in order to get a broader and more comprehensive picture. These are ‘dissatisfied’ (value 1–4), ‘indifferent’ (value 4, 5, 5) and ‘satisfied’ (value 6–9).
The same tendency is seen in relation to appearance, where about every third girl stated that she was dissatisfied with her appearance, compared to only one out of ten boys. When controlling for age, the gender differences were only significant among the oldest, where approximately half of the girls as opposed to four percent (one boy) of the boys in upper secondary school were dissatisfied.

The perception of body and appearance are also strongly related to each other (see Appendix 3, Table 2). Approximately 70 per cent of those who report that they are dissatisfied with their bodies tend to have the same feelings regarding their appearance. This pattern remains significant when controlling for both gender and age, indicating that both girls and boys in different age groups are very likely to be satisfied/dissatisfied with both. What is it then that causes this dissatisfaction with the body?

**The actual versus the ideal shape of the body**

When looking at mediated images of ideal bodies, a common message is that the shape of the body is important. Although the ideals for women and men tend to differ, certain characteristics are still shared, such as the emphasis on the slim, fit, tall and muscular body, while the fat or obese body is denigrated. As illustrated in Chapter 4, the shape of the body is not only connected to values, but to character and morality as well.

In order to understand how the respondents viewed their own body shape and their ideal shape, they were asked to look at five different drawings of both naked, full frontal male and female figures. The shape of the presented figures (labelled 1 to 5) varied from a very thin one to a more corpulent one (see Figure 6:1). The respondents were first asked to estimate the actual shape of their body by indicating the figure they thought looked most like their own. They were then asked to indicate their ideal shape, that is, the figure they would like to look like. This helps indicate to what extent they are satisfied with their actual shape, and, in the case of a preferred change, which figure is preferred.
Girls

Figure no 1 2 3 4 5 No wish to change Total N
Actual shape 2 16 54 27 1 100 86
Ideal shape - 11 45 2 - 42 100 83

Boys

Figure no 1 2 3 4 5 No wish to change Total N p
Actual shape - 16 64 20 - 100 70 n.s
Ideal shape - 4 21 3 - 72 100 68 **

Figure 6: 1. Girls' and boys' estimations of their actual shape and their wish to change shape (ideal shape). Per cent.
As can be seen from Figure 6:1, girls’ and boys’ estimations of their actual body shape is quite similar. More than half of the respondents reported that they have a body that can be compared to the median figure (no 3), while nearly one fourth compared it to figure no 4, which is somewhat larger. There are no significant differences in the experience of the actual body shape between girls and boys or between the ages. Worth noting, however is that the girls indicate a somewhat greater variation in their shapes (indicating all five of the figures), while the boys view themselves as ranging between the three figures in the middle.

There is, of course, a possibility that the respondents have gathered in the middle because of the construction of the question, where the median figure (no 3) can be perceived as a normal figure. However, I do not view this as particularly problematic, as about half of the respondents have chosen another figure, and as the respondents’ estimations of their body shape correlates positively with their BMI means, (displayed in Appendix 3, Table 3) where BMI means increase with the size of the figures. It might instead indicate that the respondents’ judgements of their actual shape are quite accurate. The primary interest is thus less in which figures the respondents identify with, but rather to what degree they are content or discontent with their actual shape.

It is also in relation to this question that the respondents tend to display interesting differences. The data regarding a desire to alter body shape, or what can also be labelled their ideal body shape, displays a much more gendered picture. The boys seem to be more content with their actual body shape than the girls. Almost three out of four boys reported that they are happy with their shape as it is, in contrast to only 42 per cent of the girls. A majority of those who are content with their current shape have chosen the median figure (no 3). A tendency towards this figure is also seen among those who want to change their shape. Compared to the boys, girls indicate a somewhat stronger desire to change their shape towards a thinner one. It is interesting to notice that a thin body shape seems to be an ideal also among the boys, even though it is not as evident as for the girls.

Moreover, the view of body shape is linked to the overall perception of the body. Almost three out of four of those who are satisfied with their bodies are found among those with a median figure, while a larger body shape instead
seems to cause more dissatisfaction with the body. This tendency can be seen among both girls and boys.

The rather strong preference for the median figure (no 3) that was found both in relation to one's own perception of the body and in relation to the ideal shape can be interpreted as a desire for normality and to be perceived as 'normal'. Accordingly, the two extremes (no 1 and no 5) may be interpreted as deviance from this norm. The findings support this notion in part, as none of these figures were regarded to be part of the ideal shape. According to the earlier discussion on the social body in Chapter 4, the largest figure (no 5) might even be interpreted as stigmatised. The importance of passing as 'normal' is not only related to adults, as in Goffman's (1990) work on stigma. Normality is also found to be an important issue for children and young people. A body that does not fit in can easily be distinguished and made a target for jokes, teasing or bullying. The size and shape of the body can be a reason for giving nicknames to those who are small, fat or in any other way do not follow the norm (James 1993). References to the size of the body can also be seen through the names, both pejorative and positive, that, for example boys call one another (Prendergast 1996:9-11). Different values are also, as indicated earlier, attributed to different body shapes. The preference for a thinner shape can thus be interpreted as a wish to avoid the 'bad' body, and all that is associated with it. This is an issue that is further developed in Chapter 9, where the respondents' views of alternative ideal images are discussed. The shape of the body is also closely related to the size of the body, an issue I take a closer look at now.

**The size of the body**

Size is often regarded as another important aspect of the ideal body. Size includes height and weight, as well as the particular size of different body parts. We will start by taking a closer look at the first two; height and weight. Both of these measures are associated with positive as well as negative attributes. Height can be regarded as important in many ways. For children and young people, it is one of the things that indicate that a person is 'grown up'. Being tall is, therefore, often interpreted as a positive attribute. It can, furthermore, also be regarded as a cultural ideal for both men and women (at least in the West). This is, for example, expressed in relation to fashion models, where a tall body is regarded almost as a necessity. A tall body is also associated with masculinity and with certain sports, where height is favourable such as basketball, volleyball.
etc. While a preference for a tall body can be argued to include both men and women, the connection between gender and weight is more ambiguous. Although a slender, fit and muscular body is included in physical attractiveness for both men and women, a low body weight is often favoured for women, while a heavy and muscular body is an important part of the male ideal (see also Chapter 3).

When turning to the respondents' perceptions of their height, one finds that it is a relatively common source of discontent (see Appendix 3, Table 4). Almost half of the respondents are discontented with their height and a majority of them wanted to be taller. No significant differences could be found between girls and boys or between different age groups.

Although these figures cannot answer the question why the respondents want to be taller, it does indicate that a tall body is positively valued. The wish to be taller can, of course, be related to bodily development, but it can also be seen as an important part of an ideal body.

While height turned out to be a large source of discontent, weight seems to be an even greater source, especially among the girls. Nearly two third of the girls and almost half of the boys report that they are dissatisfied with their weight (see Appendix 3, Table 4). Dissatisfaction seems to be more common among the two oldest age groups. This is particularly evident among the girls. A majority of the girls in grade nine and grade two in upper secondary school claim that they are discontented with their weight.

The most common wish is to lose weight. This is a desire of about two thirds of those who are discontented with their weight. Here also, strong gender differences are found. The dominating desire, among the girls who want to change their weight, is to lose weight, while the boys show a more even distribution between wanting to gain and wanting to lose weight. The gender differences between a desire for either losing or gaining weight is striking when controlling for age, especially among the older group (see Table 6:2).

63 The desire to be taller ranges from 2–30 cm (Mean 8.8, SD 5.1, N=70) and the desire to be shorter from 4–10 cm (Mean 6.2, SD 2.1, N=7).
64 The desire to lose weight ranges from 1–16 kg (Mean 5.8, SD 3.3, N=57) and the desire to gain weight from 3–12.5 kg (Mean 6.5, SD 2.6, N=28).
65 The same tendency was found in Hesse-Biber's (1996:61) study of college students in the US.

89
Table 6.2. The direction of weight change among those girls and boys who wished to change their weight at different grades.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction of change</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 2 s.s</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to gain weight</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to lose weight</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there are no differences between girls and boys directions of change within the youngest age group, the differences tend to become larger among the older. An unexpected finding was that most of the youngest boys who wanted to change their weight indicated that they wanted to lose weight instead of gaining weight, as is the most common preference for the older boys. Weight gain is almost exclusively a wish expressed among the oldest boys. This wish is probably also related to a wish to increase muscle mass (which, for example, is expressed in relation to different parts of the body, see below). The girls who wish to change weight present a totally different picture. Their wish to lose weight increases with age and culminates in secondary school, where a majority of the girls desire a lower body weight. In fact, wanting to lose weight is the wish of two thirds of the total number of girls in upper secondary school, and wanting to gain weight is the wish of one third of the boys in the same age group. It is worth noting that the direction of change differs considerably within the oldest age group and that the desire to have a lower body weight is so strong among the girls.

A possible interpretation of the rather strong wish to lose weight, among girls in general and the youngest boys (Grade 7), might be that their weight might be a cause for unwanted attention, for example jokes, teasing or bullying. Another, partly related, reason for the gender differences in losing and gaining weight may be the impact of cultural ideals, summed up by the concepts of the “slender female” versus the “muscular male”, where stereotypical images help to preserve such ideals. A body that is tiny, unfit, lacks muscles or is overweight is not desired or highly culturally valued. A low weight is also presented as a goal for girls and women, while a heavy body is regarded as something positive for boys, provided it is muscles and not fat that contributes to the weight. The differences related to age may also be interpreted along these lines, as the impact
of mediated cultural ideals seems to have a stronger effect the older the respondents become (see Chapter 8 for an extended discussion of the impact of different sources of influence).

As could be expected, discontent with both height and weight are often found together. There is, furthermore, a positive correlation between both height and weight and the perception of the body (see Table 6:3). Weight especially seems to be an important part of the overall satisfaction with the body. Those who are satisfied with their height and their weight are more often also satisfied with their bodies.

Table 6:3. The relationship between the perception of the body and satisfaction with height and weight. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of the body</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>101</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We have so far found that the respondents' dissatisfaction with the body is negatively correlated with height, weight, a larger body shape and dissatisfaction with appearance, and that this is most evident for girls. This indicates that those who are dissatisfied with the body are more often dissatisfied with their height, their weight and the shape of their body. In order to get a more detailed picture of the parts that caused most satisfaction/dissatisfaction, a number of separate questions were asked.

**Fragmenting the body - liked and disliked body parts**

Advertising is, as the introductory ad also illustrated, often accused of fragmenting the body. This often includes both the idealising of certain parts and the highlighting or assigning of specific parts as problem spots in need of correction (see Markula 1995:434). As suggested earlier, this way of looking at the body may have an impact on the way that young people view their own bodies.
When asked about satisfaction and dissatisfaction with specific parts of the body, girls seem to be particularly inclined to think of their bodies in a fragmented way. They frequently report both what parts of their bodies that they like and dislike most, and they are, moreover, more likely to regard them as problematic.

Let us take a look at what parts of the body the respondents like and dislike most. In total, two out of three respondents report that they are satisfied with different parts of their body, compared to three out of four who report dissatisfaction with certain parts. Girls tend to be particularly inclined to answer this question and think of their bodies along these lines. A majority of the girls answered both these questions, compared to only half of the boys. As illustrated in Table 6:4, the legs and the stomach are the two parts associated with most satisfaction. Other parts frequently mentioned were arms, hands/feet and chest/breasts. Interestingly, no significant gender differences could be seen.

When asked about the parts that they disliked the answer rate increased somewhat, particularly for the girls. The most problematic spots are primarily found to be located in the lower body. The legs and the stomach are once again highlighted, but this time because they were reported to cause dissatisfaction. The gender differences are not significant but display an interesting pattern. It tends to be the same parts that are both liked and disliked by the girls, namely legs and the stomach. Almost one third of the girls regard the legs, and especially the thighs, to be problematic. Moreover, girls describe these two features as especially important when a girl is considered to have a nice body (see Chapter 8). Boys, on the other hand, seem to be most troubled by their feet, followed by their legs. Bottom/hips are other parts that turned out to be a rather frequent cause of dissatisfaction among both girls and boys. Interestingly, no one mentioned any satisfaction with these parts. Almost the opposite situation was found for the arms. While arms were quite frequently reported to cause satisfaction, considerably fewer regarded them to be a source for dissatisfaction.

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66 This was, as with the question on dissatisfaction, an open-ended question where the respondents were asked to write down both the part that they liked/disliked most and the reason for it. The respondents were asked to write only one choice. In those cases where more than one alternative occurred, the first alternative mentioned has been used.
Table 6:4. Girls’ and boys’ satisfaction and dissatisfaction with different body parts. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body parts</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th></th>
<th>Dissatisfaction</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands/Foots</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arms</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest/Breasts</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legs</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom/Hips</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>n.s</td>
<td></td>
<td>n.s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age seems to have a certain impact on the choice of disliked parts. Hands and feet turned out to be the parts that caused most dissatisfaction among the youngest, while the older respondents instead reported a greater dissatisfaction with the legs and the stomach.

Legs and the stomach, the parts that caused most satisfaction and dissatisfaction, along with bottom/hips and chest/breasts, are features that get a lot of both positive and negative attention in advertising and other cultural products in relation to both men and women. Moreover, they are often sexually charged and/or problematized; the introductory ad is one such example.

**The fear of being too fat**

What is then the cause of this satisfaction and dissatisfaction? Table 6:5 summarizes the reason for being satisfied with different parts. The main reasons were associated with the parts being muscular, small or slim. There is also a large proportion of more general positive assessments expressed through comments such as "They look good" or "They look as I want them to". However, the reasons are quite different for girls and boys. Size and shape are reported to be particularly important for the girls. Their desire to have a smaller shape (and to

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67 The satisfaction/dissatisfaction with hands and feet are presented together, as relatively few respondents expressed like or dislike for them. Satisfaction is equally distributed between hands and feet, while feet contribute to twice as much discontent as the hands. Most of the discontent is related to their size.

68 Age had no effect on the reasons given.
decrease their weight), displayed earlier, is here reinforced through their preference for parts that are slim, have a small size, the right length or the right shape. These aspects seem to be unimportant for boys, especially the reference to parts being small or slim. The boys instead tend to refer more to muscles, function and generally positive assessments.

Table 6:5. The reasons girls and boys give for their satisfaction with different body parts. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for satisfaction</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muscles</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Function</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shape</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right size</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small/slim</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally positive assessments</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything else is ugly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note that although muscles also have a certain importance for girls’ satisfaction with different body parts, they rarely report any satisfaction with their function, whereas boys on the other hand frequently do. This can maybe be related to the stronger connection between sports and masculinity and male activity. A way to understand the differences found between girls and boys is to link them to cultural ideals presented, for example, in ads. Muscles, activity and sports are strongly linked in these to men and masculinity, while size and shape of the body, and to a certain extent also muscles, on the other hand, often are associated with women’s bodies. In short, the respondents seem to be content when they have a body that matches the ‘stereotypical’ images of a masculine and feminine ideal body that emphasise thinness for women and muscles for men.

This picture is reinforced when looking at the main reasons for dislike of body parts. The attention seems to be focused on parts that were considered to be too fat or too big, that is, the opposite of why they were liked. Table 6:6 indicates that gender differences are quite evident. The two reasons most frequently mentioned by the girls are feelings of being too fat or too big, together with various
other problems. The reasons the boys give are more varied, and, as with dissatisfaction with weight, express a more contrasting view. Their most frequent reasons for dissatisfaction were associated with parts being either too fat or too thin. Boys compared to the girls show a much higher concern with parts being too thin, a reason that is of little concern for the girls. Worth noting is that no one mentioned any dissatisfaction with the function of the parts, a quite common reason for satisfaction, especially among the boys.

Table 6:6. The reasons girls and boys give for their dissatisfaction with different body parts. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for dissatisfaction</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of muscles</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong shape</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too fat</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too big</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too thin</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too small</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various other problems</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The feeling of having body parts that are too fat, together with lack of muscles and a discontent with shape, were all reasons commonly reported by the oldest, while various other problems were more common among the youngest. These differences remain for the girls when controlling for gender.

The reasons for dislike vary between the different body parts. The stomach and the legs are mainly associated with feelings of being too fat and lacking muscles, while the bottom is mainly regarded as too big. The arms and the chest/breasts are primarily regarded to be too small or too thin, and, to a certain extent, also to be the wrong shape. Finally, the hands and the feet are related to various minor problems.

'Other problems' refers to various things such as parts being hairy, not fully developed, too feminine etc.
Concluding comments

Gender, as we have seen, is a particularly important variable to explain young people’s relations to body and appearance. Gender correlates with all of the issues discussed above, except the relation to height, the actual body shape and the parts that are liked/disliked.

The girls seem to have internalised a view of their bodies as imperfect and in need of change or correction. They appear to pay more attention to their bodies and they express more easily both their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with it. In short, their description of the favoured body is very close to the image of the ideal female body presented in mass media. It can be summed up as tall, slim and low weight. Much of the girls’ attention was focused on size and shape. Aspects of size were not only related to the perception of the body as a whole, but also to the perception of specific body parts. While small or slim parts caused satisfaction, large or fat parts were a frequent cause for dissatisfaction.

The favourable male body can, to a certain extent, be characterised pretty much in the same way as the female, in the sense that a tall, slim and well-toned body is preferred. Size is also important for the boys and many express a wish to be both taller and heavier. However, the question of size (and shape) is toned down, in favour of a stronger preoccupation by muscles and function when the specific parts are targeted. Muscular development and an increase in muscle mass can therefore be argued to be an important part of the masculine ideal body. Boys’ greater attention to muscles and function of the body can, to use James’ (1993) words, be described as an interest in ‘what it does’ while girls instead are much more interested in ‘how it looks’, something I will return to in chapter 9.

Both the strong gender differences and the importance of size are found in earlier studies of young people’s relations to body and appearance. The occupation with size among girls, and muscles and function among boys, is supported by findings in other studies. Anita Harris (1995) reported, in her study of Australian youth, the same type of answers as were found in this study in response to the question about what is liked/disliked about the body. The Australian girls seemed not only to be to be more dissatisfied and more preoccupied with the body than the boys, but they also referred to the same body parts as the girls in my study. Harris furthermore found that boys in her study often related their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the body to the context of sport. Height, and
a fit body - not being too fat and/or too small or skinny, were important for them, together with more neutral assessments of the body and its parts. This latter finding can be compared to the generally positive assessments frequently mentioned by the boys in my study. In a Norwegian study of young people's body image, Målfrid Råheim (1994) asked young Norwegians to describe their feelings in relation to their experience of the body. Her findings also coincide strongly with the ones that have been discussed above. The female ideal described by the Norwegian girls was primarily to be slender and thin, and secondly, to be fit and to have large breasts. The male ideal was to be fit, muscular and slender (but not thin!). In both these studies, young people’s perceptions of the body were discussed in relation to the influence of cultural values.

The importance of size and the fear of everything that is big or fat found among the girls has also been addressed in other studies. Markula (1995) found a similar attention to size in her study of the female body image in aerobics. She states that "Apparently, women do not want to be associated with big anything: Big muscles, big bones and big bodies are generally feared" (Markula 1995:440).

The body parts that the girls in my study dislike, predominantly the stomach and legs, also coincide with the parts that many women, as well as the media, often point out as specifically problematic areas. Markula refers to Stalling (1980), who describes the main areas of most concern for women to be the upper arms, abdomen, and the outer thighs (Markula 1995:434).

The female attention to muscles has also been expressed in several studies. Bordo (1995:191) argues, for instance, that slenderness is today no longer enough for women, since the athletic 'hard' look also has become part of the female ideal. However, muscle size is an intricate matter for women, which studies of female body builders have shown (see Hargreaves 1994).

The boys' wish to be bigger and their attention to muscles and function, or 'what it does', can be related to Connell’s (1983) theoretical discussion of hegemonic masculinity and the significance of sport, where the size and shape of the body become important. A big and well-built body signifies masculinity. While boys had no problem expressing their perception of their bodies in general, it turned out to be more difficult to relate to its parts. The idea of hegemonic masculinity might also help to explain this rather low response rate, as caring too much about body and appearance is often regarded as 'unmanly'. This view persists, although today it has been challenged by the intense focus on the male body in advertising and in mass media in general, and by the in-
crease in body care products aimed at men. Another explanation is that these are questions that the boys have not thought as much about as girls probably have, as they are continually fed messages concerning the beautification of body and appearance.

The girls’ greater attention to ‘how it looks’, and their ‘cult of thinness’, seen both in relation to their overall view and the parts, as well as the ease with which they fragment and problematise different parts of their bodies, can easily be linked to influences from mediated ideals. Girls are probably more aware of these mediated ideals and the pressure to conform to them. They may also be led to believe that the benefits of having a nice body are higher for them.

Age is found to be another variable with some importance for the perception of body and appearance. Age seems, though, to be of minor importance on its own, but together with gender it displays significant differences. Different patterns can be identified for girls and boys. The ones who are most dissatisfied are found among the older girls and among the younger boys. Moreover, girls’ dissatisfaction tends to increase with age. These differences may to some extent be explained by the respondents’ physical- and puberty development. The girls, especially the oldest, can be described as being in a late phase in their development, while the boys, especially the younger ones, can be described as being in an earlier phase. An implication of this is that the girls can see the results of this development, where a higher amount of body fat is one important aspect. According to the findings, this development is not in line with how the girls describe their desired body, and nor are social and cultural values. The boys, on the other hand, might still be more uncertain about how their bodies will come to change in the future, which might help to create both distress and hope. The developing male body, which among other things increases in weight and muscle mass, is also more in line with how the boys describe their desired male body.

The large variation in the actual body size, e.g. the height and weight differences, found within the boys in grade 7 and 9, (see Appendix 3, Table 1) can also contribute to the greater dissatisfaction among the younger boys. These differences in height and weight measures are quite large among the younger boys, but tend to be smaller among the oldest. This might be linked to a willingness to conform to an average size of the body and to normality. The respondents’ perception of size and shape can to a certain degree also be interpreted as a question of ‘normality’. The wish to ‘blend in’, to have a ‘normal’ body, with
the ‘right’ size and shape for all of its parts, can be seen as important for both girls and boys. To look different or to deviate in any way may therefore be seen as unwanted and as a possible source for jokes, teasing or bullying, something that some earlier studies have also demonstrated. However, it is difficult to say how strong the pressure for ‘normality’ is, and how it might differ for girls and boys. The limits within which one can deviate, seem in many cases to be much narrower for girls, at least when they are expressed through mass media. This, together with the social and cultural values attached to different body shapes, may therefore help to explain girls’ greater dissatisfaction.

What has been identified so far is a relatively widespread dissatisfaction with different aspects of the body. We continue from here and see to what extent the respondents are also involved in practices that will help them to control, ‘normalise’ or achieve the desired body.
7 Control and strategies to alter the body

This chapter is focused on the different ways that the body is controlled and altered through practices such as exercise, food and eating habits, and cosmetic surgery. The central question that is considered is as follows: is the dissatisfaction that the respondents expressed in relation to the body and its different parts acted upon, that is, are the respondents doing anything to alter their bodies, and if so, what? We also return to the idea of the body as a project to see to what extent young people view it in this way.

The chapter is divided in two sections. The first is focused on control and the second on how the body can be seen as a commodity that is shaped, styled and reconstructed, and how this work can be regarded as a project. Much of the earlier theoretical discussion of control and surveillance in Chapter 4 focused on external control in general and on individual responsibility. However, the first section of this chapter will focus more on young people and control, especially self-control. Although the main focus is on the different ways that individuals practice control over their own bodies, I also briefly touch upon the different kinds of external control and surveillance that young people are exposed to at home and in the school setting. Self-control is also addressed in the empirical section where the different ways that young people themselves control their bodies, especially its size and shape, is discussed. In the second section, the different strategies that the respondents use to alter the body and the investments they make are addressed empirically. We start out, however, by taking a closer look at how the young body is controlled.

Control exercised at school and at home

Control of the young body can take place both in the home and in institutions outside the home, for instance, the school. The home is a place where the body is central and where much of the work on/with bodies take place. David Morgan (1996a) argues that the body is closely linked to the family in several ways, and not least through aspects of control. Parents’ way of practising control or regu-
lation of children is often expressed through child-rearing practices and the work of civilising children into society. However, the home is not only a place of control, it is also a place where children often experience positive feelings in relation to the body. Moreover, parents often praise the young body for its embodied beauty, for achievements and for the progress it makes (Bendelow et al 1996, James 1993).

The control of the body within the home is also closely linked to other agencies or institutions outside home. The school is one such important arena. Moreover, it is one of the earliest places where the young body is exposed to control and regulation outside home. Several studies have focused on the relationship between these two arenas. Gillian Bendelow et al (1996) have, for instance, studied the importance of emotions in the civilising and regulatory work at home and in school. Allison James (1993) has likewise focused her attention on these two arenas and on the significance of children’s experiences of bodily differences. Although these two arenas are involved in much of the same work, they also differ quite a lot, as other things are valued at school than in the home. Children should, for instance, be able to restrict their movement and sit still at certain times and be physically active at other times. Moreover, the school has a tendency to place the mind over the body. The control exercised by the school can be related to several areas of young people’s lives. Some are primarily physical, related to time and space (Kirk 1993, Prendergast 1996), while others are more aesthetical by imposing restrictions in regard to, for instance, appearance and dress codes (Lesko 1988).

The control and regulation practised at school is also part of a larger societal aim, to educate young people in how to become and stay healthy. In achieving this goal, different sources then come to more or less ‘work’ together. Eva Palmblad and Bengt Erik Eriksson’s (1995) historical study of health promotion in Sweden from the 1930s until today is a good illustration of how external control is exercised, but also how control within the family has been shared or exercised on behalf of other agencies, especially the school. It can, moreover, be

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70 The tendency to place mind over body is also nicely expressed in Karin Widerberg’s (1995) accounts of her memories of becoming and being a woman in the male world of knowledge, that is the school and the university environment. She gives an illustrative example of this when she describes the changing nature of her relation to reading. While her early childhood memories of reading were filled with joy and positive bodily experiences, this strong connection to the body came to change radically as she learned that the ‘head’ or the mind was instead in focus in the school setting.
seen as a good illustration of how a somatic society may work. They found that the spread of health promotion as such turned out to have changed considerably over the years, regarding both the sender and the receiver as well as the message, although the normative features still tend to be strong. New channels, such as television and film, have over the years come to be used more frequently, and the message has, to an ever increasing extent, become more individualised and come to construct the individual as responsible. Today’s messages are highly individualised and pitched at certain groups. Moreover, they are based much more on personal responsibility and lifestyle changes than before. Health has thereby changed from being a collective property to an individual property. This also demands a higher degree of self-control by the individual.

**Self-control**

The practice of control over one’s own body can be understood as self-surveillance or self-regulation. When this is related to the ideal body, it can be exercised through food intake, exercise routines, or through measuring or control of changes in the size and shape of the body. The use of height and weight charts is another way of controlling the body; its development as well as its normality. Food and exercise are often pointed out to be especially important means of exercising control over the body. People with eating disorders are often associated with an extreme way of practising these methods of control. However, they are also commonly practised by young people in general, and, as we will see in the empirical material, by the young people in this study.

I will, however, take a closer look at some of the ways young people can practice self-control over different areas of life, as well as their sense of gaining and losing control, before I turn to the empirical material.

Self-control is closely linked to control by others, as it is both learned and often performed in interaction with other people (see Morgan 1996a:116). This means that self-control can both be affected by other people and affect other people. It can also be argued that the control exercised by other people changes as one grows older.  

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71 Jenny Hockey and Alison James (1995) argue, however, that there is a parallel between how old people and children are treated by their carers.
gradually lose their significance as self-control becomes more and more internalised and other people and institutions instead become more important.

It is sometimes argued that aspects of control become especially important in adolescence when large bodily changes take place and furthermore become particularly visible. Studies have also showed that bodily changes like puberty and the onset of menstruation have an impact on the experience of control. Shirley Prendergast (1996:5–6) has, for instance, noted that loss of control (temporal, practical, emotional as well as social) was a powerful theme in girls’ account of menstruation. Sexual activity and being around girls are identified as occasions when adolescent boys feel a loss of control (Harris 1995).

**Bodies on display**

Self-control can also be related to the presentation of self and the body. Many studies have indicated that there are gender differences in the way women and men exercise control over their own bodies. In many studies girls and women are often said to pay more attention to their bodies. The reasons for this attention are varied. Prendergast (1996:12) illustrates this when she looks at the impact that formal and informal aspects of school have on adolescent pupils

...girls tend to learn internalised, self-monitoring forms of bodily regulation that are often based on being observed, on presentation, passivity and sometimes shame. These forms of regulation mean that girls are much more self-conscious about their bodies, always thinking of them, always doing something about them: always ‘on their mind’.

(Prendergast 1996:12)

The display of the body seems to be particularly important here. This issue is also frequently mentioned by other scholars, both as something positive, as in the case of what Featherstone (1993) has called the ‘performing self’, but also as something negative. The awareness of the gaze, of being observed or viewed as an object, seems to be a particularly powerful aspect for girls who seem to be much more aware of their bodies being on display and who, moreover, seem to dislike it more than boys. David Kirk and Richard Tinning (1994) found, for example, that willingness to display the body during physical education classes

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72 See also Chapter 8, where important mediators of cultural values are discussed.
73 See also Chapter 9 for an extended discussion of this issue.
differed substantially between girls and boys. The boys in their study took up much more space and liked to show their strength and physicality by displaying their bodies both physically and by wearing clothes that revealed much of their muscular bodies. The girls, on the other hand, tried to avoid attention by hiding their bodies in baggy clothes and by doing as little as possible.

The display of the body is also a common reason for not feeling in control of the body. Anita Harris (1995) found that this was particularly true for girls. Wearing bathers and being at the beach, one of the times when the body is most exposed to the gaze of other people, were for example frequently mentioned as situations when the young women in her study felt least in control of their bodies. Being around the other sex was yet another frequently mentioned situation when both young women and young men felt least in control. The young men, furthermore, felt that they lacked control of their bodies when they were drunk and during sexual activities.

While the sense of losing control to a large extent seems to be related to the display of the body and to relations with other people, especially the other sex, the sense of gaining control instead seems to be much more related to food and exercise. Food seems to be a particularly important means of control for young girls. Målfrid Råheim (1993) found that the girls in her study were much more preoccupied by food and eating than were the boys. They tried to control their bodies (that is their weight) by eating 'light' and healthily, and they saw exercise as a way to get slender. Furthermore, exercise was regarded by them more as duty than fun. The boys, on the other hand, regarded exercise as a way to achieve a good physical shape, and to some extent also as a means of control, but with less negative connotations as for the girls. Harris (1995) found similar gender differences in her study. In response to the question: 'When do you feel most in control of your body?' the boys stated that they felt in control of their bodies when doing sports, while the girls on the other hand related their sense of control to denial, above all of food.

After this short introduction to different aspects of self-control I will now return to the empirical findings to see how the young people in this study tried to control their bodies. The first two ways of controlling the body that will be focused upon here are firstly, the use of different techniques to measure the size and shape of the body, and secondly, the use of food. I will then turn to the different strategies that are used to change the things the respondents are dissatisfied with, their willingness to undergo cosmetic surgery, and the use of anabolic
steroids. These ways of changing the body can also be regarded as a means to control it.

Guarding the body - the control of body size by the use of different body measuring techniques

We saw in the previous chapter that much of the respondents' attention is focused on the size and shape of the body, and that it is a frequent cause of dissatisfaction. The focus is now on how they try to control it. There are, as we have already discussed, many ways by which the individual can evaluate and control the body. The ways that we focus on here are; to observe the body in the mirror, to detect alterations in size with the help of clothes, to measure weight with bathroom scales, and finally to tape measure the body. Tape measuring is often associated with measuring height, but can also be used to measure different parts of the body. As such, it can probably be regarded as a more extreme form of body control, mainly practised by groups that are quite preoccupied with the size of the body such as fashion models and the like. The obtained measures can be used to compare one's own body with images of ideal bodies, but also to check alterations in one's own body or to control the 'normality' of the body.

Not very surprisingly, the respondents indicated that the mirror is the most common way to monitor or control the size and shape of the body (see Appendix 4, Table 1). A good one fifth of the respondents claim they use the mirror every day for that purpose, and approximately one third use it at least once a week. Although this way of controlling the body is more common among the girls, it remains that almost half of the boys use the mirror for this purpose at least once a week. Interestingly, this was the only measuring technique that displayed any significant gender differences. Using weighing scales, which is probably the most obvious body measuring device, is another quite common way to control size. Approximately one fifth of the respondents weigh themselves at least once a week. To use the fit of clothes as an indication of size turned out to be a less practised method, but it is still used regularly by both girls and boys. However, using the tape measure as a tool for body measures is

74 The tape measurements of famous models may, however, have an impact on people outside the "world of modelling" since these figures are also available to a wider public, mainly through articles and magazines.
a much less frequently used method. Although it is more unusual, nearly half of
the respondents still state that they have used it at least sometimes.

Age turned out to have some impact on the use of different body measuring
practices. Significant differences are seen between age and the use of the mirror,
where the most frequent users are found among the two oldest age groups. An­
other somewhat surprising finding is that the use of tape measuring seems to be
more common with the youngest. A possible explanation for this might be that
they interpreted the question as relating to the measuring of height, although the
question itself was not explicitly focused on height. Moreover, height was found
to be a relatively common source of discontent among the respondents.

A more complete picture of the desire to control the size of the body is seen in
the additive index in Table 7:1. The body-measuring index is created out of the
four alternative measuring techniques mentioned earlier. Approximately one
out of seven report that they pay a large amount of attention to different kinds of
measuring techniques. This is much more common among the girls. It is, how­
ever, interesting to note that boys also show an interest in these activities, al­
though not as frequent as the girls. Age has no impact on the attention given to
the control of size.

Table 7:1. Girls’ and boys’ attention paid to different body measuring techniques
expressed by the body-measuring index. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of attention</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The index is based on the different measuring techniques discussed above. No factor analysis is
done since the variables are too few to express different dimensions. Moreover, the correlation
between the variables is also quite small. The additive index might nevertheless be useful since
it measures the combined picture of the control of body size. The result of the index is divided
into three categories: large-, moderate- and little attention.

75
These results are consistent with the findings in earlier studies where girls and women are often found to pay greater attention to their bodies as well as a need to control them. Another related way to regulate the size of the body is to control food intake, an issue we will take a closer look at next.

**Food and eating**

*A vice but not a burden.*

*It is a shame not to. Guilt descends upon me today. I ate sweets yesterday. And then I did not have the time to go jogging because I had to run downtown in search of organically grown... Try becoming friends with your vices instead. Invite them for a cup of coffee.*

(Ad for biscuits) (My translation)

The above quote from an advertisement for biscuits illustrates the often contradictory messages related to food and eating. In many such messages dieting and indulgence are interlinked. While the food industry on the one hand tries to persuade us to eat and indulge ourselves, on the other hand it imposes the need to diet and to eat healthily. This is illustrated in the ad through a combination of asceticism and hedonism, something that is found to be quite common in commercial advertising, especially in relation to low or reduced-fat food products. Such ads often imply that consumers can indulge themselves but stay thin and attractive at the same time (Lupton 1996:152). It further expresses the feelings of guilt and anxiety when eating the wrong type of food. These are all questions that this section will be centred around.

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76 The above quote was in the ad accompanied by a black and white photograph of a very thin young girl, dressed in a top and tights, lying on her back on a bench in a Gymnasium lifting weights. Her slender body is effectively emphasised by the shadows that come through the windows, which appear to be the only source of light in the room. The brand mark at the top right corner and a packet of biscuits, found in the down right corner are the only coloured objects in the ad. Under the brand mark is the text “It is a shame not to” written in tiny letters.

The ad proved to awake negative feelings among customers and was, after it had been questioned by The Swedish Consumer Agency, drawn back by the manufacturing company (Gustafsson 1992).
Many messages around eating, food preparation, dieting etc. are especially aimed at women. Studies have showed that girls and women of all ages often express a problematic relationship to food. This relationship is expressed in many different ways. Young people, especially girls, are for example often found to be engaged in different weight control practices (O'Dea et al 1996, Edlund et al 1999). Such practices may in some cases turn into a more severe obsession with food or even eating disorders. Eating disorders are also frequently found among young people (Folkhälsoinstitutet & Socialstyrelsen 1993). Denial of food is found to be a way for women to be in control of their bodies, not only in relation to eating disorders which has often been pointed out, but also in situations where they feel they have lost control over other areas of life (Charles & Kerr 1986:553).

Food has for young people also become important for other reasons. The growing interest in vegetarianism is one such example. Studies have found that a conversion to vegetarianism is for many people related to moral issues, which includes both animal rights concerns and political concerns. Other common motives are related to health and ecology (Lupton 1996:123–125).

Food is increasingly also associated with health. This connection can be seen both in mass media and in health campaigns. Although most of these health campaigns are aimed at adults and specific ‘risk groups’, it is very likely that young people will also adopt such messages. Certain foods are also said to make you more beautiful, increase well being and even provide protection against illnesses such as cancer. However, to follow such recommendations is quite difficult, as what is healthy today may become unhealthy tomorrow. Allan Ward (1997:84) notes that:

The growing concern with healthy eating has generated new obsessions and new anxieties, as well as new commercial products which promise to alleviate such concern. Articles in the magazines, even entire books, are devoted to micro-properties of foods, to minerals and extra vitamins, usually considered good and to additives, preservatives and chemicals, usually bad.

Many of these ‘health messages’ are also a good illustration of how the inner body is in focus for the enhancement of the outer body. The outer body is also

---

77 Many such products are today referred to as 'functional food'.

109
the prime focus for many diet messages, as well as ads for dietary supplements. Philip White and James Gillett (1994) found in their study of body building magazines that dietary supplements were the most frequently advertised products in these magazines. Self-transformation was a common theme in many of these ads, and dietary products, as well as hard work, were believed to create a desired muscular exterior.

The relationship to food, as has been illustrated above, can be viewed very differently. Food can be regarded as something good that gives energy, builds up the body and strength, and makes you beautiful or healthy. It can, on the other hand, also be regarded as something bad that makes you feel fat, overweight and unhealthy, and sometimes even makes you sick. It is not only the food in itself that is important, it is also a question of its composition, quantity and one’s own eating habits.

**Control of food-intake**

In order to find out to what extent the respondents tried to control their food intake, they were presented with four statements that attempt to capture some important aspects of their relationship to food and eating. These are; ‘I often think of what I eat’, ‘Eating sweets/fast food gives me a bad conscience’, ‘I usually try to choose ’’light’’ products when they are available’ and finally ‘I often eat because I feel alone or sad’. The first statement, ‘I often think of what I eat’, is, however, quite ambiguous, since the interpretation of the answer can be regarded in both a positive and negative way. It is all a matter of difference in degree. To be aware of what one is eating is to some extent a desirable aim, something encouraged by, for instance, mass media, domestic science and preventive medicine to promote good health (see Eriksson & Palmblad 1995). An excessive attentiveness may, on the other hand, become more harmful, especially if it is related to weight control. In this sense, the statement can also be linked to strategies of both weight loss and weight gain.

However, the link to weight concerns is more evident in the two following statements, ‘Eating sweets/fast food gives me a bad conscience’ and ‘I usually try to choose ’’light’’ products when they are available’. These statements are, as

78 Some of the respondents are also vegans or vegetarians, which gives the statement yet another dimension.
discussed earlier, also related to common themes in advertising and magazine articles on dieting. The last statement, 'I often eat because I feel alone or sad', is associated with the notion that food is sometimes used as reward and comfort. Depression and stress are common situations when people, especially women, turn to food, but food can also be used as relief from boredom or as a means of relaxation (Charles & Kerr 1996:540).

The respondents' attention to food and eating are, as illustrated in Table 7:2, quite widespread. Approximately half of them say they often think of what they eat; something that both girls and boys expressed to almost the same extent. Compared to the following questions, this can be characterised as general attention to food and eating, and as such it includes both girls and boys. The following questions that were more concerned with weight control and that indicates a more problematic relationship to food and eating displayed a more gendered picture. In total, about one third of the respondents reported that eating sweets/fast food makes them feel guilty, and one fifth often choose light-products when they were available. In both cases a majority of these are girls. On the whole, about 40 per cent of the girls expressed feelings of guilt in relation to certain foods. While boys also indicated that they both have feelings of guilt in relation to food and choose light products, very few boys used food as a way of seeking comfort when feeling lonely or sad. To use food in this manner is, thus, almost solely a female phenomenon. Approximately one fifth of the girls agree with this statement.

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79 It is not unusual to find a link between food and/or food intake and feelings of bad conscience or guilt in advertising, especially when promoting different “light” products.

80 Sweet food is particularly often used in this way.

81 The original variable consists of four alternatives (see Appendix 2, question 35). In the following analysis these have been put together into two categories, 'I agree' and 'I disagree'.
Table 7:2. Girl's and boy's different eating habits. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>I often think of what I eat</th>
<th>Eating sweets and fast food makes me feel guilty</th>
<th>I often choose light-products</th>
<th>I often eat because I feel alone or sad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>n.s</td>
<td></td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The gender pattern is reinforced when all four statements are taken together in an additive index. In total, one fourth of the respondents can be regarded as paying significant attention to what and how they eat. As can be seen in Appendix 4, Table 2, a majority of these are girls. Age is significant only for the girls, where those who pay considerable attention to food and eating are primarily found within the two oldest age groups.

Significant attention to food and eating is, as can be seen in Table 7:3, also negatively correlated with overall satisfaction with the body, indicating that those who pay a lot of attention to food and eating also seem to be less satisfied with their bodies. Interestingly enough this relationship is only found for the girls.

Table 7:3. The association between the perception of the body and the eating habit index. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attention to food and eating</th>
<th>Perception of the body</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

82 Factor analysis is not carried out, as the variables are too few to express different dimensions. There is, however, quite a strong correlation between the variables. The index is divided into three groups; large, moderate and little attention.
A similar pattern is also found concerning satisfaction with weight. Those who pay considerable attention to food and eating are also less satisfied with their weight. For girls, this is often expressed through a wish to lose weight.

All in all, these findings indicate that girls and boys in the study have a very different relationship to food and eating. Although both girls and boys agreed that they often think about what they eat the way they do this tends to be different. While girls express a more problematic relationship to food, including both feelings of guilt and eating for comfort, they also, through their frequent choice of light-products, indicate that food intake is used as a way to control their weight and maybe also to lose weight. This relationship is even clearer in the summarised index, where girls who pay considerable attention to food and eating are more frequently dissatisfied with their bodies and express a wish to lose weight. This is also something that goes in line with their wish for a thinner ideal shape, their wish to lose weight and their fear of big and fat body parts. These findings are reinforced by other studies, referred to above, where girls and women are often found to express a problematic relationship to food and eating, and where food is used as a means of controlling the size and shape of the body.

Although boys to a certain extent also agree on these matters, their main objective is probably to build the body up, gain weight and to be bigger; something that many of the boys in the study also indicate that they wanted. Boys’ attention, as well as their relationship, to food and eating is also less problematic.

The same gender pattern is also found in cultural messages around food and eating, where women are frequently related to food in general and to dieting messages in particular, which often indicate that women have a problematic relationship to food. Although men also, at least to some extent, are attending to weight loss practices, healthy food etc, a much more common association is found for products that will help to build the body up and make them strong.

**Different ways of altering the body**

The size and shape of the body is not only subjected to the exercise of control; but can also be regarded as part of a project. Seeing the body as a project means
being aware of the plasticity of the body and of the increasing possibilities to shape, style and reconstruct it. It also involves a willingness to invest time, money and energy in the body and the appearance. This section addresses some of these investments, as well as some of the practices used to alter the body involving the more common practices of dieting and exercise, as well as some more radical practices such as plastic surgery and the use of steroids.

All of these practices are frequently referred to in mass media and consumer culture, where a number of different ways of changing the body are introduced. There is also an ever-growing market of cosmetics and other beauty care products and services available for the improvement and preservation of physical appearance. Although most of the products are aimed at women, an increasing market for body and beauty enhancement products for men has also appeared (see Chapter 4 for an extended discussion of this theme). The question addressed here is to what extent the respondents wish to alter their bodies and what strategies they find useful in doing so. However, let us begin by looking at their willingness to make investments in the body and appearance.

**Investments in body and appearance**

Three different aspects of investment were included in the study; the investment of time, money and interest. These aspects were addressed through the three statements: ‘I spend a lot of time on my appearance’, ‘I spend a lot of money on different skin and hair care products’ and ‘I am interested in fashion and trends’.

Table 7:4 shows the different investments made in appearance. Time seems to be an important aspect of investment. A good half of the respondents say they spend a lot of time on their appearance. Both girls and boys express this large interest, even though it is more common for girls to spend time on their appearance. Money seems, on the other hand, to be spent on other things than on products that approve the appearance. Those who think they spend a lot of money are considerably fewer than the ones who spend a lot of time. Girls are, as could be expected, much more inclined to spend money on their appearance. One fourth of the girls think they spend a lot of money, while only about one tenth of the boys do. Young people’s shortage of money may be one explanation of the

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83 The original variables consisted of four alternatives (see Appendix 2, question 11). In the following analysis these have been put together into two categories, ‘I agree’ and ‘I disagree’.
rather low figures. However, to show a large interest in fashion and trends is common among both girls and boys. Although the interest in fashion and trends is much more common among the girls, there is still a large proportion of the boys indicating an interest. A male interest in fashion or style is also described in some earlier studies, both in relation to young men and for men in general (see Willis 1991, Craik 1994, Edwards 1997).

Table 7:4. Girls' and boys' investments in the appearance. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>I spend a lot of time on my appearance</th>
<th>I spend a lot of money on my appearance</th>
<th>I am interested in fashion and trends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age seems to have only a small effect on the willingness to make investments. The only significant difference was found between age and an interest in fashion, where the two older age groups were more likely to be interested in fashion.

Exercise and diet; two ways to alter the body

Young people are not only willing to invest time and money in the body; they are also willing to invest energy in its alteration. The desire to alter the body and the practices used are studied through the question, "Are you making any efforts to change the things you are dissatisfied with?" In total, as many as 60 per cent answered that they tried to change their bodies in one way or another. Table 7:5 illustrates the different strategies used. Exercise is the most common way to change the body, used by approximately half of the respondents. Boys show the largest interest in exercise as a sole activity. More than half of the boys said they exercised to change their bodies, compared to 40 per cent of the girls. While exercise is the main way of altering the body for the boys, girls tend, on the other hand, to also think of what they eat and to combine this awareness with exercise. However, there are almost no gender differences left when the girls who only exercise are put together with the girls who report that they combine the two activities. One girl out of four who exercises also tends to think about what she eats. While both girls and boys exercise, the occupation with eating is, on the contrary, almost exclusively a female interest.
Table 7:5. Girls’ and boys’ strategies to alter the body. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of alteration</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think about what I eat</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise and think of what I eat</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Girl’s greater attention to food and eating that was discussed earlier is reinforced by the findings in this part. However, their concern with food seems to be something other than dieting. As a matter of fact, dieting is quite rare in the material. Only 2.5 per cent (or 4 respondents) reported that they dieted in order to alter the body. All of these combined it with exercise. In comparison with other studies of young people’s eating habits, this is a surprisingly low figure. Most of the respondents who used food as a way to alter the body have instead chosen to describe their relationship to food and eating in their own words, which here is summarised by the expression ‘I think about what I eat’.

The girls thus seem to make a distinction between dieting and thinking about what they eat. Something that might explain this somewhat surprising result, is that the word ‘diet’ (in Swedish ‘banta’) might be regarded as stigmatising for young girls, as it also implies that weight is a problem and that a serious preoccupation with food and eating is undertaken (See also Bengs 1997). To ‘think about what you eat’ can, in the light of this, be understood as a less serious oc-

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84 In response to the question the respondents were presented with two fixed alternatives, to diet (in Swedish ‘banta’) and to exercise, as well as an open alternative where they could write down their own alternatives (see Appendix 2 question 22). Instead of choosing the fixed alternative, ‘to diet’, most of the respondents chose to write an answer of their own.

85 Edlund et al (1999) found in a recent Swedish study that dieting was much more common among the girls in their study where 43 percent of the studied girls (between 8 and 16 year old, N=122) reported that they had tried to lose weight at some time. It also showed that the number increased with increased age.

86 Since the ones who reported that they diet were so few they have been included in the category ‘I think about what I eat’.

87 Robin Saltonstall (1993:10) found a similar distinction in her study of adults and their views on health. In her case the pattern was gendered. Men described their food consumption with the verb ‘to eat well’ while women more often referred to it as ‘to diet’.

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cupation. The dividing line between the two concepts is vague and one cannot tell where the 'thinking’ turns into practice, or diet. Still, it is worth noting that many of the girls are preoccupied by food and eating; a concern that they do not share with the boys.

The belief in exercise as a means to alter the body is, as we have seen, widespread among the respondents. While studies of adults emphasise exercise as a way of losing weight (Hesse-Biber 1996:106, Markula 1995), exercise seems to have a different meaning for the young people in this study. The findings in Table 7:6 indicate that satisfaction with weight has little to do with exercise. Exercise may therefore instead be used as a means to shape and tone the body and to gain muscles. However, dissatisfaction with weight seems to be strongly related to practices involving food, especially for girls. The girls, especially the older ones, who are dissatisfied with their weight and use food as a way of altering the body, are primarily found among those who want to lose weight. Exercise may therefore be regarded primarily as a way to change the shape of the body, while eating and dieting instead may be regarded as a way to change (reduce) the size of it.

Table 7:6. The association between weight and the strategies to alter the body. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of alteration</th>
<th>Satisfied with weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think about what I eat</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise and think of what I eat</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A similar pattern as was found within the overall satisfaction with body and appearance in the previous chapter, can be seen in the strategies to alter the body when we control for age. Those most preoccupied with both exercise and eating are the girls in secondary school, where approximately three out of four girls are involved in any of the above practices in order to alter their bodies, while the boys at the same age are least preoccupied. The youngest girls are
almost exclusively using exercise to alter their bodies, while preoccupation with food and eating seems to be more apparent among the oldest.

Table 7:7 illustrates the relations between different modes of alteration when compared to the overall satisfaction with the body. Those who are indifferent or satisfied with their bodies indicate that they more often use exercise as a means to change the body, while those who are dissatisfied more often report that they think about what they eat and combine this with exercise. Exercise can therefore be seen as a means to improve the body even though one already might be satisfied with it. This indicates that exercise may also be pursued just for the fun of it.

Table 7:7. The associations between the perception of the body and the strategies to alter it. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of alteration</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Indifferent</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think about what I eat</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise and think of what I eat</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A relatively large number (about 40 per cent) of the respondents indicate that they are not involved in any practices in order to alter their bodies. It is difficult to say if this is because they do not feel they need to, or if it is because they think it is impossible to change their bodies according to their desires. If exercise and food are not enough to alter the body, cosmetic surgery might be another solution.

**Cosmetic surgery: a way of sculpting the body**

Plastic surgery can be regarded as one of the more radical ways of altering the body. It is, in contrast to many other ways of changing the body and appearance, a more permanent way. Plastic surgery can also be regarded as a way to

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88 In plastic surgery a differentiation between reconstructive and/or aesthetic or cosmetic surgery is often made. Reconstructive surgery is often used to correct physical disfigurements resulting...
view the body as a commodity that can be both changed and bought. "The technologies of cosmetic surgery assume the makeability of the human body expanding the limits of how the body can be restyled, reshaped and rebuilt" (Davis 1995:17).

This knowledge of the possibilities for altering the body and appearance help to make plastic surgery become a project for many people (Shilling 1997). As such, it is much more associated with women than men. According to Davis (1995:21), about 90 per cent of all cosmetic surgery is performed on women. Breast surgery (implants and reduction), nose reshaping, facelifts and liposuction are but some common operations. New surgical procedures and techniques are occurring all the time and there seems to be a constant shift in the popularity of different procedures (Finkelstein 1991:88). Today, when fat is feared, liposuction is the fastest growing surgical procedure among both men and women (Davis 1995:26). It is not only the surgery that changes in popularity, but the attention and emphasis on different parts of the body seems also to be in a state of flux. Breasts are commonly highlighted and given a lot of mass media attention. Another more recent focus of attention is lips, where lip enhancement and similar operations are examples of rather new and popular ways of improving the appearance.

However, cosmetic surgery is not an exclusively female concern. It seems, on the contrary, to be a growing market also for men. There are, for instance, specific advertisements for cosmetic surgery that offer both general and specific surgery techniques and procedures aimed at men (Lupton 1998). Hair implants and ear surgery are noted to be the most frequent operations performed on men (Davis 1995:21). Chest implants and penis enlargements are some examples of other more specifically male- oriented operations. While earlier there was a stigma attached to cosmetic surgery, especially for men, this has been greatly reduced today since cosmetic surgery has attained a greater acceptance (Finkelstein 1991:88).

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89 See Joanne Finkelstein (1991) for a short description of some of the more common surgical procedures and Edisol Dotson (1999:104–106) for a description of procedures particularly performed on men.
Cosmetic operations have not only spread to males, but have also come to include young people. According to a survey of young people in the age range between 16–29, about 35 per cent were considering having cosmetic surgery (Wolters 1998:17). However, for many young people cosmetic surgery procedures are not often realistic options, as they are often very expensive. It has thus been noted that young people sometimes receive cosmetic surgery as a graduation gift (Wolf 1992:208). While many undergo cosmetic surgery to get a more youthful or a more beautiful body, others do it to conform to a "Western ideal". Ann Frisell Ellburg (1996) notes that young Swedish girls from foreign backgrounds often operate on their noses for this reason.

**Cosmetic surgery in the media**

Although cosmetic surgery has become much more common, it is probably still relatively few who have any first-hand experiences or information from personal sources. One can therefore expect that the role of mass media is important in presenting information about cosmetic surgery. The attention it gets in articles in newspapers, girls and women’s magazines, tabloids and television programs has helped to make it more acceptable. Cosmetic surgery is therefore not likely to be unknown for young people, especially not for girls, since these and related issues are often discussed in girls and women’s magazines. Many such articles carry information on everything from what can be done, where and how operations are performed, to how much they cost. Others have the character of ‘life stories’, where patients tell their own story. In many articles on cosmetic surgery, women are presented as active agents who have taken their lives in their own hands. Another frequent message is that the body can be changed according to the wish of its owner, and that the result is worth all the pain the operation causes. By highlighting problematic spots in need of corrections, such stories invite the reader to become aware of the possibilities and the need for change at the same time as the body becomes fragmented. However, it is not only the positive side that is portrayed in these stories. Negative aspects such as failures and/or health concerns are also frequently discussed (Frisell Ellburg 1996).

Cosmetic surgery is, furthermore, no longer presented as a phenomenon that only occurs among the rich and famous. It is also presented as a solution to a

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90 See Davis (1995:18–20) for some examples of media coverage of cosmetic surgery.
growing number of 'ordinary' people who feel a need for it and are willing to meet the cost. However, many of the more extensive operations are still performed on celebrities who are frequently in the public eye (Davis 1995:18). Jennifer Craik (1994: 80) notes that cosmetic manipulations, since the 1980s, have also become more common among fashion models and that operations such as "Face lifts, lipo-suction, breasts and lip enhancement have become commonplace". This is of course a controversial issue, not least among the models themselves. Moreover, celebrities with cosmetically enhanced bodies are frequently discussed and portrayed in mass media. Many celebrities are also quite open about their operations and do nothing to disguise this fact. Orlan, a French performance artist, has gone even further and has turned her own body into a piece of art (Davis 1997b).

**Cosmetic surgery – a desire for young people?**

Choosing to have cosmetic surgery can be regarded as a rather radical thing to do and careful consideration has to be taken beforehand. The reasons or dissatisfaction that precede such a decision are also to be regarded as quite strong. However, to consider having an operation is something completely different from actually deciding to have one.

On the question 'Would you consider having cosmetic surgery?', one out of six (or 16 per cent) said they would. Considering the rather low age of the respondents, this is a fairly high figure. It indicates that dissatisfaction with certain parts of the body and/or appearance is so strong that these respondents think that more radical measures need to be taken. The desire to have a cosmetic surgery is almost exclusively a female concern. Only three of the male respondents said they considered having an operation. The thought of having an operation is also more common among the oldest. Those who are dissatisfied with both body and appearance are, as could be expected, also more prone to consider having an operation. Table 7:9 shows that about one third of those who are discontented with their body and appearance would like to change it with the help of cosmetic surgery.
Table 7:9. Respondents who consider having an operation in relation to the perception of body and appearance. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consider having an operation</th>
<th>Perception of the body</th>
<th>Perception of appearance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Half of those who would consider having an operation wanted to change their body. One third wanted facial surgery, and the rest wanted surgery on both body and face. Liposuction was the most desired surgical procedure for the body, followed by breast surgery (desired by 6 compared to 3 respondents). Liposuction, where fatty deposits are removed from the body by a suctioning process, can be seen as a way of surgically slimming the body. The popularity of liposuction might be related to the earlier findings concerning dissatisfaction with weight and the size and shape of certain body parts. The stomach and the legs (thighs), the two parts that were reported to cause most dissatisfaction, are also areas on which liposuction commonly is performed, and thus may therefore be seen as a solution to these problems. As noted earlier, liposuction as well as breast surgery are also two of the most performed surgical procedures today.

Nose correction is the most desired procedure among those who wanted a facial surgery. The nose and the complexion were also reported to cause most dissatisfaction among the respondents. Several other studies have also indicated that nose surgery is popular (Hesse Biber 1996:51) and that the nose is a concern among young people (Frisell Ellburg 1996).

As was expected, young people’s knowledge about cosmetic surgery is only to a limited degree received from first hand sources. Only ten per cent of the respondents knew of someone who had an operation, citing ear and nose surgery to be the most common procedures. While there were no significant differences between girls or boys in this respect, age seemed to be of some importance. It was much more common among the two oldest age groups to know of someone who had had cosmetic surgery. Prior experiences, in this case knowing someone who had an operation, turned out to be of little importance when considering having surgery on one’s own body.
The respondents were also asked about their attitudes towards different statements concerning cosmetic surgery as a phenomenon. As can be seen in Table 7:10, almost one fifth of the respondents said they would consider having cosmetic surgery on their body to make it more attractive, while only one out of ten would consider an operation on their face for the same reason. This view turned out to be more common among the oldest girls, and the ones who are dissatisfied with their bodies. Other studies have also indicated that these kinds of reasons are not as common as one might think. Davis (1995, 1997a) noted, for instance, that many women in her study did not have cosmetic surgery to become more beautiful; it had more to do with their sense of self. Cosmetic surgery seems, however, to be a widely accepted way of altering the body. About three out of four respondents have little or no objections to other people’s desire to undergo surgery. A majority of the respondents (92 %) also believed and/or were aware that many fashion models and movie stars have had cosmetic surgery. Although plastic surgery is more common among females, only one fifth believe that cosmetic surgery is only practised by girls, a belief that is somewhat more common among the youngest respondents.

Table 7:10. Girls’ and boys’ attitudes towards different statements about cosmetic surgery. The proportion who answered ‘agree completely’ or ‘agree somewhat’. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would consider having cosmetic surgery to get a more attractive face</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>(*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would consider having cosmetic surgery to get a more attractive body</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would not consider having cosmetic surgery, but it is OK if others do it</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>n.s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many fashion models and movie stars have had cosmetic surgery to get a more attractive body</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>n.s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only girls/women have cosmetic surgery</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>n.s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To sum up these findings, one can see that cosmetic surgery seems to be something that mainly attracts older teenagers, especially girls. There might be several explanations for this, not least that the female dissatisfaction with body and appearance increases over the years, together with the knowledge and awareness of the possibilities of changing the body in this way. Plastic surgery may
be seen as a solution, although quite radical, to female dissatisfaction with the body. The most wanted procedure, liposuction, is also frequently performed on the parts that were reported to cause most dissatisfaction among the girls, and can therefore be regarded as a way to surgically make the parts look smaller and thinner a desire for many girls.

**Use of anabolic steroids and growth hormones**

The practice and dangers of anabolic steroids, growth hormones and similar substances have been debated on and off in the media, often in relation to famous athletes accused of doping, or in association with body building, where the negative consequences and the secondary effects are in focus. Common side effects frequently focused on are the psychological effects such as aggressiveness and depression, and sexual disturbances such as impotence and sterility. There is also a large variety of other bodily related side effects (Ståhle et al 1996).

Swedish law prohibits both the sale and the possession of hormone substances, but not the use (Folkhälsoinstitutet 1993). The use of steroids is, however, prohibited within all sports. Although the use of steroids is regarded as a problem within Swedish sports, there is little evidence of an increase, nor is there a tendency that it is spreading to young people. However, another pattern is found outside the organised sports movement, where an increased use is found and where young people also are involved in the use (Folkhälsoinstitutet 1993). A common place to be introduced to such substances is the gymnasium, where it may reach athletes of all ages.

It is difficult to say how common the use of steroids is among young people, as there are relatively few studies on the subject and since the figures tend to vary among the studies. According to the National Board of Health and Welfare (1993:20), about 1–3 percent of Swedish boys between the age of 15–20 have tried anabolic steroids.

Although none of the respondents report that they have tried steroids themselves, about one out of six (or 16 per cent) knew of someone who has tried or

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91 These substances will be referred to in the following as steroids.
used them. It is twice as common for the boys to know of someone. The person they knew of were in all cases other boys in the age range of 15–25 years, with a mean of 17.7 years. No one knew any girls who tried steroids.

When asked about what they thought were common reasons for young women and men to use steroids, the respondents seemed to find it much easier to associate steroid use with men than women. They believed the most common reason for both women and men to use steroids were to get a nicer body and to improve results. Two other common reasons mentioned for men, but not for women, were to get more muscles and to get bigger.

Although the respondents believe that the most common reasons for men in general to use steroids is to get a nicer body, improve results, get more muscles and to get bigger, almost none of the respondents claim that they themselves would use steroids for these reasons. Nor do they approve of other people's use of steroids. As a matter of fact, only 5 percent say that they do not want to try it themselves but find it OK that others use them. Nor was the pressure from friends strong. The fact that steroids are illegal to possess, sell and use within competitive sports is also regarded as a strong reason not to use them. Almost two out of three say they would never use them because they are illegal. Most of the respondents are also well aware of the risks; only about one out of ten thinks the risks said to be associated with the use of steroids are exaggerated. No significant gender or age differences can be found for the above statements except for the two last aspects (concerning risk and illegality), where the youngest tend to feel the risks are exaggerated and would be less inclined to use steroids because they are illegal.

In total, 33 respondents knew someone who had tried/used steroids (22 boys compared to 11 girls).

It was most common for the respondents to know of only one person, although six respondents claimed they knew two or three persons who had tried/used steroids.

While almost 40 percent of the respondents answered the question in relation to men the response rate dropped to only 14 per cent (or 23 respondents) when they were asked about common reasons for women to use steroids.

These two reasons were also found to be the two most commonly stated reasons among American high-school students who had tried anabolic steroids (Terney et al 1990 referred to in Folkhälsoinstitutet 1993:20).

The response rate for these questions was quite low. All of the different reasons referred to above varied from 7–11 per cent.
It is, of course, difficult to ask questions about sensitive subjects, especially regarding illegal substances, as the respondents for instance may not report their own use because they fear the consequences. It is probably easier to speak about others who have tried/used them. The number of respondents who knew of someone who had tried/used steroids is also quite high, and the age of these persons is quite low. When interpreting these figures, one has to be aware that it may be only rumours that are being recorded here, and that it may also be a limited number of people of whom they know. At any rate, most respondents seem not to approve of steroid use and are reluctant to try it themselves.

**Concluding comments**

The focus of this chapter has been on how the body is controlled, and on attitudes towards the different strategies to improve or alter the body and appearance. As shown, this involves, among other things, work, time, money and interest. Many young people in the study seem to be willing to invest quite a lot of these on themselves. Girls tend to be particularly inclined to pay attention to and control their bodies, through the use of different measuring techniques and through food and eating. The control of food and eating is almost exclusively something that involves girls. They are also more likely to be willing to make different investments in their appearance, and to choose to have cosmetic surgery. Girls' greater tendency to invest time, money and interest in body and appearance can also be linked to consumer culture and the emphasis that is put on the use of different commodities to become feminine (and masculine).

The interest in altering the body displayed gender differences only in relation to the strategies used. The earlier findings, that girls 'fear' big bodies and want to be thinner, and boys express a desire to become bigger and develop their muscles, are further reinforced in relation to the desire to alter the body. Girls are more likely to combine eating and exercise and to show an interest in cosmetic surgery, particularly liposuction; activities that are all frequently used to get a thinner body. The oldest girls are, as in the earlier findings, the ones who seem to be most inclined to control the body. Boys, on the other hand, regard exercise as the main way of altering the body; something that may help them to build up the body, get more muscles and become stronger. However, there is a reluctance to use 'shortcuts', such as steroids, to achieve a bigger, stronger and more muscular body. The most frequently mentioned reasons for others' use of steroids do, however, demonstrate a male desire to get a bigger and more muscular
body. Both these gendered ways of relating to the body are also emphasised in texts on femininity and masculinity. Sport is, for example, argued to be an important way for boys to confirm masculinity through the body, while the beautification and improvement of the body is a way for women to confirm femininity. Some of the studies referred to in Chapter 3 also point out that exercise for women is found to be a way to achieve a slimmer body.

These findings can also be compared to the ones Robin Saltonstall (1993) found in her study of adults and their concepts and practices of health. Women in her study emphasised their relationship to food, while men referred to the importance of physical activity. Men were concerned with the body as a medium for action, where its function and capacity were important. Women were also interested in these aspects, but showed an equal interest in the appearance of their body and with keeping it in a ‘presentable’ condition.

The interest and attention that is directed towards the control and improvement of the body can also be related to the view of it as a commodity, that among other things, can be shaped, styled and reconstructed. This way of relating to the body is very much in line with the view of the body as a project. To view the body as a project means being aware of the possibilities of reconstructing it, making investments in it as well as being involved in work with/on the body. It has been suggested by Shilling (1993:5) that there might be variations along social lines, especially gender, in the way the body is regarded as a project. Judging from my findings, I would argue that the body can be described as a project for both girls and boys. However, girls are particularly inclined to regard it as a project since they tend to be more dissatisfied with their bodies, pay more attention to it, and are more likely to try to control it, especially through food and eating, and furthermore frequently tend to be involved in different practices with the aim of altering it.

The different ways of controlling the body described in this chapter can also be interpreted according to Featherstone’s (1993) division of inner/outer body. Most of the respondents’ practices are focused explicitly on the outer body (expressed through measures, investments, exercise and plastic surgery). Other practices, such as the relationship to food, eating and dieting, are more centred on the inner body (where food provides energy, good health, comfort etc). Yet, the effect is also seen on the outer body.
Caring about and working with the outer body can be understood as a way of indicating that one is aware of the significance of the exterior or surface and possibly also its connection to identity and to social and cultural norms, where the outer body is understood to demonstrate the character and personality of its owner.

This chapter has primarily discussed different aspects of personal or self-control. Before we turn to some of the aspects related to external control, such as the view of the body as an object discussed earlier, important mediators of cultural values and body ideals will be addressed.
8 Mediated body ideals

After looking at the different ways that the young body is perceived as problematic, the practices used to control it and the strategies used to alter it, it is now time to take a closer look at how the respondents’ perceive social and cultural influences around them and their view of the ideal body.

Two important sources of influence (on how one’s own body and ideals are perceived) have so far been identified; media and other people. The following two chapters develop their impact further by looking at how the respondents perceive their role as mediators of cultural values. This chapter is primarily focused on the impact of mass media, while the next pays specific attention to other people and more interpersonal or social issues. However, in the first section of this chapter, both of these sources are addressed; first by discussing how they may work, and secondly by looking at how the respondents perceive their influence. The second section of the chapter is focused on the ideal body and on mediated ideals. This is addressed by studying the idealised women and men, or celebrities, that the respondents regard to be attractive. The last section of the chapter returns to the significance of different parts of the body, but this time in relation to the most important features of the ideal body.

Mediators of cultural values

Social and cultural norms and values about body and appearance are powerful in shaping the individual’s bodily identity. These norms and values are typical of the time and cultural setting the individual lives in. Chapter 3 explored the impact and importance of mass media and consumer culture in the defining and shaping of gender. In this discussion, mass media is often argued to be a powerful mediator of body and beauty ideals. These ideals are found in much of its content and are frequently displayed through the constant flow of images, especially obvious in advertising and commercials. There is also a widely held belief that mass media has an impact on its viewers and readers, not least through the portrayal of gender identity. Culturally idealised forms of femininity and masculinity help to define, reinforce and reshape the understanding of gender. These messages may present stereotypes (both attractiveness stereotypes and
more negative ones) that both tend to uphold gender myths and may lead to stigmatising consequences. The connection to consumer culture is strong, as it helps to spread information on how to become feminine and masculine. Moreover, it is important to note that there is no single definition of beauty and that young people both can and are encouraged to choose between different ‘looks’.

Different personal sources are another important mediator of norms and values around body and appearance. They may help to both reinforce and modify the mediated ideal. People close to the individual, like family and friends, are, for example, pointed out as particularly important mediators (Smith 1988, Lesko 1988, Hesse Biber 1996). Messages around food and eating are one area where parents and peers are found to be important. They both constitute the major sources of dietary advice for young people (O’Dea et al 1996:35). However, most attention has been paid to the influence that girls receive from different personal sources. Mothers and other women are frequently pointed out as particularly important sources for girls, while the role of fathers and siblings is less discussed. Mothers are, for instance, found to influence their daughters through their attitudes and attention to their own bodies and through their relationship to food and eating (Hesse Biber 1996:87 ff.). Judging from the above studies, one can expect that people close to the individual, such as family members and friends, may have a great impact on how young people perceive their bodies, for example, through the attention they get, through comments and through care work related to the body. Other people who in one way or another are important to the individual, like boy/girlfriends and/or people they look up to or admire, may also be important to them (the specific influence from different personal sources is further discussed in Chapter 9).

There are both differences and similarities between these two main sources, both in the way they work and in the way they are interpreted, and they may therefore have different importance for the individual. While personal sources are highly individual and require a personal relationship between the giver and receiver, media sources are more general and impersonal. The content of the mass media sources is also much more widespread and affects the individuals as well as their personal sources. It is, therefore, not an easy task to differentiate between influences from different sources, as media and personal sources both contribute to the creating, shaping and maintaining of cultural norms and values around body and beauty. Mass media has lately often been pointed out to be a strong source of influence in much of the recent academic work on the body but
also by media itself. The question is, how do young people themselves regard the importance of these different sources of influence?

**Personal and media influences on how the body is viewed**

To answer this question, the respondents were asked to mark how much influence the two main types of sources, as discussed above, have had on their perception of the body. Table 8:1 indicates that both people and media have a strong impact on how one’s own body is perceived. Friends turned out to be the single most important sources of influence. Three out of four respondents stated that friends have a strong impact. Other personal sources, such as sisters and brothers and parents were reported to be of less importance, although almost half of the respondents regarded them as important. The strong influence from mass media was particularly related to movies and TV, which were regarded as important by almost three out of four respondents. Magazines were another source that was regarded to be particularly important. Advertisements were regarded as less important but were still reported to influence about half of the respondents. However, when the same question is asked in relation to how young people in general are affected by advertising, almost three out of four hold the opinion that advertising affects young people’s views about their body. Books seem on the contrary to have only a moderate influence.

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97 See Appendix 2, question 34. The alternatives, i.e. the sources of influence, were fixed but the respondents also had the option of adding an alternative of their own. Very few took this opportunity. Only four per cent (or seven respondents) mentioned other people or things that they thought influenced their way of perceiving their bodies. These were boys and boyfriends, themselves, fashion and trainer/coach.

98 Magazines, film and TV all to a certain degree include commercials or advertisements, which makes it hard to distinguish the commercial impact from the impact of the rest of the content. In order to try to separate their impact, advertising has been used as an alternative of its own here.
Table 8:1. Girls’ and boys’ perceived influence from different sources. The proportion that answered ‘some influence’ or ‘large influence’. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence from</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>(*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>n.s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister or brother</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>n.s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>(*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers/magazines</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>(*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>(*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other sources</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>(*)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender has a strong impact on the sources of influence, as can be seen in Table 8:1. It is primarily girls who regard themselves to be more influenced by both mass media and friends. The girls regard all kind of media influences to be more important than do boys. The strongest differences are found for movies and newspapers/magazines, which are regarded as especially influencing by the girls. The strong gender differences might be explained by the fact that women’s bodies and appearance are much more in focus in all kinds of media content and in girls’ and women’s magazines in particular.

Table 8:2 illustrates the effect of age. Somewhat surprisingly, all sources of influence are found to be stronger among the oldest, except sisters, brothers and books. This is particularly true for visual media, such as movies and TV, and advertising. The increasing influence from the different media sources is particularly common among the girls, while the boys indicate a stronger influence from friends. These findings might be an indication of a growing importance of the body, what others think about it and an orientation towards the views of other people and the surrounding world. The stronger influence from other people, mainly parents and friends, might also be connected to a higher attention from these persons. This might for instance be expressed through comments related to the body, a matter that is addressed in Chapter 9. The increased significance placed on the influence of friends (as well as media) may also be interpreted as a shift from the importance of the family to an increased importance of other people and sources found outside the family. This shift is often described and discussed in relation to primary and secondary socialisation.
Table 8:2. The perceived influence from different sources by grades. The proportion that answered 'some influence' or 'large influence'. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence from</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister or brother</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers/magazines</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other sources</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reported strong influence from media that the older respondents, particularly the girls, express can maybe also be explained by a shift in interest towards new kinds of media and/or towards other parts of its content where gender stereotypes are more obvious. One example of this shift can, for example, be seen among teen girls who often tend to change their reading habits from girl's magazines towards women's magazines, or magazines aimed for an older or adult public. The content of these magazines tends also to shift when they are aimed at an older public. The influence from different media sources can also be related to young people’s media habits. These are discussed more in-depth in Appendix 5.

A totally different explanation for the reported strong influence from media is that young people today are aware of the impact of media on body and beauty ideals. The impact of media has, for instance, frequently been debated and discussed in the media itself and in campaigns directed to schools. Several campaigns, aimed at pupils and teachers, have been distributed to schools. Some examples of larger campaigns (based on written material) that have made connections between advertising and young people's body ideals are "Grepp om livet" (Gustafsson 1992) and "Sensualism eller skamgrepp" (Gustafsson 1994) both distributed by the Swedish Consumer Agency (Konsumentverket). National Institute of Public Health, (NIPH) (Folkhälsoinstitutet), another important distributor, has focused on issues such as self-confidence and the use of anabolic steroids in campaigns such as "Män, muskler och ideal. Om missbruket av anabola steroider" (Folkhälsoinstitutet 1993) and "Tro inte på skönhetsmytena

99 See also the discussion of media content as gender manuals, Chapter 3.
tro på dig själv” (Folkhälsoinstitutet 1994). The latter could also be seen on television. Another more recent campaign by Mjölkfrämjandet is "I naturlig storlek" (Mjölkfrämjandet 1997). The report "Ett liv av vikt" by NIPH and the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) (Folkhälsoinstitutet & Socialstyrelsen 1993), where different aspects of eating disorders were in focus, is another example of the increasing attention that different central authorities has given to these issues. Mass media has also paid attention to many of these campaigns both in articles and in debate programs in TV.

At the time of this study, these kinds of campaigns were not as common as they are now. It is, however, difficult to say what kind of implications they might this have for my study and how influential these kinds of campaigns and mass media attention in general are. Hopefully they help to raise a critical awareness of how advertising and mass media content in general work and how it might influence young people.

In sum, the most important findings in relation to influence are the significance of friends and the media that particularly girls express, and its tendency to increase with age, which can be interpreted as a shift away from the importance of the family to other outside forces. This orientation is further developed in the following section where ideal bodies, both the mediated as well as ‘real’ bodies, are in focus, and in Chapter 9, where the importance of other people’s views is addressed.

**Ideal bodies**

When turning to the second section of the chapter, the discussion focuses on the ideal body, and more precisely on young people’s views of the ideal male and female body presented by the mass media. As distinguished from the questions in Chapter 6, where the respondents were asked to comment on their own bodies and its parts, this section deals with the ideal body in two other ways: First, by looking at who the respondents think possesses an ‘ideal body’, and what characteristics they connect with the owner of these ideal bodies. And secondly, by looking at the respondents’ description of what features they think are important if a girl and a boy are considered to have a ‘nice’ body.

These are both questions that many respondents may recognise as recurring themes in mass media, particularly in many popular magazines, where the read-
ers are asked to choose the most good looking, most sexy, popular, best dressed celebrity and/or where the single most appealing features are presented through reader surveys. These results are sometimes presented together with questionnaires where readers can test their own attitudes.

Images of ideal bodies are, as discussed earlier, also common, especially in mass media and advertising. The ideals that they bring about are socially constructed and vary both historically and culturally. Although Western ideals often tend to be widespread, and in the case of super models almost global, alternative and non-Western ideals still persist (see Johansson 1996a). The historical changes of ideals are often pointed out, not least with references to fashion. Several studies have also indicated that the desirable shape and look of, for instance, fashion models and Miss America Pageant contestants, have changed over the years towards a thinner one, which indicates a thinner ideal for women (Garner et al. 1980, Craik 1994, O'Dea 1995). Less attention has been paid to the shape of the male ideal and its change over the years. However, a trend towards a more muscular ideal has been identified (O'Dea 1995). The spread of body and beauty ideals, particularly female ideals, has during these last years been both discussed and criticised in mass media itself, as well as in feminist and other studies. Female fashion models, but in some cases also female athletes, have been accused of promoting a negative body ideal to young women. The connection between ideal images and the spread of eating disorders has also been made (Garner et al. 1980, Garner & Garfinkel 1980, Folkhälsoinstitutet & Socialstyrelsen 1993).

**Comparisons with ideal images**

Images invite comparisons. Such comparisons can, for example, include both one's own past and present photographic images, as well as mediated idealised images (Ziehe 1986, Featherstone 1993, Hesse-Biber 1996:71). Featherstone (1993:178) argues that images are important in relation to one's own appearance in the sense that "Images invite comparisons: They are constant reminders of what we are and might with effort yet become". Photographic images of one's own body can, according to this, be used to compare the body from time to time and may as such work as a kind of self-control, for example to check alterations in the body or the 'normality' of one's own body in comparison to others. These images can also evoke both memories and mixed feelings around the body (see Walkerdine 1993, Haug et al. 1987). While photographic images of one's own body primarily reminds the individual of how the body looks and
has looked, ideal images instead help to contribute to how a desirable body might look. It can, furthermore, be argued that it is particularly important to focus upon the idealised images of the human body, as they are important in shaping the individuals understanding of the ideal body as well as the experience of their own bodies. Images of attractive people can also be used (as a norm) in order to evaluate one’s own body. Such images are, furthermore, often associated with a ‘good life’, with success, fame, happiness and so on, which may contribute to a desire to reach these images.

A desire to look like the ideal images was also found in the study, where about half of the respondents, irrespective of gender, also tried to get their body to match their ideal image. One-fourth of the respondents also indicated that they wanted to look like people in TV commercials. Interestingly, this was most common among the oldest girls and boys, which tends to correspond to the earlier finding where the oldest also regarded the influence from TV to be stronger than did the younger respondents.

**The mediated ideal body**

One way of capturing the image of the ideal body is to focus on whom the respondents regard as especially attractive and why they find these persons attractive. These ideal persons might be found both in the respondents’ immediate surrounding and/or be found in a mediated context. It is the latter that is in focus here.

Television, films and magazines are filled with different kinds of celebrities such as television personalities, movie stars, pop stars, fashion models and athletes. They fulfil different functions for the individual; entertainment, identification etc. They may also play an important role in influencing the image of the ideal body, both in relation to one’s own body ideal and the ideal for the other sex. Gunilla Holm (1997) found, for instance, in her study of the Swedish magazine Vecko Revyn, that young girls found the pictures of young men to be part of the entertaining experience of reading the magazine. As ideal images they also invite comparisons.

Another way of looking at the relationship between young people and celebrities is to look at idols. The idol can, especially among young people, be regarded as a very important person (next to friends), and may also be an object of
both love and identification (Ganetz 1992). The ‘wannabe phenomenon’ is one such use of the idol in the construction of identity, and as Lisa Lewis (1990) also proposes, a way to mark a best friend relation. These close relationships with an idol are often related to girls (Ganetz 1992, Lewis 1990). Although the celebrities who are mentioned in this study might not be regarded as an idol, the respondent might still want to look like him or her or want their boy or girlfriend to. In this way, they may also affect the way young people perceive their own and others’ bodies.

**Ideal persons with ideal bodies**

In order to get a better picture of the respondents’ view of the ideal body, they were asked to name both a male and a female celebrity that they considered to be good looking. Moreover, they were asked to write down their reason for choosing this person. This might be regarded as a mediated ideal, as these persons can be expected to mainly appear in different kinds of media content.

The focus on different categories of celebrities has tended to change over the years. One can also expect that the popularity of certain celebrities will vary over time, among other things, depending on what kind of TV series, movies, sports or music groups and so on that are popular at the moment. The findings indicate that this to a certain degree is also the case. Many of the celebrities that were chosen turned out to be popular at the time of the study and thus appeared frequently in mass media. What becomes apparent when looking at the answers is that there is far from a single definition of an ideal body. What the respondent regards as an ideal person is very individual, as well as what they particularly like about that person. A total of 35 different female celebrities and 40 different male ones were mentioned. The celebrities have been divided into five main categories in order to make the material more manageable. These are actors/actresses, models, athletes, singers/musicians and others.

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100 Madonna is often used as an example of this phenomenon. A more recent example is, however, the large interest that many young girls show in the pop group Spice Girls, where they try to imitate them and their style.

101 The early Hollywood stars who, in the 1920s, helped to spread new consumer culture values, have over the years come to be accompanied by fashion models and the like (Featherstone 1993, Craik 1994).

102 The category ‘other’ includes among others, TV hosts, politicians and stand up comedians. It turned out to be somewhat difficult to categorise the celebrities as many of them tend to work in more than one area. They are, however, placed in the category that they mainly tend to be associated with.
The different categories of female and male celebrities are shown in Table 8:3, below. Actors and actresses seem to be regarded as particularly good looking, especially the male ones. Fashion models are another category that is mentioned fairly often, especially female models. Athletes, singers and other celebrities are less frequently mentioned but are as categories equally distributed among the female and male celebrities.

Table 8:3. The respondent's choice of good-looking celebrities divided in different categories. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actresses/actors</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion models</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singers/musicans</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When comparing the different categories by gender, one finds that girls and boys to the same extent tend to choose almost the same amount of female celebrities from each category. While male actors were the dominating category among the girls (about three thirds of the girls chose a male actor), more than half of the boys instead tended to choose men from other categories, especially athletes and fashion models.

While girls seem to find it quite easy to name a good looking celebrity, boys tend, on the other hand, to have greater difficulties thinking along these lines, especially when it comes to naming other men that they think are good looking. The answer pattern regarding male celebrities is therefore somewhat difficult to interpret, as the response rate for the boys is quite small.

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103 Similar difficulties were also expressed in relation to their perception of their own body and when they were asked to describe the most important features of the male body.

104 The answer rate for naming a female celebrity was around 70 per cent for both girls and boys. Naming a male celebrity was even easier for the girls, who increased their answer rate with 10 per cent; boys on the other hand seemed to find it difficult. Only 30 per cent of the boys answered the question.
It can be argued that body and appearance are important for celebrities from all of these categories. Although it is most in focus for fashion models and athletes, it is far from unimportant for the others as well. It is not surprising that actresses/actors and fashion models are frequently chosen, as good looks are particularly important for these groups, especially models who are judged on the 'perfection of their body' (Craik 1994:85). However, it is interesting to note that young people know the names of many models (seven women and two men) and that they are known both among girls and boys. This is an interesting category since their status has changed strikingly over the years. From being low paid and rather unrespectable work, it has now come to be regarded as (at least for the supermodels) well-paid and glamorous work. Since the 1970's they have even become superstars (Craik 1994). Today, fashion models are also frequently seen in other related fields.

In order to say more about the most frequently mentioned celebrities included in the different categories, the five most popular ones are presented in Table 8:4, below. The five most popular female celebrities belong to four of the categories mentioned above. It is interesting to note that of the five women listed all, apart from Agneta Sjödin, are also known as models. However, Cindy Crawford and Claudia Schiffer must be regarded as 'supermodels. Quite another pattern is found among the most popular male celebrities where all, except Marcus Schenkenberg, are actors.

Table 8:4. The five most frequently mentioned female and male celebrities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pamela Anderson</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Jared Leto</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy Crawford</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Keanu Reeves</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia Schiffer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Marcus Schenkenberg</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Akraka</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Johnny Depp</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agneta Sjödin</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Brad Pitt</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
<td>71</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is not only the choice of celebrities that differs; the distribution is also heavily influenced by gender. Girls' and boys' ratings tend to vary quite a lot when they are looked at separately. Girls tend to have a very diverse idea of who they regard to be an especially attractive female and male celebrity, and there seems to

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105 Agneta Sjödin is a well known and very popular Swedish TV personality.
be little correspondence between girls’ and boys’ opinions. Pamela Anderson (among other things known from the popular TV series ‘Bay Watch’), the single most popular female, was, for instance, regarded as especially popular among the boys (over a third of the boys who answered the question regarded her to be particularly good looking). The girls expressed a more diverse picture. The most popular female chosen by the girls was Maria Akraka (a Swedish athlete). She was, on the other hand, exclusively chosen by the girls. The same goes for the single most popular male, Jared Leto (an actor who, at the time for the study, acted in a popular TV series for youngsters called ”My So Called Life”). The most popular male among the boys was, on the other hand, Marcus Schenkenberg (a Swedish fashion model, among other things famous for his well-defined abdominal muscles).

The reasons for finding these persons especially attractive also vary quite a lot. The answers have been divided into five different categories. The first two are mainly focused on the body. While the first category combines attributes where both body and face were mentioned, the second is more explicitly related to the body, including a fit body. The third category comprises comments on appearance. These references are only related to the face and the hair. The fourth assembles general positive comments of which most are related to appearance. The final category is not as specific as the others are, instead it includes comments such as ‘everything about the person is liked’. These five categories are displayed in Appendix 5, Table 1, where girls and boys give their reason for choosing their specific person. While appearance seems to be an especially common reason for choosing a male celebrity, the reasons for choosing a female celebrity are more varied. The reasons that girls tend to give for choosing the female celebrities also vary more than the reasons the boys give. Body and face is the most common reason among the girls, while the primary reason for the boys is that they like everything about the person. When girls, on the other hand, think of the male celebrity, appearance is regarded as most important. The reasons boys give, to a larger extent than the girls, also include the body.

When comparing the different categories of celebrities by the reason the respondent has given for choosing them, the same pattern appeared for both females and males. Fashion models were primarily regarded to have both a nice body and face as well as ‘having everything’. Appearance was the main reason for choosing actresses/actors and singers, while body and fitness was the main reason for choosing both male and female athletes.
In sum, it is apparent that the boys find it difficult to express their view of male ideal bodies but rather unproblematic to describe the beauty of women. Only one out of three boys mentioned a male celebrity, compared to two out of three who mentioned a female. The same tendency was seen when it came to the reasons for choosing this person. One explanation for this tendency is related to the question and its focus on attractiveness, something that is often not associated with masculinity. It can even be argued that the connection between men and attractiveness or beauty illustrates a subordinated masculinity, since men who publicly state or express their opinions of the attractiveness of other men are sometimes associated with being gay, see Chapter 3.

Following Connell (1983), who states that sport can be argued to be the leading definer of masculinity, and my own suggestion that male sport stars may work as famous exemplars of masculinity or so-called ‘heroes’, one can expect that young men to a large degree would regard athletes to possess an ideal body. Although it is difficult to interpret the answers from the boys, the findings indicate that this to a certain extent is the case. Something that is much more unexpected is that male fashion models also seem to play an important role for the boys. Male models are a much more recent phenomenon than the female, but their popularity has grown very rapidly in these last years.

Girls, on the other hand, seem to have little trouble mentioning a good looking celebrity, and their answers also varied quite a lot. An explanation for this might be that they are much more acquainted with this way of looking at other people’s bodies since they are often encouraged to judge and compare other bodies against their own.

**Descriptions of the ideal features of the male and female body**

It is not only ideal images of people, or stigmatising or stereotypical messages that can be found in media; we have also seen that some features of the body are frequently in focus in mass media content. The tendency to present fragmented images, the focus on ‘problem spots’ as well as the idealisation of other features are some examples of issues that get frequent attention. Such attention may also come to have an impact on how the ideals are perceived, not least because they invite comparisons with one’s own body. It is to ideal features of the young body that we now turn.
In order to get a description of the most important features of an ideal body, the respondents were asked to focus on the features that they regard as important if a girl or a boy is considered to have a nice body. This was done in two different ways. First, the respondents were asked to indicate their own view of the most important features of their own and the opposite sex respectively. Secondly, they were asked to indicate what they think is the general view of important features held by members of their own and the opposite sex. The respondents were asked to rank the three most important features.

This will give an indication of which features the respondents considered to be most important in an ideal male and female body. Moreover, it will present us with a picture of how the opposite sex regards the ideal body and what the respondents believe about the general view. The answers will, thus, illustrate the difference between what girls think that boys like and what boys really do like and vice versa. These beliefs may also influence the way the individual experiences their own body.

Following the earlier presented results concerning the most important features of the respondents’ own bodies, one would expect that the stomach and the legs should be mentioned fairly often, since these features are regarded as important both for the like and dislike of the body. However, the answers turned out to show a more varied picture of how girls and boys looked upon the ideal body of the same and the opposite sex (see Figure 8:1). The face was, in each case, considered to be the single most important feature when a person is regarded as good looking. About half of the respondents ranked the face in first place in each case.

106 See Appendix 2, question 27–30.
107 Different body parts were listed and the respondents could choose from this list or write their own alternative, which very few did. The respondents were instructed to write the most important feature first, then the second most important and finally the third. The answers have been regarded as three separate variables and the feature that got most votes in each case has been selected as the most important one for each variable. This explains why the same feature may appear more than once, for example in both second and third place.
108 The importance of the face is also supported by the statement “It is more important to have an attractive face than a nice body” (referred to in Chapter 9), a statement that two thirds (67 per cent) of the respondents agreed with.
However, here the similarities in the respondents’ view stop. The description that girls give of the ideal female features differs quite a lot from the one that boys give. While girls rank the stomach and the legs in second and third place, boys, on the other hand, regarded the breasts and bottom to be important. The features mentioned by the girls (legs and stomach) coincide with the parts that many of them expressed both like and dislike for earlier (see Chapter 6). Attention is also frequently focused on these parts in, for instance, advertising (see for example the ad for stockings presented in the same chapter). Breasts and bottom, the features that the boys though important, can on the other hand be described as more sexually oriented. These features are also frequently exposed in the media, however often in a quite different way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDEAL FEMALE FEATURES</th>
<th>IDEAL MALE FEATURES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls’ view of the female body</strong></td>
<td><strong>Boys’ view of the female body</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. face</td>
<td>1. face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. stomach</td>
<td>2. breasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. legs</td>
<td>3. bottom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls’ view of the male body</strong></td>
<td><strong>Boys’ view of the male body</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. face</td>
<td>1. face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. bottom</td>
<td>2. bottom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. arms</td>
<td>3. stomach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8:1. The respondents’ view of the most important features of the female and male body.*

While girls and boys had a different view of the female ideal body, the view of the male ideal body is, on the other hand, somewhat more agreed upon. Both girls and boys regarded the face and bottom to be of specific importance. However, the third most important features differ between the two. Girls tend to favour the arms, while boys themselves regard the stomach to be more important. The stomach was, as for the girls, also a part that the boys often expressed both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with. However, this was not the case with the bottom, which in turn only caused dissatisfaction.

**Sexualised ideals**

The patterns found in the respondents’ own description of the ideal body of a girl and a boy are somewhat reinforced when looking at their beliefs of the general view held by members of their own and the opposite sex (see Figure 8:2). Breasts and bottom, together with the face, are the most frequently mentioned...
features. When looking at the female ideal, one find that girls' and boys' perception of the general male view tends to differ quite a lot. When the girls described what they think boys in general regard as important features if a girl is to be considered to have a nice body, their description turned out to be identical with the view that the boys themselves expressed earlier. The boys' own perception of the general male view reinforced the already sexualised picture of the female body by emphasising the breasts.

While girls' and boys' perception of the general male view of the female body differed, their perception of the general female view of important features of the male body instead turned out to be surprisingly similar. It is interesting to note how the male body also has become more sexualised when girls and boys describe what they think is girls' general view of an attractive male body. Much of the attention is now directed towards the bottom, a part that, together with the breasts, is regarded as attracting sexual attention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDEAL FEMALE FEATURES</th>
<th>IDEAL MALE FEATURES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls' perception of the general view of the female body held by boys</td>
<td>Boys' perception of the general view of the female body held by other boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. face</td>
<td>1. breasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. breasts</td>
<td>2. breasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. bottom</td>
<td>3. legs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls' perception of the general view of the male body held by other girls</td>
<td>Boys' perception of the general view of the male body held by girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. face</td>
<td>1. face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. bottom</td>
<td>2. bottom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. bottom</td>
<td>3. bottom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8:2. The respondents' general view of the most important features of the female and male body.

Yet another interesting finding is related to the response rate. While girls seem to have no problems at all describing the most important parts of the male and female body, boys on the other hand, seem to have some problems in describing their own view of the male body. The response rate for the boys dropped from 90 per cent or more to 70 per cent when they were asked to describe their own view of the male body. The general view of the male and female body and their own view of the female body were, on the other hand, unproblematic to describe. Some boys apparently regarded the attention towards other male bodies

109 The treatment of each of the three answers as single variables explains why certain parts is indicated more than once (see also note 11).
as problematic and sometimes even linked it to homosexuality. A couple of boys even felt a need to state that they were not homosexuals.

What can be concluded from these findings is that the face and bottom are features associated with both an ideal male and female body, although the bottom seem to be particularly important for the ideal male. Breasts, another important feature, are on the other hand only mentioned in relation to the female body. Although girls’ and boys’ own view of the male and female ideal body were somewhat varied, their beliefs about the general view were more consistent. Judging from this, young people seem to be quite familiar with the preferences of the opposite sex. This awareness is something that personal as well as mass media sources may help to contribute to. The ideal body is also sexually loaded. This is expressed in three ways. Firstly, through the parts associated with it. Secondly, through the perception of the general view that showed a more apparent sexual dimension than did the personal view, and finally, through the difficulties that some boys had in describing the ideal male body. The views that young people have of the ideal body and the beliefs they have of what others regard as important features may also have an impact on their own experience of the body. A correlation between parts viewed as specifically liked and disliked was also found.

In sum, some of the gender differences that were found when the respondent described the mediated ideal body (the celebrities) tended to be maintained also when they described the features that are important in an ideal body. It is once again interesting to note the ease with which the boys describe the female ideal and the difficulty that the boys show in describing the male counterpart.

There is also a consistency between the view of the ideal female celebrity and the features that the boys expressed. The features they mention themselves (especially breasts and bottoms) and their belief of the general male view are, to a large extent, the characteristic features of the most popular female celebrity chosen, namely Pamela Anderson.

**Concluding comments**

Images of desirable male and female bodies can, as some of the work in Chapter 3 discussed, work as gender manuals. As such they help to define, shape and reshape the understanding of masculinity and femininity at the same time as
they present ideas of how ideal bodies should look. A mediated ideal can also be argued to be important in different ways. One is that it invites comparisons, another is that it makes individuals more conscious of the importance of the body and of 'good looks'. Mediated ideals are, according to this discussion, believed to be especially important for young women. The findings also indicate that girls, especially the oldest ones, perceive the influence of media to be particularly important. The tendency for the influence from these sources to increase with age may be related to a changing use of media, new reading and viewing patterns etc. In many of these messages, the importance of the body in relation to other people is a frequent theme. The body then becomes more related to other people and to the opposite sex. It is also important to keep in mind that many girls expressed dissatisfaction with the body and the appearance and that the question on influence might be related to a negative view of the body, something that mass media often helps to sustain.  

However, mass media is not the only important source of influence for young people. Friends turned out to be another. The impact and importance of both mass media and friends for girls are also highlighted in other studies. Dorothy Smith (1988) uses, for instance, the term “textually-mediated discourse” when she describe the interplay between active and creative women, mass media, other people and the market in the shaping of femininity (see Chapter 3 for a further discussion of the concept).

It can also be argued that mediated ideal images, of for example male athletes, also are important for boys and men in the sense that they represent culturally exalted exemplars of masculinity. Boys also regard mass media to be an important influence on how they perceive their bodies. However, friends are regarded by the boys as an even stronger source of influence. It is somewhat more difficult to interpret the answers the boys give, not least since they have a more positive view of their own bodies, which makes it difficult to know if they regard the influence to be positive or negative. When understood as a negative influence, a possible understanding of the perceived strong influence from friends can be related to the negative comments the boys receive from their male and female friends, discussed in Chapter 9. The influence of mass media

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110 The influence from mass media can of course also be regarded as positive, but I find it more likely that girls, since they to a large degree are much more dissatisfied with their bodies, regard it to be negative. The influence from friends is discussed more in depth in Chapter 9 where other people’s attention to one’s own body is further discussed.
may be regarded as both positive and negative since men’s bodies are not as frequently problematised as women’s are, but, on the other hand, the tendency to objectify and sexualise the male body has also come to include men. This last aspect might also be related to the difficulty that many boys displayed when they were asked to express their views of the male ideal. Sexualised and objectified images of men may be difficult for them to relate to. Another related explanation for this tendency is associated with the questions and their focus on attractiveness, something that is often not associated with masculinity. It can even be argued that the connection between men and attractiveness or beauty illustrates a subordinated masculinity, since men who publicly state or express their opinions of the attractiveness of other men are sometimes associated with being gay (see Chapter 3 for a further discussion).

However, the boys appear to have little or no problem expressing their view of what they thought was the female ideal. Girls, on the other hand, seem to find it much easier than boys to name good-looking celebrities as well as to describe important features of an ideal body irrespective of gender. Moreover, they have a more diverse picture of the person they regard as particularly good looking, which might imply that they are more used to this way of thinking.

Since much of the discussion in this chapter has been focused around the influence and impact of mass media, it is important to note that mass media content is not passively absorbed but rather is negotiated, questioned, criticised and resisted. The same goes for the acquiring of masculinity and femininity. Young people may resist these messages themselves both in an individual and collective manner. Oppositional groups critical of the stereotyped gender images presented within popular culture and the development of alternative magazines are two such examples. Alternative images and/or open questioning and critique of idealised images can also be found in research, campaigns and in mass media content in general.

How then is one’s own body perceived by other people and how important is one’s own body to the respondents? These are two of the questions that are discussed in the following chapter, which focuses its attention on some of the social aspects of the body.
9 Social aspects of the body

While the earlier chapters have focused on the respondents' perceptions of their own and ideal bodies, as well as the practices used to alter and control them, this chapter discusses some of the social aspects of the body. The social aspects of body are studied here in four different ways: first, by looking at the respondents' views of a body that can be regarded as an alternative to the ideal body (discussed in the previous chapter), or what is here referred to as an 'ordinary' body (in other words, a body that does not 'measure up' to the cultural ideals); secondly, by looking at how important their own body is to the respondents themselves and how important other people’s views of it is to them; thirdly, by studying the respondents’ experience of self in relation to other people; and finally, through the comments the respondents receive in relation to their bodies and appearance.

As discussed in relation to the theme of the social body, the body is important in many ways, not least because people are judged according to the way they look; something that may have both positive and negative effects for the individual. Judgements are also something that this chapter takes a closer look at; among other things, in relation to obesity. It also returns to and follows up questions that the two earlier chapters have addressed. The first of these is to the issue of the influence of other people that was introduced in the previous chapter. The second is the question of responsibility for how one looks and for improving the body. Obese people are, for example, frequently regarded to be responsible for the way they look, but does this responsibility also include young people in general? The third question concerns control. The attention one’s own body receives from other people may also be related to aspects of control, especially external control. Such attention can be regarded as an additional way in which the body can be judged or evaluated by other people, for example, through admiring or critical glances or through remarks or comments from relatives, friends or one’s boy/girlfriend. The fourth issue concerns comparisons. The previous chapter discussed comparisons in relation to images, but other people may also be important in this sense since they also, as is the case with images, invite comparisons. Peer group comparisons, according to Sharlene Hesse-Biber (1996:74–77), are important for young people as their bodies begin to change and develop. She further notes that women’s comparisons with other people
often increased a sense of competition and insecurity, and that they sometimes also resulted in feelings of anger, resentment or evil thoughts, especially when the women felt that they did not measure up to the competition. Are comparisons to other people something that young people in this study also practise?

An 'ordinary' body

While the previous chapter discussed the impact and importance of mediated ideals and the respondents’ views of ideal bodies, this first section addresses those bodies that are often regarded as not measuring up to the cultural ideals, namely the obese. Societal and cultural values about obesity, as discussed earlier, are effectively spread both by mass media and people. These values are important both in relation to how one’s own body is perceived and how others’ bodies are viewed. Some common ways of viewing the obese body are addressed in this section, starting out with mass media portrayals of obese people.

Mass media portrayals of the obese

Not everyone has an ideal body. In fact, very few look like the ideal images of men and women presented in mass media. Still, many strive to reach these ideal bodies. As we have seen in the earlier chapter, mass media is one of the largest distributors of ideal images. However, it is difficult to measure up to such ideals. This is not least because they are not always what they appear to be; the practice of retouching may, for instance, help cover, add or take away certain problematic features in the photographic images on display. The correspondence between people in the real world and people portrayed on, for instance, television is also far from accurate. People portrayed on television are, for example, to a lesser extent than people in the real world, found to be obese. Teenagers and characters in commercials are particularly seldom portrayed in this way (Dietz 1990). The focus on young, thin, slim and muscular bodies leaves little room for alternative images of, for instance, aged, disabled or obese bodies, and this is particularly obvious in advertising and commercials. When they do occur, they are often presented in a stereotypical or negative way. Obese people are, for instance, found to be portrayed in a way that makes them

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Esther Rothblum (1992:70) refers, for example, to a study by S. R Dyrenforth et al (1980) that reports that ninety-five percent of women in the media are average weight or less. Many women will feel overweight when comparing themselves to these ideal women.
look amusing (see Konsumenterket 1987). However, there are alternatives to the slim ideal images. A recent example is the use of ‘ordinary’ people as fashion models, and the often explicit use of larger female models, sometimes referred to as ‘plus size models’ (in Swedish ‘mulliga’ model), which has appeared during the last few years. They can be seen as a response to often intense discussions and critiques of contemporary ideal images. Some of these new role models have also become quite famous. However, the impact of such alternative models can be questioned. They may have a positive effect in the sense that they help to broaden the ideal and offer a more realistic point of reference, which in turn may affect young girls’ and women’s feelings about their own bodies. But in order to be really effective, they need to be accepted as part of the ideal, not just recognised as an alternative to it. Their effect may otherwise be marginal since the thin ideal is so prominent.

Young people’s attitudes towards obesity

Public attitudes toward obesity, as was discussed in the theoretical section on the social body, are often extremely negative. Many studies have found that most people have strong negative associations with the obese, and that they are often rejected both by themselves and by other people including family, friends and health professionals.  

The obese are, furthermore, often held accountable for their weight. This is also evident in William DeJong’s (1980) study of how adolescent girls’ opinions of a peer who is obese influence their beliefs about the cause of her obesity. He found that young girls’ opinions of an obese peer were strongly related to the question of responsibility. While it is rare that a person with a physical stigma is held personally responsible for their condition, this belief seems to be much more common for the obese, where self-indulgence, gluttony, or laziness are often attributed as common causes of obesity (DeJong 1980:77). The obese peer who was presented to the adolescents (through a photo and a description) received a less positive evaluation unless she could offer an ‘excuse’ for her weight, such as a glandular disorder, or could report that actions were being taken to reduce the weight. She was, furthermore,

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112 See Rothblum (1992) for a review of the literature on weight and social stigma, and DeJong (1980) for an overview of studies about young people’s attitudes towards obesity.

113 The study is done with American high school girls, in the age range 14 to 18 years. They were presented with a photograph of either an obese or non-obese peer and a written description that indicated the cause of her condition and in some cases also, the course of action she had taken to lose weight.
frequently associated with unhappiness and unattractiveness regardless of the cause of her obesity.

Judging from the above studies, attitudes towards obesity are extremely negative, stressing personal responsibility and lack of personal control. Moreover, obesity is frequently associated with unhappiness and unattractiveness. In order to see how the respondents perceive people who do not comply to the cultural image of the ideal body, they were presented with a photograph of a young woman, shown in picture 9:1 below.

![An alternative to the thin female ideal body](image_url)

The photo chosen can be regarded an alternative to the thin ideal body presented in mass media. It is a black and white photo of a young woman, although she is not as young as the respondents. She is sitting naked on a piece of rock surrounded by water in a posture similar to the famous Danish sculpture “The Little Mermaid”. Her head is slightly turned away from the viewer and she seems to be relaxed while she poses for the picture.

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114 The picture is from the book ”Kroppens sug, hjärtats saknad” 1987 by Karin Sveen and photo by Lill-Anne Chepstow-Lusty. With kind permission of Pax-förlag, Oslo.
The idea was to find a picture of a young woman in a neutral setting that did not have any overt sexual connotations. The fact that the model is naked may of course also have an impact on the respondents, especially the boys, who may also come to include and judge her sexual attractiveness when looking at the photo. However, I believe that this need not be a problem as the photo does not explicitly portray the woman as a sexual object.

The photo was presented together with 22 different adjectives that were both positive and negative. Some of these can be regarded as each other’s opposites, such as fast-slow, active-passive, honest-dishonest, lazy-hard-working, happy-sad, nervous-confident, and fun-boring.

The respondents were asked to give their first impression of the woman in the photo by choosing the three adjectives that they thought best described her. They also had an option to choose a word of their own. About one fourth of the respondents (43) used this opportunity, resulting in a total of fourteen different words.

**The respondents’ associations**

All the pre suggested adjectives are presented in Table 9:1, below, where they have been divided into two main categories according to their relation to obesity; words with positive connotations and words with negative connotations.

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115 The initial idea was to present a picture of both a young man and a woman of a similar age as the respondents to see how they viewed a peer and if the associations differed according to the gender of the person portrayed. However, this turned out to be quite a difficult task. Neutral, non-commercial pictures of young people, and especially pictures of young men who did not fit into the ideal turned out to be difficult to find. However, the alternative, to present a photo of a female body is, as been argued, highly relevant especially since the female body is both viewed and portrayed as more problematic and in need of control than the male.

116 All the adjectives can be found in Appendix 2, question 26.

117 The most frequently suggested words were ‘fat and/or obese’ (25), followed by ‘courageous’ (5) and ‘self-confident’ (3). The rest of the words; ‘posing’, ‘thoughtful’, ‘peaceful’, ‘calm’, ‘proud’, ‘ordinary person’, ‘worried’, ‘insecure’, ‘dissatisfied’ and the statement ‘she seems to be happy with herself’ were suggested by single respondents, see Appendix 6. Table 1.

As with the pre suggested words these can be described as belonging to different categories. Since some of the words that the respondents chose themselves express more neutral associations such as posing, thoughtful, peaceful, calm and ordinary person a third category (neutral) has been added to the former two.
The total amount of words chosen is 437 (out of 482 possible). As could be expected from findings in earlier studies, the photo evoked many more negative than positive associations. The respondents assigned twice as many words with negative connotations than positive to the photo. Only one third (or 149 words) of the words that the respondents chose had positive connotations, while the remaining two thirds (or 288 words) had negative connotations.

Table 9:1. Positive and negative adjectives chosen to describe the young woman in the photo. Per cent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITIVE CONNOTATIONS</th>
<th>NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambitious</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard-working</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three most common words chosen were all associated with negative connotations. They described the woman in the photo as; 'slow', 'sluggish' and 'lazy', words that are all associated with a low level of activity. Another frequently chosen negative word was 'sad', chosen by one fifth of the respondents. Words associated with laziness and unhappiness are also frequently found in other studies of attitudes towards the obese. Although the gender differences were small, they indicate that the boys more than the girls tend to associate the woman with negative words; primarily adjectives related to level of activity,

118 Three out of four respondents marked three alternatives (including the option to choose a word of their own). Fourteen percent chose less than three words and 10 percent chose more than three words (these respondents have been included in the material although they were asked to mark three alternatives). Only 3 respondents chose not to answer the question at all.
such as slow and sluggish. The focus on these words might be an indication of the strength of common beliefs about obese people as being responsible for their appearance and not doing anything to change it. It could of course also be a result of a more literal way of looking at the picture, focusing on the inactivity that the woman in the photo depicts. While the former gender differences were quite small, they tend to be larger for the more negative adjective ‘disgusting’, a word that the boys chose quite frequently. This indicates that boys are much more inclined to express their negative feelings for a female body that do not comply to the current ideal than are the girls.

Although the negative associations predominate, one third of the words associated with the photo are positive. The three most used positive words were ‘kind’, ‘confident’ and ‘honest’. As women’s self-esteem is often found to be related to body size and as the woman in the photo seems to be untroubled by the display of her naked body, this might be interpreted as if she is both self-confident and happy with herself and the way she looks. Words such as being ‘competent’, ‘hard-working’, ‘successful’ and ‘ambitious’ are, on the other hand, less likely to be chosen, as well as words that describe activity. In fact ‘fast’ is the only word that was never chosen.

The gender differences for the positive connotations are much stronger than for the negative. Girls’ descriptions of the woman in the photo are in general much more positive than the descriptions the boys give. Girls regard her to be much more ‘kind’, ‘confident’, ‘honest’ ‘happy’, ‘funny’ and ‘smart’ than do the boys. Girls’ more favourable associations with the photo might possibly be understood in the light of their greater awareness of the female body as problematic and in need of control or change, which might make them more tolerant to ‘deviant’ bodies. They may also feel a kind of closeness to the young woman in the photo, as girls, more than the boys, can relate to the woman in the photo on the basis of their own bodily experiences, as well as the experiences of other female friends. Girls may also be more accustomed to and ready to accept the new alternative images of female bodies discussed earlier.

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It is difficult to say how a photo of a young man with the same body constitution would be interpreted. But, according to the commonly expressed negative view of body fat and the findings in the study, particularly those related to the comments that young people receive from male and female friends, (see Table 9:9) a young man with excess weight would probably also be judged in a predominantly negative way by both girls and boys.
The most striking finding when looking at the respondents’ own choice of words is the frequent use of negative words, and words associated with the evaluations of the woman’s appearance (or her physical attractiveness). As can be seen in Appendix 6, Table 1, the most common words are associated with the woman’s bodily constitution, describing it as ‘fat or obese’ (chosen by 25 of the respondents). However, there are no differences between girls’ and boys’ tendency to describe her in this way. The positive and neutral words chosen were, on the other hand, related to self-confidence and tranquillity.

An important finding, apart from the tendency to associate the woman in the photo with negative attributes, are the gender differences in the connotations. Boys seem to focus more on the lack of activity and on the attractiveness of the body, while the girls seem to see beyond such things and instead focus of her qualities and her self-confidence. The male expectations of the female body might thus be understood as higher than the female. A similar tendency could also be seen in relation to the boys’ perception of the ideal body for women, where their attention to a large degree was directed to the body instead of the face.

After examining the respondents’ view of a body that does not measure up to the ideal, attention will now turn to how important one’s own body and others’ bodies are for them. As was indicated in the previous chapter, other people, and especially friends, are regarded as important sources of influence on how one’s own body is perceived and understood. Moreover, the influence of friends, and to a certain extent also parents, is found to be stronger among the oldest. The following sections develop this finding further by starting to see how and in what way the body is important to the respondents.

**The importance of having a nice body**

The fact that the young people in the study seem to be quite preoccupied with their bodies raises questions such as in what way the body is important to them and how does it affect them? Is the body important only in relation to themselves, or does it have a wider importance in relation to others and the outside world? The importance of one’s own body may, for instance, be part of individual self-esteem and identity. Regarded in a broader sense, it might even affect one’s lifeplans. There is quite a lively discussion today about the importance of good looks. Good looks are, for example, believed to contribute to the individ-
ual receiving better treatment, becoming more popular, increasing chances of finding a partner, getting and keeping a job, a higher salary etc. These, and related issues are dealt with both in research and in mass media. The ‘beauty myth’ (discussed in Chapter 4) is another example of the strong link between physical appearance and personality in mass media and literature.

In order to capture how and in what way the body is important for the respondents, they were presented with a range of statements regarding the importance of the body (see Table 9:2). The statements dealt with different aspects of importance, ranging from the importance of one’s own body to the importance of others’ bodies. Table 9:2 illustrates that many young people regard questions concerning their own body to be particularly important. Three out of four think, for example, that having a nice body is important for themselves, and almost as many think that it is important that others’ like it too, including their boyfriend/girlfriend. Many respondents (42%) were also worried that their bodies are not attractive enough in the eyes of their boyfriend/girlfriend. Half of the respondents also reported that they compare their bodies with others’ and are trying to match them with their ideal images, an issue that has been emphasised by several authors.

The respondents’ views of the importance of other people’s bodies’ displays a somewhat more complex picture. The body of boyfriends/girlfriends seems to be of great importance, while the bodies of friends are almost without interest.

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120 The importance of a nice body and good looks can be found in different media content like newspaper articles, women’s magazines and advertisements. Sometimes it is discussed quite openly (see for instance Barkman 1994, who discusses the importance of body size in relation to promotion and salary) and other times it is more covert and subtle, for instance in movies and TV programs.
Table 9.2. Attitudes towards different statements about the importance of the body. The proportion that answered 'agree completely' or 'agree somewhat'. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is important for me that I have a nice body</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important that others think that I have a nice body</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important that my friends have nice bodies</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important that my boyfriend/girlfriend has a nice body</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important that my boyfriend/girlfriend thinks that I have</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a nice body</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to have a nice body when applying for jobs</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is more important for a girl to have a nice body than it is for a boy</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is more important for a younger person to have a nice body than it is</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for an older person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is more important to have an attractive face than a nice body</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys think that a girl's body is more important than her face</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls think that a boy's body is more important than his face</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A person with a nice body gets treated better</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a person's responsibility to try to do something to get a nicer body</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty girls do not get taken seriously</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often compare my body with others’</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to get my body to match my ideal image</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I worry that my boyfriend/girlfriend will not find my body attractive</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, the young body is perceived as more important than the old, and the female body as more important than the male. These issues are both common themes in mass media in general and in advertising in particular, where the young body, for instance, is promoted as desirable and as an 'ideal', while the old body seldom is discussed or shown,¹²¹ and where young women still dominate the 'world of advertising'. The respondents' strong belief that a young body is more important than an old is probably also related to their own age and the importance they place on their own body. The relationship between a nice body and future success in life is another theme found in the media. However, few respondents thought that the body was important when applying for jobs, but nearly half of the respondents believe that a person gets better treatment if s/he has a nice body.

¹²¹ See for example Lupton (1998:129) and Chapter 3 and 4 for an extended discussion of these themes.
On the question about what is regarded as most important, an attractive body or an attractive appearance (face), about two thirds of the respondents answered that they think an attractive face is more important than a nice body. When they were asked a similar question about what girls and boys in general regard as most important, the body or the face, about forty percent of the respondents indicated that they thought that boys think that a girl’s body is more important than her face. By contrast, only one out of four believed that girls hold the same view of the male body. This indicates that almost twice as many believe that boys are more focused on the body of the other sex than girls. These findings to a certain extent coincide with the earlier findings related to the most important features in a male and female body, discussed in the previous chapter. There, the face was regarded as the most important feature in all cases except when the boys described their general view of what other boys regard as most important features in a female body, where other body parts instead were described as more important.

Other statements like; ‘pretty girls do not get taken seriously’ and ‘it is a person’s responsibility to try to do something to get a nicer body’ are both issues that seem to have little impact on the respondents. The responsibility for body and appearance, previously discussed in relation to consumer culture and control, seems therefore to have little impact on the young people in this study. Very few respondents regarded it to be the individual’s own responsibility to do something to get a nicer body. This is important to note, as it implies that young people’s desires and the strategies they use to change their bodies are not connected to a sense of responsibility, at least not for themselves. Still, many respondents, as we have seen, are involved in various ways of working with and controlling their bodies, which implies that other things like other people’s opinions or views of their own body might make this become worthwhile.

These statements give a somewhat complex picture of the importance of the body, where questions concerning one’s own body seem to be very important. A way to reduce the complexity and to find underlying dimensions is to use factor analysis. The factor analysis may also help to find patterns among the answers that can be used later to create indexes.

122 Other aspects of responsibility, for example to stay healthy, avoid illness etc, may still be important for the respondents, as well as the responsibility often connected to deviating bodies.
Table 9:3 summarises the results of the factor analysis. Three main patterns of responses were found that expresses an *individual*, a *social* and a *cultural dimension*. In the first 'individual' dimension, the importance of one's own body is in focus. It includes questions where one's own as well as others' opinions about the body are important. More active or evaluative ways of relating to the body, such as comparisons and adjustments to ideals, are also included in this dimension.

The second pattern expresses, on the contrary, a more 'social' dimension, where other people's bodies, as well as the importance of the body in relation to work and the responsibility to change it are included. In the third pattern, common cultural beliefs are addressed. This 'cultural' dimension assembles statements that can all be found in different mass media content. The female and the young body are, for example, commonly displayed in much of this content, as well as men's interest in women's bodies and the belief that one is better treated if one has a nice body.

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123 Three of the statements presented in Table 9:1 have been excluded in the factor analysis as the correlation between them and other statements are low. These are; 'It is more important to have an attractive face than a nice body', 'Pretty girls do not get taken seriously' and 'Girls think that a boy's body is more important than his face'. The fact that the first two statements differ from the rest, in the sense that they relate more to appearance than to the body, might be regarded as another reason for excluding them. The third statement shows no connections to any other question and is therefore probably measuring something else.

124 Four factors were initially proposed by the analysis. When trying to reduce the factors by extracting only three, almost the same results were maintained. The principal difference is that the last three statements (no 12, 13 and 14) which now belong to the first factor (also referred to as the individual dimension) in Table 9:3 above, fell out as a factor of its own in the four factor model. The effect of this fourth factor has also been tested on its own with the same result as when it belongs to the first factor (see the index 'Importance of one's own body' displayed in Table 9:4). This, together with the fact that the three-factor model also is supported by a theoretically based index which preceded the factor analysis, makes it reasonable to choose the three factor model instead of the four factor model, as the former is both theoretically and empirically supported.
Table 9:3. Factor analysis of attitudes to statements about the importance of the body.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It is important for me that I have a nice body</td>
<td>0,65</td>
<td>0,32</td>
<td>-0,09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It is important that others think that I have a nice body</td>
<td>0,68</td>
<td>0,40</td>
<td>-0,13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. It is important that my friends have nice bodies</td>
<td>0,26</td>
<td>0,72</td>
<td>-0,10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. It is important that my boyfriend/girlfriend has a nice body</td>
<td>-0,06</td>
<td>0,72</td>
<td>0,06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. It is important that my boyfriend/girlfriend think that I have a</td>
<td>0,59</td>
<td>0,35</td>
<td>-0,02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nice body</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. It is important to have a nice body when applying for jobs</td>
<td>0,19</td>
<td>0,50</td>
<td>0,38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. It is more important for a girl to have a nice body than it is for a</td>
<td>0,12</td>
<td>0,06</td>
<td>0,75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. It is more important for a younger person to have a nice body</td>
<td>0,07</td>
<td>-0,08</td>
<td>0,56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>than it is for an older person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Boys think that a girl’s body is more important than her face</td>
<td>-0,11</td>
<td>0,11</td>
<td>0,67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. A person with a nice body gets treated better</td>
<td>0,13</td>
<td>0,37</td>
<td>0,48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. It is a person’s responsibility to try to do something to get a</td>
<td>0,23</td>
<td>0,54</td>
<td>0,23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nicer body</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I often compare my body with others’</td>
<td>0,78</td>
<td>-0,09</td>
<td>0,07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I try to get my body to match my ideal picture</td>
<td>0,71</td>
<td>-0,03</td>
<td>0,16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I worry that my boyfriend/girlfriend will not find my body</td>
<td>0,65</td>
<td>-0,10</td>
<td>0,29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attractive enough</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigenvalue                                | 3,58 | 1,80 | 1,58 |
Per cent of variance                       | total 49,7%        |

In order to see how these patterns or dimensions are connected to other variables like gender, age and the perception of the body, three additive indexes were constructed.

The impact of gender and age on the first index, ‘Individual body index’, is displayed in Table 9:4. Those who regard their own body as important are above all the girls and the oldest. This pattern still holds for girls but not for boys when controlling for both age and gender, where the importance of one’s own body for the girls seems to increase with age. The only significant differ-

---

125 The result of the index is divided into three categories; great, moderate, and little importance. The categories are constructed so that the middle alternative covers a broader spectrum than the other two, which instead show the more extreme standpoints where the respondents strongly agree or disagree with the statements.
ences were found among the oldest, where about 40 per cent of the girls regarded their own body to be of great importance to them.

Table 9:4. The association between the individual body index, gender and grade. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th>Grade 2 s.s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These findings correspond strongly with the earlier results on the perception of one’s own body discussed in Chapter 6, where girls, especially the oldest, frequently expressed a greater concern and dissatisfaction with aspects related to both the size and shape of their bodies. Moreover, it can be related to the increased impact of friends that the oldest respondents reported in the previous chapter.

Significant differences were also found between those girls who dislike their bodies and think that one’s own body is of great importance. This connection to the perception of the body is perhaps not so surprising as they both in a way cover the same type of issue, one’s own relation to the body. However, what it indicates is that dissatisfaction is also related to what other people might think about the body, an issue that will be further discussed in the last section of the chapter where the comments the respondents receive are in focus.

An interesting question is, however, if this pattern holds if one takes a step further away from the issue of one’s own body. Is the engagement in one’s own body also extended to include others’ bodies, and a more abstract importance of the body, a kind of social and cultural importance of the body?

---

126 The amount of girls who regard the body to be of great importance increases over the years from 10 percent in Grade 7 to 40 percent in Grade 2 in Secondary school. This figure is very high in comparison to the boys in the same age group, where only five percent regard it to be of great importance.
The social body index displays a totally different picture. The only significant difference found concerned gender and the index. Boys regarded the social dimension of bodies as more important than did girls. This indicates that the body for girls is foremost important when one's own body is directly involved, while for boys it also includes a more social aspect, where others' bodies, especially the female (the girlfriends'), are important. It can to a certain degree be argued that the boys in this study tend to be more concerned about other people's bodies than their own. This finding can also be related to the boys' tendency to express negative feelings in relation to a body that does not measure up to the ideal, see the previous section.

Significant gender differences were also found in the third index, based on the cultural dimension, which deals with a more abstract importance of the body. Girls were significantly more likely to agree with the statements included in this dimension. This finding is supported by the earlier emphasis placed on mass media as an important source of influence. As discussed earlier, the girls might be more acquainted with these kind of cultural messages, as they are often directed to a female public. The higher agreement among the girls might also be explained by the direction of the statements, which involves girls more than boys.

Judging from these results, one can conclude that questions concerning one's own body seem to be very important for the young people in this study, and especially to the girls. This can be seen both in the way that they are preoccupied with it and in the significance they give to others' perceptions of it. Other people are, on the other hand, less important, except when it comes to the body of a boyfriend/girlfriend. This indicates that the body is important in relation to the opposite sex, which includes both the look of their partner's body and how the partner perceives one's own.

The link between the importance of the body and other people's perception of it is now further explored by looking at how the respondents experience the self in relation to others.

The experience of self in relation to others

Two other important aspects of the social importance of the body that have been studied are the question of perceived popularity and the experience of self in
relation to others. A range of questions was asked to cover these aspects, which are summarised in Table 9:5. Most of the respondents show a positive picture of the self in relation to other people. A majority of the respondents feel that ‘they are as good as anybody else’ and that they are ‘as good at most things as their friends are’. Three out of four are also happy with who they are and consider themselves to be popular among their friends. Two out of three also think that making contact with other people is easy. Despite this positive picture of the self, nearly half of the respondents indicate that they sometimes feel worthless and/or feel like failures. One fifth also report that they often feel lonely.

Table 9:5. The experience of self in relation to other people.  
The proportion that answered ‘agree completely’ or ‘agree somewhat’. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relations to other persons</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am popular among my group of friends</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am popular with boys</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am popular with girls</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often feel lonely</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am just as good as anybody else</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I feel worthless</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easy for me to feel like a failure</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All in all, I am happy with who I am</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easy for me to make contact with other people</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am as good at most things as my friends are</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown above, the relationship to other people gives a somewhat ambiguous picture of how the respondents view themselves in relation to others. A factor analysis was done in order to see how these aspects were related to each other (see Table 9:6).

---

127 The statement 'I am just as good as anybody else', presented in Table 9:5, is excluded in the analysis as no correlation to the other statements was found.
Table 9:6. Factor analysis of the relation to other people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am popular among my group of friends</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am popular with boys</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am popular with girls</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often feel lonely</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I feel worthless</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easy for me to feel like a failure</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All in all, I am happy with who I am</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easy for me to make contact with other people</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am as good at most things as my friends are</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Eigenvalue | 3.20 | 1.74 |
| Percent of variance | total 54.9% | 35.5 | 19.3 |

The analysis shows that the answers are gathered in two different dimensions. The first is related to *self-esteem*, and includes statements that indicate a low self-esteem where the person feels lonely, worthless and like a failure. Two other, more positively related, statements are also gathered in this dimension, namely ‘being as good at things as friends are’ and ‘being happy with who one is’. Most of the respondents tend to report that they do not diverge from other people in this way. All the statements included in this dimension cover issues that are related to self-esteem and how one judges self in relation to others. The second dimension is focused on *popularity*. Issues related to popularity are gathered in this dimension, as well as the ease with which contact with other people is made.

Two indexes of self-esteem and popularity have been created in order to see if they in any way are related to gender, age and overall satisfaction with body and appearance. The first index is created out of the issues belonging to the first factor of self-esteem. High self-esteem turned out to be more common among the boys, while low self-esteem was more often seen among girls. Age showed some correlation with self-esteem in the way that the oldest tended to have the lowest self-esteem. When controlling for gender no significant differences were found. However, there is a clear tendency for girls in secondary school, more often than boys, to report low self-esteem. Self-esteem was also strongly related to the experience of both body and appearance, in the sense that those who are dissatisfied with both body and appearance to a higher degree than others had low self-esteem (see Table 9:7). When controlling for gender, this tendency is seen for both girls and boys. It is, however, difficult to state in what way they
are connected or in which order they come. Does dissatisfaction with the body and/or appearance result in a low self-esteem or is it vice versa?

Table 9:7. The association between the perception of body/appearance and self-esteem index. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-esteem</th>
<th>Perception of the body</th>
<th></th>
<th>Perception of the appearance</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While self-esteem seems to have a strong correlation to both gender and the perception of both body and appearance, the second factor, popularity, seems to have less impact. Girls and boys tend to regard themselves to be almost equally popular among other young people. The age differences are also small, but indicate that there is a tendency for the youngest to perceive themselves to be less popular among friends. The popularity index was also found to have some effect on the perception of the body, although the correlation was not as strong as in the case of self-esteem. The correlation was found to be negative, in the sense that those who did not regard themselves as popular were more prone to be dissatisfied with their bodies than those who regarded themselves to be popular. However, this correlation was not found for the experience of appearance.

In sum, many respondents seem to have a good self-esteem and view themselves as popular. A low self-esteem is primarily found among the girls, particularly the oldest, for whom it is also related to dissatisfaction with body and appearance. This connection between low popularity and dissatisfaction with the body can also be linked to the importance of the body, where many respondents, particularly girls, assign a great importance to other people’s perceptions of their bodies. Paradoxically, few respondents assigned any importance to their friend’s bodies.

We have seen that it is not only one’s own experience of the body that is important; others’ views and reactions, or what we suppose they think, are also essential for how the body is perceived. Some studies have pointed out that
early experiences of the body have an impact on how the body is perceived later in life (Haug 1987, Widerberg 1995, Liukko 1996). These experiences are often related to other people’s actions or reactions towards the body, something that is expressed both verbally and non verbally. The following section takes a close look at one more explicit way of knowing what other people think of the body and the appearance, namely the practice of offering comments.

**Body talk**

A lot of our daily talk involves the body, both in the way that it originates from parts of it and in the way it expresses our feelings and other non-verbal messages (or what is popularly referred to as body language or what Goffman (1966) calls ‘body idioms’). The body (our own and others) is also a frequent subject in many of our daily conversations. As such, it is a very rich topic in which everyone can participate. Such a conversation may deal with how the body develops, how one feels about it, how it can be changed and the possibilities on offer, things that can be done with it or the shortcomings of the body, such as old age, bodily decay or illness. It may also deal with what we regard as nice, beautiful and ugly, or with things that cause envy or disgust. In short, the body can be regarded as a rich source of conversation.

Other people’s views of one’s own body and others’ bodies are frequently expressed through judgements and comments about bodies, as well as attitudes regarding issues like food, eating, exercise, sexuality and other phenomena connected to the body and its development.

Different people are also expected to play certain parts in this conversation. Parents are, for example, expected to talk to their children about their bodily development and their entering into new stages in life, e.g. puberty development. Sexuality is another subject closely related to the body, where parents are supposed to work as important sources of information. The mother is often argued to be especially fit to discuss such issues. Judging from recent studies, this is not an easy task for her and communication is sometimes judged as unsatisfactory from both parties. Many mothers therefore come to rely upon and count on mass media and peers as important co-educators (Te Poel & Ravesloot 1995).
Popular culture is also found to provide a resource for teaching and learning in relation to issues like love, sex, and intimacy. Young girls seem especially attracted to these kinds of sources, which they often use and discuss in a critical manner. Boys on the other hand, often display a reluctance to discuss such issues and share problems with friends (Kehily 1996). A ‘best friend’, especially for girls, is another important person, with whom one can discuss all kinds of issues, secrets and dreams etc. Girls sometimes also describe their mother as such a ‘best friend’ (Wulff 1989, 1992, 1995).

Issues around body and appearance can also be brought up in a more straightforward way e.g. through comments that one receives or gives to others; an issue that is discussed more below.

**Comments from other people**

Comments on the body are a complex issue. Comments can deal with a lot of different things and may both repeat and modify other cultural messages. They can, furthermore, be offered from a lot of people in one’s close surroundings. Comments from different people may also be interpreted in different ways and may have different value depending on who delivers them. A positive comment from a mother or a father might, for instance, have less impact than the same comment from a friend or a boy/girlfriend, as parents, to a larger degree, are expected to offer nice comments. Comments and values from the same or the opposite sex may also be judged as more significant, not least because of the importance of attracting a potential partner, something that is also strongly supported in cultural messages of love and romance.

The right to comment (as well as gaze) on other people’s bodies is, moreover, often unevenly distributed among men and women, and to a certain extent also among parents and children. David Morgan (1996:126–127) states that such access to others’ bodies, including the right to comment or gaze on the body, are more likely to be placed on men, while women are more likely to be recipients. Moreover, men and husbands are often found to comment on their wife’s bodies and weight (Charles & Kerr 1986). Parents and other adults who also frequently talk about the body and the bodily development of children may also feel that they have a right to comment on these issues. The way in which comments are given is also of importance in terms of how they are perceived. Comments made in the presence of others or made ‘over the head’ of the person are, for example, often a negative experience for the individual who receives them.
Comments can, furthermore, be both positive and negative as well as a mixture of the two. Even when a positive comment is delivered, its impact may be negative depending on the receiver's desire to receive comments. Comments can therefore be said to be both wanted and unwanted. If they are wanted, they can be seen as a sign of intimacy or as confirmation that the person is OK, but if they are unwanted they may instead highlight things that the person prefers to keep hidden or concealed (see the discussion on stigma in Chapter 4).

It is, furthermore, important to note that a negative (or a positive) comment need not always be expressed in a straightforward manner or even be expressed in words. A glance or the absence of a remark may also be viewed negatively. Other people's way of looking at one's own body may likewise influence the way the individual comes to look at his/her own body (as is the case with the stigmatised body, discussed earlier). Others' view of the body may therefore affect the self-identity of the individual.

When returning to the empirical material, the comments the respondents receive from other people will be in focus: who gives comments and what are they about?

Table 9:8 shows from whom the respondent receives most comments. Family members and friends are the ones reported to give most comments on the body, which indicates that a close personal relation to the giver is important. Women seem to be particularly important commentators, especially the mother, but also female friends. Sisters and brothers also comment on the body quite frequently. Even though females tend to comment more on the body, many respondents say they also get comments from males, especially fathers and male friends. The boy/girlfriend is another important person who fairly often comments on the body. The number of comments from these persons can be considered as rather high, especially when it is related to the number of respondents who report that they have or who have had a boy/girlfriend. These comments are probably, judging from earlier findings in relation to the individual dimension (discussed above), important for the respondents. Almost three out of four respondents reported, for example, that other people's opinions as well as the boy/girlfriend's opinions of their body were important. Forty percent of the

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128 About 15 percent of the respondents claimed that at the time of the study they had a boy/girlfriend, and two out of three claimed that they had had a boy/girlfriend before.
respondents were also worried that their bodies were not attractive enough in the eyes of their boy/girlfriends. However, comments from people outside the family or the close circle of friends are quite unusual. 129

Table 9:8. The comments that girls' and boys' receive from different people. The proportion that 'often' or 'sometimes' gets comments from different people. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments from ...</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>n.s</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister/brother</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>(*)</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>n.s</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male friends</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>n.s</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female friends</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy/girlfriend</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>n.s</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>n.s</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other people</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>n.s</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9:8 also indicates that a lot of attention is directed toward the female body. Girls get significantly more comments from other females, such as mothers (who frequently gave comments to almost all of the girls), female friends as well as from sisters (and brothers). This result reinforces the belief that women often speak to each other about issues related to body and appearance.

Women, especially the mother, were also frequent givers of comments to boys. While the boys receive fewer comments from their female friends than girls, they tended to get an equal amount of comments from their male friends and their father.

Age does not seem to have a particularly strong impact on the frequency of comments. The only exception is the comments that the respondents received from their peers. Respondents in upper secondary school receive more comments from male friends, from their boy/girlfriend, and to some extent also from female friends. When controlling for gender, the findings indicate that girls are more likely to get comment from male friends and their boyfriends. This finding

129 It should be noted that only 20 respondents chose to write down an alternative of their own. Some of the persons mentioned are trainer/coach, friends they work out with, doctors, and friends to the family.
may be related to the strong influence of friends for this group, presented earlier. The tendency to have a boy/girlfriend is also higher among the oldest group, and this may explain the higher comment rate from these persons.

Commenting has, so far, only been treated as a positive or neutral experience, but receiving comments is not always nice and comforting. Comments can also be negative or be placed as a burden of guilt on the receiver. While almost all of the respondents reported whom they received comments from, considerably fewer mentioned what type of comments they received, that is if they were generally positive, negative or both. The distribution of different types of comments is displayed in Appendix 6, Table 6:2. Most of the comments are of a positive nature. Female friends, the boy/girlfriend, and relatives are those who tend to give most positive comments, followed by parents. Sisters and brothers are, on the other hand, those who tend to deliver most negative ones. Judging from earlier studies (see Hesse-Biber 1996:89), this is often done in a teasing manner and can probably be quite effective in a negative way, as siblings often know or can identify the weaknesses of their sisters or brothers. Sisters and brothers are also, together with male friends, the ones that tend to make the most varied kinds of comments. Boy/girlfriends are the only ones who do not make any negative comments. This is interesting, as the earlier findings concerning this group indicated that there seems to be a fear, especially among the girls, that their own bodies will not be regarded as attractive enough by their boy/girlfriend.

When controlling for gender, some significant gender differences are found, all related to comments from peers. Parents, sisters/brothers, and relatives tend, on the other hand, to make almost the same type of comments to girls and boys irrespective of gender. Table 9:9 shows the type of comments that girls and boys get from male and female friends and boy/girlfriends. Girls tend to get more positive comments from all of these persons, especially from female friends and from boyfriends, who primarily make positive comments. Many of the positive comments that the girls receive from female friends may be understood as a sign of intimacy and/or a way to reassure one another. Examples of such reassurances can be overheard when girls are gathered together in, for instance, dressing rooms or in the girls’ room (Ganetz 1992). Boys also get a lot of positive comments from the same sources as the girls, at the same time as they also get more varied comments. Negative comments are mainly made by their male friends, but to some extent also from their female friends. The negative comments the boys receive from their male friends may, to a certain extent,
be interpreted as bullying or teasing, Bullying is sometimes argued to be a common experience for many boys and may even be something that they have to ‘learn to take’ (Morgan 1996b, Prendergast 1996).

Table 9:9. The type of comments that girls’ and boys’ receive from their male and female friends and from boy/girlfriends. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of comment</th>
<th>Male friends</th>
<th>Female friends</th>
<th>Boy/girlfriend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both pos. and neg.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9:9. The type of comments that girls’ and boys’ receive from their male and female friends and from boy/girlfriends. Per cent.

Girls seems to be somewhat more negative in their judgement of boys and nicer towards members of their own sex, while boys seem to be nice with girls and more negative in their judgement of other boys. These results go in line with the female tendency to confirm and reassure one another, as discussed above. Girls’ tendency to make negative comments to boys may, on the other hand, be understood in terms of a female claim on or expectation of the male body, whereby girls may think that boys also are obliged to take care and show interest in their bodies. However, the tendency to regard other people’s bodies as important was more common among the boys (see the social dimension). The low rate of positive comments between males may, on the other hand, be explained by their unfamiliarity with making positive comments about body and appearance to other boys. Varied and negative comments may, on the other hand, be easier to make as they are more neutral. Male envy or homophobia may be other explanations.

The actual things that the respondents usually received comments about differed greatly. A total of 94 different issues were brought up. These have been divided into six different categories, shown in Table 9:10. They focus on: exercise/muscles, slenderness, height/weight, general appreciation of the body and/or comments on its parts, comments related to the face and the appearance, and finally, comments on other things including general comments (both posi-

130 This finding can also be related to some of the earlier questions where the boys seemed to have trouble judging or commenting on the bodies of other men.
tive and negative) and comments on things like clothes and make up. The last two groups, appearance and other things, each accounted for almost one fourth of the comments. The rest were related to the body in one way or another. Issues concerning size were particularly common, especially those which related to slenderness. These were often positive, in contrast to the comments about weight, which on the other hand were reported to be more negative. The stomach was one of the specific parts that was mentioned fairly often in connection to the body.

Table 9:10. The content of comments that girls and boys receive about body and appearance. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments about ...</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slenderness</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body and its parts</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise/muscles</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height/weight</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the comments the respondents received were positive; only one out of ten was directly negative. Interestingly, many of these were connected to exercise, where the respondents were told that they should exercise more. Although most of the comments were perceived as positive, it is, of course, difficult to know how the respondents interpret them. As said before, a comment that is intended to be positive may in some cases still be experienced as negative or undesirable.

Table 9:10, furthermore, indicates that there is a strong gender difference between what the respondents get comments about. Slenderness and appearance are the two main themes in the comments towards females, while exercise/muscles, different body parts and the category ‘other’ are the most common themes for the boys.

The comments do not seem to be related to the respondent’s age in any way. Boys and girls tend to get approximately the same sort of comments in all of the
three age groups. Nor are they related to the respondents’ overall satisfaction with body or appearance. However, what they indicate is a connection between the parts that the respondents expressly like and dislike, as discussed in Chapter 6. The focus on slenderness for girls was related there to a "fear" of everything that is big and an approval of the body parts that were small or slim. The attention on muscles/exercise for the boys was likewise connected to a desire to get a larger body and a focus on muscles and the function of the body. Comments may, therefore, be seen as important for the way young people think about their bodies. They may also help to reinforce the idealised pattern for how men and women are expected to look, as they also tend to correlate with gendered themes in advertising, self help books and articles.

Concluding comments

The chapter has shown that the body is important in relation to other people, both for the individual themselves and for how others view it. The body both generates information and attracts attention, which is expressed by both glances and in words or comments. The influence of parents and friends, discussed in the previous chapter, has here been further explained both by the importance of other people’s perception of the body and by the comments the respondents receive. Parents and friends turned out to be those from whom the respondents received most comments. Mothers were particularly frequent providers of comments. Girls are found to receive more comments than boys, especially from other women. The strong influence of women is also supported by findings in other studies. The comments the girls receive, although they are predominantly positive, are to a large degree focused on appearance and slenderness, which further emphasises images of femininity. The great importance that girls place on how others perceive their bodies, and the frequent attention they get from other people in the form of comments, help to accentuate their attention on how ‘the body looks’. Boys also get a lot of comments, and although most of them are positive, they also receive some negative ones, particularly from other boys. Images of masculinity are also emphasised through the comments the boys receive. Their focus on muscular development and exercise may also help to stress boys’ greater attention on ‘what it does’.

Judging from the findings in this and earlier chapters, one’s own body tends for the girls to be the subject of both internal and external control, in the sense that they, to a larger extent than the boys, regard other people’s thoughts about their
bodies to be important. They tend to be aware of their bodies being on display and are also more concerned about the way others will view it. Although no direct questions were asked about the respondent’s view of the body as an object, the above findings can, however, be interpreted in this way. The importance that the girls tend to place on other people’s perception of their bodies can be interpreted as an awareness of the body as an object, particularly as an object of the male gaze. As such, it is also linked to control, and especially to feelings of not being in control. Young girls’ awareness that their bodies are to be assessed and on display have also been highlighted in other studies (Harris 1995; see also Chapter 7). Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to be concerned with other people’s bodies. They are also found to be harsher in their judgement of bodies that do not measure up to the ideals.

Young people’s self-esteem is also found to be connected to the perception of both body and appearance. Girls, especially the older ones, were found to report a lower self-esteem than boys.

The personal responsibility for how the self is presented includes time, work and interest in the body, and comes to influence the way one is defined and treated by others. Bodies defined as ‘bad’ are, as noted earlier, often viewed in a negative way, stressing laziness and an undisciplined self. This way of looking at bodies that do not measure up to the common ideals was common also among the respondents in this study. The photo of the ‘ordinary’ body was frequently associated with negative connotations, especially those adjectives that referred to the level of activity. This can to some extent be interpreted as a lack of responsibility. However, a personal responsibility for getting a nicer body was not stressed among the respondents themselves. Still, they are both aware of possibilities for changing the body and involved in different practices with the aim of altering it. Many also believe that people get better treatment if they have a nice body.

A similar way of dealing with this issue was found in Annette Götlund’s (1997:148) study of young Swedish girls. The girls in her study were well aware of the ‘makeability’, or possibilities of changing both body and appearance, but they did not regard it as their responsibility.

Although many young people do not believe that people are responsible for the way they look this does not necessary include everyone. People with bodies that deviate from the social and cultural norm, for example the obese, might still be
held responsible for the way they look. Put simply, one can conclude that girls tend primarily to judge their own bodies, while boys, on the contrary, are more likely to judge others.
10 Concluding remarks

The ideal body has been in focus in this thesis, including not only young people’s perceptions of their own bodies, but also other people’s bodies and mediated ideals. Body ideals and ideal images are very much on the agenda today. Critical voices that question the existing ideals and their impact on young people, women, people with eating disorders etc. are raised at all levels of society from young people themselves, parents, professionals, and political-, feminist-, and other organisations and interest groups. Mass media also helps to criticise these ideals at the same time as they also continue to spread them.

The problem is not only the ideal images themselves, but also the attitudes, norms and values around bodies that do not measure up to the ideals. The increased possibilities of manipulating and/or reconstructing the body have also come to make people both morally and personally responsible for their bodies, the way they look, their health etc.

The intense focus on the body, including different aspects of it, such as the ideal, healthy, sick and frail body, makes it a target for consumer culture interest. To a large degree they play on people’s fear of having or getting a body that is, old, unhealthy, unfit or in other ways does not measure up to the ideals. The body may also become a potential problem for the welfare state, in the sense that unhealthy and/or sick bodies increase medical expenses.

Since the young, fit and healthy body so convincingly is portrayed as something worth striving for, in that it will make the owner, happy, successful, popular etc., and since much attention is focused on appearance, it is no surprise that many people are involved with different body care practices and strive to get a desired body. This concern with the body is something that includes people of all ages. However, many young people seem to be particularly inclined to be influenced by these matters. The widespread dissatisfaction and concern with body and appearance is today also found among children.

The aim of this study has been to study how young people perceive their own bodies and the social and cultural norms regarding body and appearance. The central questions were therefore focused both on the perception of one’s own
body and the ideals. The practices that young people engage in in order to achieve the desired body are also studied, as well as the importance they assign to the body. This last issue raised the question of whom they regard as the most important source of influence for how their own body is perceived.

The study is based on a questionnaire distributed to 167 young girls and boys aged 13, 15 and 17. The questionnaire, which was completed in the classroom, was quite extensive and contained 76 different questions, of which most included a number of separate items.

Before discussing the conclusions that can be drawn from the study, a short summary of the theoretical framework and the main empirical findings will be presented.

**Summary**

The theoretical framework of the thesis includes both general theories on the body and gender perspectives; two areas that are central for an understanding of the ideal body. Both are closely linked to each other and emerge from a diversity of disciplines, theoretical foundations and methodologies. This study has focused primarily on sociological theories and on theories that address the gendered body. The sociology of the body is a rapidly growing area and offers a variety of different theoretical views. Three main perspectives can be singled out; the naturalistic, social constructionist and phenomenological. Although several of them have influenced the theoretical framework of the thesis, the main focus has been on the social constructionist perspective. This implies that the body is seen as a receptor of social meaning. In the case of body and beauty ideals, this means that there are no fixed, given ideals. They tend instead to vary both between different cultures and at different times. There is thus a set of ideals that exist at a given time and these ideals are shared with other people. Various external forces tend to influence and affect people’s understanding of the body. Mass media and other people are two important sources that are in focus here.

The ways in which people think about and experience their bodies is also dynamic and changes over the life course. The body is constantly subject to change and alterations and can in this sense be regarded as unfinished. Constant work on the body is therefore needed and this work will help to change its
meaning. Together with the knowledge of the plasticity and the possibilities of changing the body, this helps to make the body become a project for many people today.

Looking at gender from a social constructionist view means being aware that the understanding and interpretations of femininity and masculinity are concepts adopted from culture. Understandings of gender are in a state of flux and are shared with other people. People’s gender identity can therefore be viewed as unfinished and in transition since gender can be seen as ‘worked’ into the body. What it means to be a girl/woman and a boy/man is learned through interaction with other people and in response to representations in mass media. These sources help to influence, shape and reshape the individual’s understanding of femininity and masculinity.

Different forms of femininities and masculinities exist at the same time. In the case of masculinities, some of these are regarded as more dominant or hegemonic while others are subordinated. Hegemonic masculinity can be described as the culturally idealised form of masculine character. Sport, work, sexual activity and fatherhood are four common ways in which men can confirm and express hegemonic masculinity. Sport is often pointed out as particularly important since it includes boys and men of all ages. Athletes can also be argued to be culturally exalted and even presented as heroes. A fit, strong and muscular body becomes part of the masculine ideal. Moreover, hegemonic masculinity is a question of domination, over women but also over other groups of men. This subordination of certain groups of other men (such as gay men) is strongly related to heterosexuality.

Although one can not speak of a parallel hegemonic femininity, there are, however, certain types of femininities that are culturally exalted. While sport seldom is regarded as an important definer of femininity, a much more common connection is found between beauty and femininity. The beautification and care work on one’s own body can therefore be seen as an important way for women to acquire femininity. This is also heavily supported by images, products and services offered by consumer culture. However, women’s involvement in the beautification of their bodies seems to be much more problematic than men’s acquiring of masculinity through sports, since it can be seen as part of female oppression. Another way to look at this connection is to focus on girls’/women’s active and creative engagement in their bodies, which does not have to exclude the oppressive character of this work.
Images and mass media representations of men and women is, as already indicated, important in the construction and shaping of gender identity and of how femininity and masculinity are understood. They may help to spread new definitions and to reinforce and/or sustain traditional or stereotyped ones. In many of these representations, women have traditionally been associated with body and beauty care, an area which today has also come to incorporate men. The appearance of a consumer-oriented masculinity, where more and more consumer culture goods and services are promoted for a male market, have contributed to an increased attention directed toward men’s physical appearance. Men today, particularly in advertising, are also found to be portrayed in feminised and objectified ways. These tendencies have contributed to an increased correspondence between the cultural representations of ideal men and women.

Four themes, based on the theoretical framework presented above, are highlighted in order to capture central and important aspects of the ideal body. These are; the problematic body, the controlled body, the commodified body and the social body. All four of them are gendered and women’s bodies are in many cases closely linked to them, something that was also further reinforced in the empirical section.

The problematic body refers to the many ways in which the body is regarded as problematic. One aspect of this is related to how the body is described within many theoretical developments, where the body in general and women’s bodies in particular have been identified as problematic, in need of change, control etc. This way of describing the body can also be found in areas such as mass media and consumer culture, medicine and through the ways that women themselves relate to their bodies.

The second theme, the ‘controlled body’, refers to the different ways that the body can be controlled. This involves both an external as well as internal control, or what can also be referred to as self-control. Studies have pointed towards an increased emphasis on self-control and individual responsibility for the body, health and wellbeing as well as for other areas of life. Control, both external and internal, is frequently associated with women and their bodies. Moreover, women are often asked to be responsible for or in control of the health and appearance of others’ bodies as well as their own.
The third theme refers to the body as a commodity, something that can be bought, changed, modified and that displays certain values (such as power, prestige and status). As such, it is closely connected to consumer culture both as a commodity and as a focus for consumption. Consumer culture becomes important in relation to the body because it both displays the ideal images of the body and the ways to attain these ideals. The earlier focus on products and services that help to improve and maintain the female body has more recently come to expand and include also the male body.

The fourth and the last theme concern the social body. This involves both the importance of the body for the individual as well as its importance in relation to other people. The body is often believed to display who we are or who we want to be, and becomes as such an important part of people’s self-identity. The way people look, take care of and present themselves to others is therefore important both for the individual and for how s/he will be judged by others, since a person’s value is often based on their physical appearance, particularly the shape of their body. Some body shapes are also more highly valued than others. In contemporary western cultures, the fat body is frequently viewed as ‘bad’, while thinness and muscularity are positively evaluated. Obesity has, as such, also come to be connected to a bad character and a low morality. An obese body is not only considered to be a ‘bad’ body, but it can also be regarded as a physical deviance and a stigma, an idea that mass media also helps to promote. The concept of stigma is important for this study because it demonstrates shared knowledge of the prevailing norms, the attempts made to be/pass as normal, and the awareness of both what is regarded as a stigma and what it means to have one.

Slender girls and muscular boys

The four themes, presented above, have also helped to guide and organise the empirical parts. The findings indicate that the perception of and relation to the body is very much gendered and to a certain degree also related to age. In order to sum up the most important aspects of the respondents’ relationship to their bodies, I have chosen to relate my own findings to two accounts of how both a young woman and a young man respectively perceive and relate to their bodies. Both these accounts were found in popular magazines aimed at girls and women. Girls and boys in the following are discussed separately.

The first example is from an article in a women’s magazine, where five women in the age range between 16 and 69 were asked about their perceptions of their
bodies. Black and white photos of the women dressed in sport bras and tights accompanied the stories. The quote, presented below, is the account that one girl (aged 16) gave of her relationship to her body and the practices she used to alter and control it.

- I do aerobics about three times a week. Of course I work out to get a nice figure, but it is probably mostly because it makes me feel good. One feels satisfied with oneself when one has been exercising.

- I cannot say that I am satisfied with my body, my stomach is big and my thighs are a little fat. I think a lot more of how I look now than I did two years ago. I guess you become more aware when you are older. Everybody becomes like that. Both friends and boyfriends. And then there are all these fashion models that one sees.

I have never been on a diet, but I do think about what I eat. I try to avoid chips and hamburgers. But sometimes I cannot.

When I exercise I try to work a little harder on the parts that I am dissatisfied with. A nice body should be proportionate, not too tall and not too short, not too thin and not too fat. Nothing has to be too big.

I wanted to have a bigger behind before, but now I am glad that it is small. I think it is fun to have nice training clothes. It is not that I compare myself with others who exercise, but of course one wants to look nice.

(Ljungström & Jansson 1996:39) (My translation)

The above quote serves as a good illustration of the importance of the body in the life of a young woman. The young woman is not only dissatisfied with different parts of her body, she is also aware that they can be altered and is involved in different practices to alter it. She tries to control her food intake by thinking about what she eats, and combines this with aerobics, where she tries to focus on her ‘problem spots’. She has adopted a fragmented and problematic way of looking at her body, which is expressed through feelings of the female body as never being ‘right’. She believes that her own and others’ awareness of the body has increased over the years and is, moreover, aware of the cultural ideals and put some of the blame on fashion models.

In fact, this young woman’s account coincides to a large extent with the perceptions of the body expressed by many of the girls in my study, who also have internalised a fragmented and problematic view of their bodies. They refer to the same problem spots and also express a fear of everything that is big and fat.
This dissatisfaction can therefore be related to a fear of having or getting a ‘bad’ body. The wish to get a smaller body size and shape and a lower weight is also further emphasised through the practices they utilise in order to alter and control their bodies. Much attention is focused on different practices to control and alter the body, particularly food and eating, which is used both on its own and in combination with exercise. The body can in this sense be regarded as an object of work for the girls.

A majority of the girls in the study also regard mass media to be an important source of influence for how people in general perceive their bodies and for how they themselves perceive their own. They also frequently compare themselves with their ideals.

Another important finding is related to the body as a commodity and an object. Many studies have emphasised the female body as frequently being on display, both in mass media and in everyday life. It has, furthermore, been argued that girls and women frequently can be regarded as being more ‘on stage’ than boys and men. As such, they are frequently exposed to the gaze of others and especially to the male gaze. This fact seems also to have an impact on how girls (and possibly also boys) perceive the female body. The girls in the study also express a great concern for what others thought of their bodies, which is an indication that they view their own bodies through the critical eyes of others. This awareness of the body as an object of the gaze may also make them aware that their bodies and appearance are judged and scrutinised. What other people think about the body therefore becomes quite important for them. Much attention was also directed to their bodies, which for one thing was expressed through the many comments they received, primarily from other women but also from boys. One can therefore state that the social aspect of the body is important for girls.

Let us now turn to the young man’s account of his perception of his body. The second quote is from a girl’s magazine where it appeared under the heading ‘The naked truth about guys’. In the article, six young men were invited to talk about their perceptions of their bodies. All stories were accompanied by photos of the young men posing nude. The readers were told to ‘enjoy’ the pictures and read the young men’s own stories about their bodies. The youngest (age 19) describes his relationship to the body like this:
-Actually I am satisfied with my body and I do not have any complex about it, I could be some centimetres taller but I am still growing so there is no problem. I am relatively strong but I do not regard that as important.

-On the other hand it is important to look fit, and I am that fit that I do not need to be dissatisfied. Of course everyone has different capabilities but everyone can get an ideal body, one only has to exercise. However, too muscular, anabolic guys are not so nice looking. I also believe that a guy who exercises wants his girlfriend to have a nice body.

-I spend most time on tennis but I also do a bit of body building. Sometimes I get a bad conscience when I eat bad food, it is not good if you exercise. The exercising is also affected when I am out partying a lot too. On the other hand I do not smoke.

-Occasionally girls have told me that I have a fit body. If you have it you should not be afraid to expose it and particularly in the summertime I often choose tight clothes. When I choose clothes I want them to look neat”.

(Mörner 1997:15) (My translation)

This young man appears to be quite satisfied with his body, although he would like to be a bit taller. He regards himself to be fit and this seems to be important to him. However, it is important not to be too big. Exercise is regarded as the prime way to alter the body. Exercise is also related to the question of responsibility, to which we will return later. Food is, nevertheless, not unimportant. He is not afraid of attention and like to display his body to others, which occasionally results in positive comments from girls.

The boys in my study display a similar relation to their bodies as this young man. Although many boys are quite satisfied with their bodies, they still express negative feelings about them. Their dissatisfaction is primarily focused on height and weight, and indicates a desire to be bigger and taller. A big, well-built, fit and muscular body is part of their ideal. However, their own bodies seem not to be as problematic as it is for the girls. Still, many boys are involved in activities with the aim to improve and alter their bodies, particularly exercise.

Other peoples’ bodies tend to be of more concern for boys than their own. However, this attention tends to be more directed to the female than the male body (as was also indicated in the narrative above). They are, for example, more likely to be concerned with how their girlfriend’s body looks, and are more prone than girls to express negative judgements of bodies that do not measure
up to the ideals. While they can easily describe, judge and comment on the female ideal body, it tends to be much more difficult to relate to their own and to other men's bodies. Many boys found it difficult to name other men whom they perceive as particularly good looking, and to express their own views of the ideal male body. However, these difficulties were most obvious when they were asked to express their own view. The general male view was, on the other hand, much easier to describe.

By judging and scrutinising other people's bodies, boys become part of the general male gaze. The fact that their own body may be an object of the gaze does not seem to be of much concern to them. On the whole, in contrast to the girls, they did not seem to be particularly concerned with others' opinions. However, their bodies did attract others' attention, something that was expressed through comments. Women, particularly mothers, were reported to be frequent commentators. Comments from other boys were also quite common, although these, much more often than the comments from women, tended to be negative. Despite the fact that they do not seem to be troubled by other people's views, they still regard friends in particular to be the most important source of influence for how they perceive their own bodies.

What the young man in the above account does not mention, but what many boys in my study express, is the importance of ideal images. The boys, as do the girls, compare their own bodies to others, want to look like the ideals and regard mass media to be an important influence.

There are also apparent age differences in the way the respondents perceive their bodies and these are connected to gender. However, it is difficult to compare girls and boys within different age groups, not least because the age range is small and since they tend to develop very differently. Still, there is a tendency for the older girls to be more dissatisfied with the size and shape of their body as well as with some of its specific parts. A reverse situation is found among the boys, who instead tend to be more satisfied the older they are. The largest differences between girls and boys are found among the oldest age group. The influence from friends and mass media tend also to be perceived as more important among the oldest. For girls this is primarily related to mass media, while for the boys it tends to be more related to the influence of friends.
Problematic femininity and masculinity

This study has shown that there are obvious gender differences both in young people’s own perceptions of the body and in the way that the body is portrayed within mass media, popular- and consumer culture. When interpreting the findings a clear connection can be made between how girls and boys express their relation to the body and the socially constructed images of feminine and masculine ideal bodies.

Many of these messages are stereotyped and tend to reinforce ‘traditional’ femininity and masculinity. Femininity is, among other things, commonly associated with the improvement of body and appearance and with care work of both one’s own and other people’s bodies, while masculinity is frequently associated with sports and with being brave, strong and muscular. Such culturally defined ideals may become problematic to relate to for both girls and boys.

Beauty and beauty care can be regarded as a way for women to confirm femininity. This is a notion that is heavily supported by both consumer and popular culture. Moreover, women are often regarded as more feminine the more they care about body and appearance, implying that if a girl or a woman is uninterested in the way she looks her femininity will probably be questioned. Complying with the need to alter and improve the body will, on the other hand, be positively viewed. Women are, furthermore, frequently judged on the merits of their bodies and their beauty. Boys and men are also judged on the merits of their bodies, although less often in relation to how good they look and more through action, often in relation to sports.

Many of the girls in the study tend not only to be troubled by their body and appearance but also to be aware that their bodies are to be assessed and viewed as objects. This probably makes it even more important for them to try to comply to the ideals or just pass as ‘normal’. Many girls are also actively engaged in practices with the aim to alter and/or control the body. It is easy to view this engagement and work on the body only as something negative, as a sign of female oppression, or even regard girls and women to be cultural dopes who have passively adopted the cultural messages about beauty. Although it is important to highlight these two very important aspects, it is also important to acknowledge girls’ active and creative engagement in their bodies. Experimenting with appearance, trying out new hairstyles, makeup, clothes etc. is often regarded as a source of joy for young girls - a way to try out different femininities. It is
therefore important not to view young people only as passive recipients of social and cultural influences. Instead, they actively participate in the shaping, maintaining and negotiation of gender.

The existing ideals and images of masculinity may also be problematic for boys and young men. While femininity is repeatedly associated with beauty, which often implies a negative connection, masculinity is often related to sport, which on the other hand mostly implies a positive connection. Sport can, for instance, be viewed as empowering for boys and men, in the sense that sport helps young men to develop bodies that are muscular and big, something that, as well as being strong, tough, fit and good at sports, is in line with hegemonic masculinity.

Although men less often than women are found actively taking care of their bodies in other ways than doing sport, a nice body and appearance is still important to them. The rapidly developing market for male body and beauty care products and services is only one such indicator. However, boys and men tend to get mixed signals from mass media portrayals of men and masculinity. On the one hand they learn that the male body, as well as the female, is important and that taking care of the body means both to maintain and reinforce a masculine self. On the other hand they indirectly also learn that body care is a feminine practice, something that will raise questions about their masculinity. The result is a strengthening of traditional masculinity at the same time as it is regarded as unmasculine to care too much about the body or appearance.

Boys’ difficulty in expressing feelings about their own and other men’s bodies, as well a reluctance to care too much about the body, can also be related to a fear of homosexuality and of being regarded as homosexual. This fear is also seen in advertising and commercials. Men in ads, particularly those who are lightly dressed, for example seldom touch each other, especially not the bare flesh of another man. Women, sports equipment such as balls, or clothes etc. are instead placed between them. Another observed trend is the feminisation of men in ads and commercials, where they for instance are seen laughing, undressed and as objects. However, these images are often supplemented with words or associations that are connected to traditionally male areas such as sports, manual work etc.

On the whole, there seems to be an increasing interest in the male body in mass media and popular culture. Men not only frequently appear in ads and commer-
cial, they participate in beauty contests, strip shows etc. where their bodies and appearance are in focus much in the same way as for women. This situation might have a potential to change boys’ and men’s relationship to their own and other men’s bodies. This is particularly so if the pressure on men to conform to the ideals continues to increase, and if girls and women also come to express a demand that men also should take care of their bodies and appearance. One might wonder what signals and what impact such images might have on young men?

**Concluding discussion**

What this study has shown is that the body matters very much for many young people today, both their own perceptions of it and what others think of it. Although the number of respondents is relatively small, which makes generalisations difficult, it is remarkable how closely their perception of the body corresponds with findings in earlier studies. The results are further reinforced by mass media products repeated portrayal of the body as a problem in need of control and as a commodity which marks the social value of its owner.

Friends, together with mass media, are also regarded as the strongest sources of influence for how the respondents, particularly the girls and the oldest, perceive their bodies. In the case of mass media, visual media and magazines are regarded as especially influencing. Mass media are not only seen to influence the respondents’ own way of viewing their bodies; they are also regarded as influencing young people in general.

The ideal images presented in mass media can be used as a source of information about how to take care of the body and the products and services on offer, but they can also be seen as a gender manual and as a source of comparisons. The results also indicate that these different ways of relating to the ideal images are to a certain extent also used by the respondents. They indicate that they compare their bodies to others, want to look like people in TV commercials and try to get their bodies to match their ideal image. However, it is not only the ideal bodies that influence people’s notions of body and beauty ideals. Representations of ‘bad’ bodies, or bodies that deviate from the ideals, are also important in the sense that they show how people with such bodies are viewed and treated. The frequent portrayal of the body as a problematic, fragmented object
in need of improvement and control seems also to influence young people’s, particularly girls’, view of their own bodies.

What can be concluded is that mass media are an important source of influence. However, it is difficult to say in what way they are important and how young people perceive and relate to the ideal as well as other images on offer. Other methods, like reception analysis, are needed in order to study these questions further.

The study also indicates that the social aspect of the body and the importance of friends as a source of influence are significant. The importance of other people’s views of one’s own body and receiving comments about it are two of the areas that, together with more interactional aspects, need more attention. Gendered differences are particularly interesting to further focus on here, since there seem to be large differences in how girls and boys perceive the importance of other people.

The link between these two sources of influence is another area in need of further attention, not least since they together may help to reinforce the social and cultural ideals. One important connection between the two is the body as an object of the gaze. Girls’ greater concern with other people’s views of the body and the frequent portrayal of women as objects in mass media content may be one explanation of the great significance they give to both these sources.

The frequent presentation of the body as a problem in need of control, care and attention helps to make the body become a project for people. To invest time, money and interest in the body can be regarded as a good investment since positive effects will be visible both at a personal as well as a social level. Young people’s level of engagement in body practices aimed to alter and improve the body indicate that there is both a knowledge of the plasticity of the body and a widespread belief that it is possible to change the body through such work. This engagement can be understood as a way of looking at the body as a project.

A question that this study cannot answer is what consequences this significant interest in the body will have for young people as they become older. Nor can it tell if a nice body and appearance really is worth all the time, money and energy that needs to be invested to get the desired body; or what the positive and negative experiences are of young people who have tried more extreme practices like plastic surgery and steroids.
The respondents’ view of the individual responsibility for the body, which often includes looking after it, that is, to stay healthy and prevent it from sickness, ageing and decay but also to keep it or change it into a presentable condition, seems to be somewhat difficult to interpret. This is particularly so when their own bodies are involved. On the one hand, the respondents show a significant engagement in the altering and improvement of the body, which can be regarded as an adoption of the idea that one is responsible for the body. Very few agree, on the other hand, that the individual is responsible for his or her own body when the question is asked more directly. However, other people may still be regarded as responsible for the way they look. The respondents’ predominantly negative associations with the photo of the young woman that was presented to them indicates that this might be the case, suggesting that this is a very complex issue that the respondents seemed to be aware of but not apply to themselves.

One should not forget that there is also a positive side connected to the care of and responsibility for the body, which is strongly emphasised by, for instance, school health care and public health campaigns. The care of the body is here presented as something positive that makes you feel good, stay healthy and avoid illness by eating healthy food, participating in regular exercise activities, having good sleeping routines and not smoking, using alcohol or other drugs. These messages need to be further emphasised as well as those that question and discuss the existing ideals. However, it is a careful balancing act, as a strong fixation with the body may become detrimental and even dangerous, resulting in, for instance, eating disorders and the use of anabolic steroids as two possible outcomes.

**Suggestions for further research**

The high prominence that looking good has today, the portrayal of the body as problematic and the frequent promise that most problems will be solved as long as we have or continue to aspire to an ideal body and appearance seem to influence the way young people perceive their own bodies. The findings indicate that there is a need to further discuss and question contemporary images of ideal women and men and femininity and masculinity, both within the family, at school, in the media and in research. The constantly changing ideals, the intensified focus on the male body and the increasing new possibilities for changing
and modifying the body and appearance are all areas that call for further research.

Having a body that does not fit into contemporary ideal images of the masculine or feminine body may result in a variety of possible reactions from other people, such as teasing, bullying, exclusion etc. These and other possible reactions as well as questions about resistance have only been touched upon in this study. In understanding young people’s attempts to both ‘pass as normal’ and to aspire to achieve an ideal body, they all constitute important areas in need of further development. Gendered experiences as well as contrasting experiences from young people with chronic illnesses, physical disabilities, eating disorders, obesity etc might also help to shed light on these issues. Their experiences of their own, others’ and the ideal body may constitute a valuable insight and possibly also a contrast to how young people in this study perceive their bodies. The perceptions and experiences of older women and men may also help to broaden the understanding of the importance of the ideal body.

Men and their relationship to the body is another interesting area in need of further attention. This includes everything from men’s inclusion in consumer culture (for example, the use of plastic surgery, cosmetic products, body and beauty treatments etc), the exposure of the male body in commercials, beauty and fitness contests, male strippers and other related areas, as well as the impact of these phenomena on men’s experiences of their bodies. The tendency to regard women’s bodies as particularly problematic may also spread over to men whose bodies will be easier to scrutinise when they become objectified or publicly displayed more frequently. All these issues raise a lot of interesting questions; for example, what impact will men’s changing roles as sex objects, fashion models etc and the cosmetic products and services aimed at men have on their perception of their own bodies? How does the health reports on the growing numbers of obese men affect their relations to the body? What impact will this have on men’s image, their will to change their bodies through food intake, exercise habits and plastic surgery?

These are all questions and areas that future research will need to develop further in order to get a better understanding of the importance of the ideal body in contemporary culture.

This study can be regarded as one contribution to the lively and expanding area of the sociology of the body, where it can be seen both as a starting point for
further research and as a contribution to the growing discussion of the impact of cultural ideals for both women and men. Although this discussion is by no means new, I believe it will still have a lot to offer in the future.
References


Young, Iris Marion (1990) *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.


# Appendix 1

## Table 1. Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2 s.s</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Table 2. The participants’ social situation. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social situation</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents’ marital status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>married/co-habiting</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>divorced</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>re-married</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>single/widow</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living conditions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>both parents</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one parent</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in turns</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socio-economic status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blue collar</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white collar</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professionals</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unclassified</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comments: A majority of the respondents report that they live with both of their parents, who are married or co-habiting. About one out of five has parents who are divorced. The socio-economic status of the family is based on the respondent’s report of the parents’ occupation. This turned out to be a somewhat difficult question to answer. About one out of five were not able to tell what their mother’s occupation was and one fourth had difficulties naming their father’s occupation. The occupations are divided according to socio-economic status using SEI-codes. The variable describes the social position of the family based on the parent who has the highest socio-economic position. This means that both the mother and the father, separately or together, can contribute to the social position of the family. This strategy has helped to make the variable more stable and to decrease the dropout rate. No age or gender differences were found for any of the above variables.
YOUNG BODIES

This is a study about body and appearance. It also includes other things such as friends, things you do in your spare time and your media habits.

Try to answer the questions as accurately as you can but, do not think about each question too long. It is important that you try to answer all of the questions. If there is any question that you feel you absolutely don't want to answer, just skip it and try to answer the following ones instead. Don't hesitate to ask if there is something you don't understand.

Maybe you feel that some questions are bad or stupid. Try to answer them anyway, but please write a comment on what you thought about them. There is space at the end for your comments on the questionnaire.

The study is confidential and you do not need to worry that someone will find out how you have responded.

Thank you for your co-operation

Staffan Marklund
Professor

Carita Bengs
Doctoral student
QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU, YOUR PARENTS AND HOW YOU LIVE

1. Are you a girl or a boy?
   - [ ] girl
   - [ ] boy

2. In what year were you born?
   19_______

3. Do you live
   - [ ] with both parents
   - [ ] alternate between mother and father
   - [ ] other, how?________________________
   - [ ] with one parent
   - [ ] as a boarder

4. My parents are
   - [ ] married/co-habiting
   - [ ] separated/divorced
   - [ ] re-married
   - [ ] single
   - [ ] widowed

5. What jobs do your parents have? If you don't know describe what they do at work.
   Mother: ____________________________
   Father: ____________________________
6  Have your parents studied at university?

- [ ] yes, mother  - [ ] yes, father  - [ ] no  - [ ] not sure

7  Do you have any sisters or brothers?

- [ ] yes  - [ ] no --> question 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How many?</th>
<th>How old are they?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- [ ] 1</td>
<td>_______ (oldest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- [ ] 2</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- [ ] 3</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- [ ] 4</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______ (youngest)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8 **How would you describe your appearance? (that is your face and hair)** Mark with an X where on the scale you would place yourself.

I am very attractive
I am ugly

I-------------------------------I

9 **Are you satisfied with your appearance? (that is your face and hair)** Mark with an X where on the scale you would place yourself.

yes, completely
no, not at all

I-------------------------------I

10 **What about your looks are you most dissatisfied with?**
You may mark more than one box if you wish.

☐ hair  ☐ eyes  ☐ nose  ☐ ears
☐ mouth  ☐ shape of face  ☐ teeth  ☐ skin
☐ other, what?_________________________

11 **Here are some statements about appearance, etc.**
Mark with an X how well you agree with each one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree completely</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Do not really agree</th>
<th>Do not agree at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I spend a lot of my time on my appearance</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spend a lot of money on different skin and hair products</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in fashion</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to be a little different</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
QUESTIONS ABOUT PLASTIC/COSMETIC SURGERY

12 Would you consider having plastic/cosmetic surgery?

☐ yes       ☐ no --> question 13

If so, what would you change?

________________________________________________________________________

13 Do you know anyone who has had plastic/cosmetic surgery?

☐ yes       ☐ no --> question 14

What have they changed?________________________________________________________________________

14 How do you feel about the following statements about plastic/cosmetic surgery. Mark with an X how well you agree with each statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree completely</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Do not really agree</th>
<th>Do not agree at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would consider having cosmetic surgery to get a more attractive face</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would consider having cosmetic surgery to get a more attractive body</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would not consider having cosmetic surgery, but it is OK if others do it</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many fashion models and movie stars have had cosmetic surgery to get a more attractive body</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only girls/women have cosmetic surgery</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions about the body (the face or hair are not included)

15 How does your body look? Put an X in the box by the drawing that looks most like your own body.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

16 If you could change your body how would you like it to look? Put an X in the box by the drawing that looks the way you would like to look.

If you do not want to change the way your body looks, put an X in this box ☐
15 How does your body look? Put an X in the box by the drawing that looks most like your own body.

16 If you could change your body how would you like it to look? Put an X in the box by the drawing that looks the way you would like to look.

If you do not want to change the way your body looks, put an X in this box.
17 Are you satisfied with your body? Mark with an X where on the scale you would place yourself.

Yes, completely no, not at all

I-----------------------------------------------I

18 Which part(s) of your body are you most satisfied with? Please, do not include your face or hair.

____________________________

Why?

____________________________

19 Which part(s) of your body are you most dissatisfied with? Please, do not include your face or hair.

____________________________

Why?

____________________________

20 Are you satisfied with your height?

☐ yes --> question 21 ☐ no, I would like to be ____ cm taller

☐ no, I would like to be ____ cm shorter
21 Are you satisfied with your weight?

☐ yes --> question 22  ☐ no, I would like to gain ____ kg

☐ no, I would like to lose ____ kg

22 Are you doing anything to change the things you are dissatisfied with? You may mark more than one box if you like.

☐ yes, diet  ☐ yes, work out  ☐ other what? ____________

☐ no, nothing

23 Write the name of a female celebrity you find especially attractive. Write also what this person is famous for (actress, singer, athlete etc.)

__________________________________________

What do you find attractive about this person?

__________________________________________

24 Write the name of a male celebrity you find especially attractive. Write also what this person is famous for (actor, singer, athlete etc.)

__________________________________________

What do you find attractive about this person?

__________________________________________

25 Use three words to describe your ideal boyfriend/girlfriend.

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________
Below is a picture of a woman. Look at the picture and try to choose the three words that you think best describe her. Mark your choices with an X.

- lazy  
- hard-working  
- sluggish  
- competent  
- active  
- passive  
- nervous  
- kind  
- fast  
- slow  
- ambitious  
- happy  
- sad  
- funny  
- boring  
- angry  
- disgusting  
- confident  
- smart  
- honest  
- dishonest  
- successful  
- other ____________________
QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW YOU SEE OTHERS' BODIES
AND HOW OTHERS SEE YOUR BODY

Here is a list of words that you can choose from when answering questions 27-30. Write the most important first, then the second important etc. Please write only one word per space.

face   shoulders   arms   hands   breasts/chest   waist
buttocks   hips   legs   feet   other, write your own alternative

27 What do you think is most important for a girl to have a nice body? Choose from the words above.

1. ____________________
2. ____________________
3. ____________________

28 What do you think is most important for a boy to have a nice body? Choose from the words above.

1. ____________________
2. ____________________
3. ____________________

29 Which body parts do you think that boys in general consider important for a girl to have a nice body? Choose from the words above.

1. ____________________
2. ____________________
3. ____________________
30 Which body parts do you think that girls in general consider important for a girl to have a nice body? Choose from the words above.

1. __________________________
2. __________________________
3. __________________________

31 How often do you get comments about your body from the following people and what type of comments are they? For each person listed below, place an X for how often they comment on your body. In the last column write (+) if the comments from that person are usually positive, and (-) if they are usually negative and finally (+/-) if they are usually both positive and negative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>often</th>
<th>sometimes</th>
<th>never</th>
<th>type of comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male friends</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female friends</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyfriend/girlfriend</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32 What are the comments usually about?

________________________________________________________________________________________
**Here are some statements about bodies.** Mark with an X the answer that best matches your reaction to the statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree completely</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Do not really agree</th>
<th>Do not agree at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is important for me that I have a nice body</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important that others think that I have a nice body</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important that my friends have nice bodies</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important that my boyfriend/girlfriend have a nice body</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important that my boyfriend/girlfriend think that I have a nice body</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to have a nice body when applying for jobs</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is more important for a girl to have a nice body than it is for a boy</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is more important for a younger person to have a nice body than it is for an older person</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is more important to have an attractive face than a nice body</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys think that a girl's body is more important than her face</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls think that a boy's body is more important than his face</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A person with a nice body gets treated better</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a person's responsibility to try to do something to get a nicer body</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty girls do not get taken seriously</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often compare my body with others’</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to get my body to match my ideal picture</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I worry that my boyfriend/girlfriend won't find my body attractive enough</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How much influence do you think that the people and media listed below have had on the way you see your body? Mark with an X the best answer for each.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No influence</th>
<th>Some influence</th>
<th>Large influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, what?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**QUESTIONS ABOUT FOOD, EATING AND WEIGHT**

### 35

**Here are some statements about food and eating.** Mark with an X the answer that best matches your own opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree completely</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Do not really agree</th>
<th>Do not agree at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I often think about what I eat</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel guilty when I eat candy/fast food</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often eat because I feel alone or sad</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I usually try to choose &quot;light&quot; products when they are available</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 36

**How often do you do the following in order to measure the size of your body?** Mark with an X the answer that best matches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Once/ day</th>
<th>Once/ week</th>
<th>Once/ month</th>
<th>Once/ year</th>
<th>Almost never/ never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weigh myself</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure myself with a tape measure</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study my body in the mirror</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure myself by the way my clothes fit</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td>Do you know anyone or know of anyone who has/has had anorexia (self starvation)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ yes  □ no --&gt; question 38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How many? girls _____   boys _____</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How old are they? girls _____   boys _____</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
<td>Do you know anyone or know of anyone who has/has had bulimia (binge eating)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ yes  □ no --&gt; question 39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How many? girls _____   boys _____</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How old are they? girls _____   boys _____</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
<td>Have you yourself ever suffered from anorexia/bulimia or had similar symptoms?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Yes, anorexia  □ yes, bulimia  □ yes, both  □ no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
QUESTIONS ABOUT SPORTS AND EXERCISE

40 Do you exercise or participate in sports?

☐ yes    ☐ no --> question 47

Which sport(s) or exercise activities do you participate in?


41 How many days a week do you practice a sport or exercise?


How many hours per week?


42 What does your training schedule look like?

☐ regularly during the entire year    ☐ seasonally

☐ now and then    ☐ other, how?


43 Do you compete in a sport?

☐ yes    ☐ no

Which one(s)?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>44 Do you have a trainer/coach?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- no --&gt; question 46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 Has your trainer/coach ever commented on your weight?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 Has your trainer/coach ever encouraged you to lose weight?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 Has your trainer/coach ever encouraged you to gain weight?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 Have the people you work out or practice together with ever commented on your weight?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
QUESTIONS ABOUT DOPING ANABOLIC
STEROIDS, GROWTH HORMONES AND SIMILAR
SUBSTANCES

47 Do you personally know anybody who has tried or uses anabolic steroids or similar substances?

☐ yes  ☐ no --> question 48

How many? girls _______ boys_______

How old are they? girls _______ boys_______

Why do you think that young people use anabolic steroids or similar substances?

girls __________________________________

boys__________________________________

48 Have you yourself ever tried anabolic steroids or similar substances?

☐ yes  ☐ no
Respond to the following statements in a way that best reflects your opinion regarding the use of anabolic steroids or similar substances (A S for short). Mark with an X the answer that best matches your reaction to the statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree completely</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Do not really agree</th>
<th>Do not agree at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would consider trying A S in order to improve my sports/exercise activities</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would consider trying A S in order to get a nicer body</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would consider trying A S in order to get bigger muscles</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would consider trying A S in order to get stronger</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would consider trying A S in because my friends do</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would not want to try A S myself, but it is OK with me that others use it</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would never use A S because they are illegal</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think that the risks said to be associated with A S are exaggerated</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I exercise mainly to get a nicer body</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
QUESTIONS ABOUT FRIENDS

50 How many close friends do you have? (That are non-family members who you feel you know well and can talk to about almost anything).

51 How often do you see your friends during your spare time? (Not during school).

☐ everyday ☐ several times a week
☐ about once a week ☐ once or a few times per month
☐ almost never

52 Do you usually spend time with one special "best friend" or with several different friends?

☐ one special friend ☐ a few friends ☐ several friends

53 What do you prefer to do in your spare time? Write only one activity.

54 Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend right now?

☐ yes ☐ no

55 Have you ever had a boyfriend/girlfriend?

☐ yes ☐ no
56 Do you usually talk to the following people when you feel sad or depressed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
<th>Yes, usually</th>
<th>Yes, sometime</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>No, never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyfriend/girlfriend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School personnel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, who?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

57 Below are some statements about you and your friends. Mark with an X the answer that best matches your reaction to the statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree completely</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Do not really agree</th>
<th>Do not agree at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am popular among my group of friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am popular with boys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am popular with girls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often feel lonely</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am just as good as anybody else</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I feel worthless</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easy for me to feel like a failure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All in all, I am happy with who I am</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easy for me to make contact with other people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am as good at most things as my friends are</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR MEDIA HABITS

58 Which magazines (weekly, monthly or comics) do you usually read, and how often? Write the name of the magazine on the line and mark an X for the response that best matches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Every day</th>
<th>About once a week</th>
<th>About once a month</th>
<th>About once a year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

59 How often do you watch videos?

☐ every day  ☐ 3–4 times a week  ☐ 1–2 times a week
☐ a few times a month  ☐ a few times a year  ☐ never

60 How often do you go to the movies?

☐ about once a week  ☐ about once a month
☐ a few times a year  ☐ never

61 On average, how many hours a day do you watch TV?

__________ hours

62 How often do you watch TV commercials?

☐ every time they run  ☐ almost always  ☐ sometimes
☐ never  ☐ other, what_______________________
Below are a few statements regarding your views on TV commercials. Mark with an X the response that best matches your own opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree completely</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Do not really agree</th>
<th>Do not agree at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I usually stay and watch when commercials are shown on TV</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think commercials shown at the movies are better than the ones shown on TV</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I usually talk with others about commercials I have seen</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I usually think about the message in commercials</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think that commercials are fun</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think that commercials are boring</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see commercials as a break when I do other things</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I watch TV commercials to get information about different products</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I watch TV commercials to see the latest trends</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I watch TV commercials to fantasise about other things</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I watch TV commercials to see attractive boys and girls</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to look like the people in the commercials</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think that commercials are fixated on bodies</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising affect young peoples' views about their body</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### What do you think makes a good commercial stand out? Mark with an X the response that best matches your own opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree completely</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Do not really agree</th>
<th>Do not agree at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>That it is funny</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That there is a story in it</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That it surprises me</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That it is filmed in a pleasant environment</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That the music is good</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That the people in it have nice bodies</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That it contain boys/girls that are good looking</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That it is about products that I am interested in</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Questions About School, Your Future and Your Plans for the Future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65 How much do you like school?</td>
<td>very much, pretty much, not so much, not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 How would you describe your school performance?</td>
<td>well above average, above average, average, below average, much below average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67 Will you continue study after your compulsory schooling?</td>
<td>yes, no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68 How do you see your chances of shaping your future and doing what you want to do?</td>
<td>very good, pretty good, small, none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69 What is your dream job?</td>
<td>Only write one</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What job do you think that you will actually have in the future? Only write one
### QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH

**71** During the teen years the body changes in several different ways. These changes can come at different ages for different people. Of the changes listed below, which ones have you noticed have started in your body? Mark with an X the response that fits best.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Has not started</th>
<th>Has just started</th>
<th>Has definitely started</th>
<th>Has stopped</th>
<th>Do not know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you started to grow at a faster rate?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you started to get bodily hair (for example under your arms)?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you noticed any changes in your complexion (oily skin or acne)?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have your breasts started to grow?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you started your menstrual cycle (&quot;period&quot;)?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**71 b)** If you have already started your menstrual cycle, how old were you when it started?

_____ year and _____ months

□ Do not remember

**72** Do you suffer from any sicknesses that cause you to see a doctor regularly?

□ yes

□ no

What sickness? ____________________________
## QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH

### 71

During the teen years the body changes in several different ways. These changes can come at different ages for different people. Of the changes listed below, which ones have you noticed have started in your body? Mark with an X the response that fits best.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Has not started</th>
<th>Has just started</th>
<th>Has definitely started</th>
<th>Has stopped</th>
<th>Do not know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you started to grow at a faster rate?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you started to get bodily hair (for example under your arms)?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you noticed any changes in your complexion (oily skin or acne)?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have your voice started to change (got deeper)?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you started to grow a beard?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 72

Do you suffer from any sicknesses that cause you to see a doctor regularly?

☐ yes  ☐ no

Which sickness? ____________________________________________________________
### 73 How often do you suffer from the following? Mark with an X the response that best matches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Almost every day</th>
<th>More than once a week</th>
<th>About once a week</th>
<th>About once a month</th>
<th>Seldom or never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach ache</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back pain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel depressed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritated or in a bad mood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel nervous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty sleeping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel dizzy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 74 Do you smoke?

- [ ] yes, daily
- [ ] yes, sometimes
- [ ] no
You can write whatever you want to here, for example what you thought of the questions in the questionnaire.
**Appendix 3**

Table 3:1. Actual measures of body size, height, weight and BMI. Range and means between girls and boys and between the different age groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>Grade 2 s.s</td>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>Grade 2 s.s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Height</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>range cm</td>
<td>149–177</td>
<td>153.5–181.5</td>
<td>153–178</td>
<td>139–189</td>
<td>162.5–189</td>
<td>175.5–190.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>181</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weight</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>range kg</td>
<td>32.2–68.1</td>
<td>36.8–72.2</td>
<td>45.4–68.8</td>
<td>30–70.2</td>
<td>46.8–99.8</td>
<td>56.4–77.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BMI</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>range</td>
<td>14.3–23</td>
<td>15.2–26.5</td>
<td>18.4–25</td>
<td>15.5–22.4</td>
<td>16.8–30.8</td>
<td>18–24.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3:2. The association between the perception of the body and the perception of appearance. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of the body</th>
<th>Perceived</th>
<th>Indifferent</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p***
Table 3:3. The relationship between body shape and BMI. Means.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Labels</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entire population</td>
<td></td>
<td>20.36</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body shape</td>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>14.40</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>18.50</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>20.17</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>22.44</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>26.20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3:4. Girls’ and boys’ perception of height and weight. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p n.s *
## Appendix 4

### Table 4.1. Girls’ and boys’ control of the body size by the use of different body measuring techniques. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Use the mirror</th>
<th>Use the scales</th>
<th>Use the clothes</th>
<th>Use a tape measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a day</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yearly</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardly ever</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>n.s</td>
<td>n.s</td>
<td>n.s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.2. Girls’ and boys’ attention to food and eating expressed by the eating habit index. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attention to food and eating</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 5

Young people’s media habits

The influence from different media sources is hardly surprising considering the time many young people are engaged with mass media and especially television. TV is an important part of young people’s everyday life. This is also true for the respondents in this study who in general spent about 2.8 hours per day (162 minutes) in front of the TV. This figure is, compared to other studies of media habits among Swedish youth (cf. Nordicom-Sverige 1996), about one hour more than the average in the same age groups. Girls and boys watch about the same amount of television each day. Age and social position tend, however, to have some impact on viewing patterns. The oldest tend to watch less, while respondents in grade 9 tend to watch most. Respondents with a low social position tend to have a higher consumption than do those with a higher social position Watching videos and going to the movies are two other popular activities among both girls and boys and across age groups.

Magazines, another important source of influence, are also popular with many young people. Forty-five percent of all young people between 13-20 years of age are reported to read magazines every day (Hernbäck 2000:A24). It is easier to find magazines aimed at young girls and women than magazines for young men. However, a new market of magazines aimed both at young men and at men of all ages can now be found. ‘Slitz’ and ‘Café’ are two such magazines; they carry articles on fashion, sport, technical devices and much more. Photographs of sexy, lightly dressed females can be found both in the magazine as well as on the cover. Many of these girls are famous singers, actresses or mod-

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131 The respondents were asked to estimate how many hours a day that they watched TV. The viewing time varies from half an hour to 13 hours a day.

132 It is, however, difficult to compare the results from different studies since both questions (how and when they are asked) and classifications (age, class etc) often tend to differ. Mediebarometer 1995 presents, for instance, its figures according to two main age groups, age 9-14 and 15-25. The viewing time for the age group 9-14 was 102 minutes and the viewing time for young people in the age group 15-25 was 113 minutes (Nordicom-Sverige 1996). The viewing time among my respondents was 166 minutes in Grade 7, 186 minutes in Grade 9, and 146 minutes in Secondary school.

133 About half of the respondents reported that they watched videos once a week or more, while 43 percent said they watch them a few times a month. Going to the movies is another quite popular activity. Almost half of the respondents go to the movies monthly, while the rest report that they go a few times a year.
els. According to reader studies, these magazines tend to attract a somewhat older group of young men (15–24 years of age), while young boys (between 13–15) seem to be moderately interested in them (Hernbäck 2000:A24).

Likewise, most studies on young people’s reading habits have focused on girls’ magazines and young women’s reading habits in general. Less attention has, however, been directed to young men’s reading habits and to how such material contributes to their understanding and performance of masculinity (Phoenix 1997:8).

Two of the most popular magazines among young girls are ‘Veckorevyn’ and ‘Frida’. About 35 percent of young Swedish females between 15–24 are reported to read ‘Veckorevyn’, one of the biggest youth magazines in Sweden today (Hernbäck 2000:A24). Although this and many other magazines claim that they aim for an older audience, many young people report that they read them. ‘Frida’, another very popular girls’ magazine, seems to be particularly popular among younger girls; about 50 percent of young girls between 13 and 15 are reported to read the magazine, although again it claims that it aims at a somewhat older group of readers (age 15 to 19) (Hernbäck 2000:A24).

Common themes in these magazines are related to the body and beauty such as fashion, cosmetics, sex and relations, famous people; but also to trends in general and to media, film, music etc (cf. Holm 1997). Celebrities are frequently featured in connection with advertising, gossip pages and in interview articles. These subjects are also quite popular among young readers (Holm 1997).

Some studies have also found a change in the content of girls and women’s magazines over the years. This can be seen as a shift of focus for old and traditional subjects and also as an attention towards new themes. Traditional subjects, such as love, have become a way of finding and expressing the self, and together with new themes, such as the body, it has often come to be presented in self reflexive articles (Arvidsson 1996). These kinds of shifts can also be seen as related to changes in the construction of femininity (McRobbie 1993). It can be argued that magazines, as well as advertising (as was discussed in Chapter 3), can be regarded as gender manuals. By reading them, young people get inspiration and advice on how to become “successful” young men and women, with all that this demands. They also get a picture of the other sex, albeit a picture that is not always true.
Ideal persons with ideal bodies

Table 5:1. Girls' and boys' reasons for finding female and male celebrities attractive. Per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attraction focused on</th>
<th>Female celebrity</th>
<th></th>
<th>Male celebrity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body and face</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body and fitness</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General positive comments</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p

* n.s
## Appendix 6

**Table 6:1. The respondents’ own choice of words to describe the young woman in the photo.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat/Obese</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courageous</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confident</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proud</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seems to be happy with herself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neutral</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peaceful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary person</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N | 27 | 16 | 43 |

**Table 6:2. Type of comment (positive and negative) from different persons. Per cent.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments from</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Both positive and negative</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisters/brothers</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male friends</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female friends</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy/girlfriend</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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