

**Body Acceptance Class
Manual**

Enhanced-Dissonance Version

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OVERVIEW

PURPOSE

This manual outlines a dissonance-based body acceptance intervention, referred to as the *Body Project*, that has been developed and evaluated at Stanford University, the University of Texas at Austin, and Oregon Research Institute. The *Body Project* is the outgrowth of a 16-year program of research on the risk factors for eating disorders by this research team. This intervention has been delivered to over 1 million young women around the world. The intervention consists of verbal, written, and behavioral exercises in which participants voluntarily critique the thin appearance ideal promoted for females during four weekly sessions. These activities have been shown to result in decreased subscription to the “thin ideal” or “appearance ideal” and consequent reductions in body dissatisfaction, negative mood, dieting, and eating disorder symptoms, as well as decreased risk for future eating disorders and improved psychosocial functioning when delivered by research clinicians (Stice, Marti, Spoor, Presnell, & Shaw, 2008; Stice, Mazotti, Weibel, & Agras, 2000; Stice, Shaw, Burton, & Wade, 2006) as well as clinicians who work in high schools and colleges (Stice, Butryn, Rohde, Shaw, & Marti, 2013; Stice, Rohde, Gau, & Shaw, 2009; Stice, Rohde, Shaw & Gau, 2011). The most rigorous trial conducted to date found that the intervention prevented 60% of the cases of eating disorders that emerged in the control condition over a 3-year follow-up, suggesting that for every 100 young women who complete this program, there should be 9 fewer cases of eating pathology over the subsequent 3-year period. This intervention also produces superior effects than several alternative interventions. Numerous independent labs have replicated the positive effects for this intervention (Becker, Smith, & Ciao, 2006; Green, Scott, Diyankova, Gasser, & Pederson, 2005; Halliwell & Diedrichs, 2014; Matusek, Wendt, & Wiseman, 2004; Mitchell, Mazzeo, Rausch, & Cooke, 2007; Roehrig, Thompson, Brannick, & van den Berg, 2006).

Consistent with the intervention theory, reductions in thin-ideal internalization mediate the *Body Project* effects on change in eating disorder symptoms (Seidel et al., 2009; Stice et al., 2007) and participants assigned to high- versus low-dissonance versions of this program showed greater eating disorder symptom reduction (Green et al., 2005; McMillan et al., 2011). The *Body Project* also produced larger symptom reductions for youth with initially elevated thin-ideal internalization, consistent with the thesis that they experience more dissonance (Stice et al., 2008) and eliminated the negative effect of exposure to thin models on body dissatisfaction in young girls (Halliwell & Diedrichs, 2014). Participant who completed the *Body Project* showed a reduction in brain reward region response to thin models compared to controls (Stice, Yokum, & Waters, 2014), indicating that this body acceptance class reduces neural response to stimuli thought to play a key role in promoting body image and eating disturbances.

No other body acceptance class/eating disorder prevention program has been found to significantly reduce future eating disorder onset, outperformed alternative credible interventions, produce effects that persist through 3-year follow-up, or produced effects that have been replicated by independent research teams.

*****Note to Facilitators:** Although the Orthodox Jewish community has several intentional buffers against the influence of secular culture and its perpetuation of the thin ideal, they are not immune to its influence and it has become apparent that the “thin ideal” or “appearance ideal” has infiltrated the culture. Many Orthodox Jews are exposed to secular stores,

online shopping, billboards, and advertisements, which readily propagate this ideal. Even within the community, the appearance ideal can be seen in the style of dress, clothing store merchandise, and emphasis on dieting and weight loss in the local media.

It is also known that women and young girls in this community are not immune to eating disorders. A recent New York Times article from April of 2011 (*Rabbis Sound an Alarm Over Eating Disorders*¹) highlighted a rise in, or at least increased recognition of eating disorders among the Orthodox Jewish communities and according to the article eating disorder treatment centers have noted an increase in the number of Orthodox females seeking treatment for eating disorders. Some have attempted to attribute this increase to *shidduchim*, the Jewish process of matchmaking. However, this hypothesis could be challenged as *shidduchim* is a system that has been in place for many years and it has always been customary for matchmakers to inquire about the size of the woman in question. The difference being, years ago the preference was for young women to be larger in size but more recently a smaller waist size and figure have become more desirable. An article appeared recently in *The Jewish Press* which advocated plastic surgery for young Orthodox girls who are seeking husbands². The article was written by the mother of a young Orthodox female who had underwent plastic surgery and extensive cosmetic enhancements when she was in the midst of *shidduchim*, and she was imploring other mothers to consider such procedures for their daughters to enhance their desirability as potential partners. While this idea may not be widely accepted, clearly this shift in what is considered preferable in terms of body type appears to have been influenced by something outside of the Orthodox community. Therefore, to combat this growing challenge; this program has been adapted for the benefit of the Orthodox Jewish community. In its original form it has been found to be an effective eating disorder prevention strategy in multiple cultural groups in the US and in several other countries to date. We can assume that it can be beneficial to members of this particular community as well in combatting this serious and growing issue.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

According to Festinger (1957), cognitive dissonance occurs when there is a discrepancy between one's beliefs and one's actions. This inconsistency creates psychological discomfort, which then motivates the individual to reduce the cognitive discord by changing their beliefs. In this intervention, adolescent girls and young women who subscribe to the thin ideal are subtly encouraged to critique the thin ideal through a series of verbal, written, and behavioral exercises. These activities are theorized to produce cognitive dissonance, which reduces the extent to which they subscribe to the thin ideal, which in turn is thought to result in improvements in body dissatisfaction, negative affect, and eating disorder symptoms. Thus, the overarching goal of this intervention is to have the participants speak, write, or act in a way that is contrary to the thin ideal. It is vital for the participants to generate the costs of the thin ideal, rather than the group leaders, because the latter would not produce cognitive dissonance. In addition, participants should never focus on any benefits of the thin ideal, because this will only undermine the effects of the intervention. The present manual is for a second generation high-dissonance version of

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RABIN, [RONI CARYN](#) (April 11, 2011) Rabbis Sound an Alarm Over Eating Disorders *The New York Times*

² Halberstam, Y. (2012, March 19). Purim and the tyranny of beauty: A plea to mothers of girls in shidduchim. *The Jewish Press*. Retrieved June 6, 2012, from <http://www.jewishpress.com/sections/family/purim-and-the-tyranny-of-beauty-a-plea-to-mothers-of-girls-in-shidduchim/2012/03/19/4/>.

this intervention, in which we have incorporated a number of components that should maximize the dissonance that putatively accounts for intervention effects. This high-dissonance version of this intervention draws from procedures used in the Green and associates trial (2005).

*****Note to Facilitators:** This concept can be compared to the Jewish premise of “*hachitzoniyus m’oreres es hapnimius*” the external actions awaken the internal. In addition, the *Sefer Hachinuch* states, “*acharei hape’ulos nimshachim halevavos*” “the heart is pulled after the deed”. These connections are noted to highlight the consistency of this manual’s approach with Jewish thought, but are not meant to be directly incorporated in the work with students. To ensure the efficacy of this intervention these sessions should not be used as a springboard for any religious lessons. If this generates a discussion of any religious concepts, offer to continue this after the session and redirect the participants to the task at hand. If this generates further discussion or explanation, this should be addressed outside of the session and documented. In the model that we are working with, the laws of modesty for example, are not the purpose of this exercise and deviating from the format could negatively impact the effectiveness of the exercise. Please document if this happens.

It is important that group leaders not embellish this intervention in any way (e.g., discuss a past history of an eating disorder) because this may undermine the effects of the intervention that have been observed in past trials. However, if leaders have ideas about ways to potentially improve the intervention, please contact Eric Stice, at estice@ori.org, as we welcome this type of input and have incorporated suggestions from dozens of clinicians regarding ways to improve the intervention script.

STRUCTURE

Groups are led by a facilitator or two, who can be school counselors, psychologists, nurses, or teachers. It is often useful to include a co-leader, who can be a participant from a previous group, to help run the sessions (e.g., pass out material and write participant responses on a whiteboard). Experience suggests that the optimal group size is approximately 6 to 8 participants, as this ensures that all group members will be able to participate verbally. The group meets for four consecutive weeks in 1-hour sessions.

COMMON PROBLEMS

Homework assignments can pose difficulties, especially those that seem “school-like.” Participants’ adherence to between-session assignments depends on whether leaders emphasize the importance of completing these exercises and how well leaders track the assignments in subsequent session. Contacting participants via phone a day before the scheduled session can help prompt participants to complete their assignments and bring them to their next session. Additionally, all home exercise forms should be placed in participants’ folders, which should be kept in the possession of the facilitator.

Participants often are extremely invested in the thin ideal and may have difficulty letting go of this pursuit. However, it is important not to allow *participants* to argue for the thin ideal, as this will only solidify their position further. Always keep in mind that the primary goal of the intervention is to get the *participants* to criticize and challenge the thin ideal. Group leaders should try to get other group members to speak out against the thin ideal or pose counter

arguments to pro thin-ideal statements voiced by participants. Experience indicates that the program does not work if *participants* do not critique the thin ideal. It may be helpful for facilitators to say that they are simply trying to follow the script when they ask participants to discuss the costs rather than the benefits of pursuing the thin ideal. Leaders can simply ask a reluctant participant to just give the activities their “best shot”, telling them that they are free to revert back to their old opinions after the group is over. It is also crucial for group leaders to keep self-disclosure to a minimum, to make sure that participants can maximize the time spent critiquing the thin ideal.

It is useful to make a distinction between the thin ideal and the healthy ideal. The thin ideal is about appearing ultra-slender. People often engage in very unhealthy behaviors to attain this slenderness, including laxative abuse, and go to extreme ends, such as cosmetic surgery, to attain this ultra-slender look. In contrast, the healthy ideal is about striving for a healthy body, which is typically nowhere near as slender as the thin ideal, in part because it is healthy to have muscles. Further, individuals pursuing the healthy ideal do not engage in unhealthy weight control behaviors, such as fasting and laxative abuse.

It is also important to engage all participants during the group sessions. Although it is crucial to follow the manual closely, participants often get bored if group leaders just read directly from the script. Thus, we recommend becoming familiar with the main points so that you can minimize the extent to which you read from the script. Maintaining eye contact with participants during the entire session and using first names helps encourage discussion as well. Be sure to look at each participant and try to draw her in to the discussions, paying special attention to those who are less talkative or reluctant to speak up. If one or two participants tend to dominate the discussion, call on other participants to share their opinions. We recommend going around the entire group so that *each* group member participates in each main activity (change the order so the same person does not always have to go first). Try to use humor when possible, be relaxed, smile and laugh when appropriate, and listen carefully to what participants are saying. When a participant shares personal information or discusses difficulties they have with body image, make empathetic statements (“Wow, it sounds like you’re really struggling with this”, “That must have been hurtful when your father made that comment to you about your weight”).

It is also important to manage the time carefully during the sessions. In order for participants to get maximal benefit from the intervention, you should cover *each activity* and allot the recommended time to each activity. Spending too much time processing activities that occur early in the session will result in insufficient time for the activities that occur later in the session and can result in a rushed feeling. It is sometimes necessary to tactfully interrupt particularly talkative individuals so that the group leader can move the group onto the next exercise in the manual. If you find that you are consistently running out of time before completing all the activities in the session, consider using the 6 50-minute version of the *Body Project*, which provides a little more time for activities.

THERAPIST TRAINING

This manual has been developed for school counselors, psychologists, nurses, or teachers. For optimal delivery of this intervention, we strongly recommend that group leaders carefully

read this manual and practice each activity (i.e., role play) before leading a group. Experience indicates that participants quickly lose interest if the group leaders are not familiar with the activities and the flow of the sessions.

MANUAL GUIDELINES

The curriculum contained in this manual has been demonstrated in dozens of randomized trials to be an effective prevention program for individuals at risk for eating disorders. Adherence to the manual protocol is critical in obtaining positive outcome results.

It is particularly crucial for group leaders to manage the session effectively and make sure that *all listed exercises* are completed. It is sometimes necessary to tactfully interrupt particularly talkative individuals so that the group leader can move the group onto the next exercise in the manual.

If a participant misses a session, try to schedule a brief 15-minute mini-session that covers the important points and exercises with them. We often do this over the phone a few extra days before the next session or right before the next session begins. Although this represents extra work for the facilitators, it helps to minimize missed sessions and communicates that each participant is important, and maximizes intervention effects.

The manual describes each of the 4 intervention sessions. For each session, information is provided on (a) materials used for the session, (b) a listing of topic areas to be covered, (c) main procedural elements for group leaders to follow, and (d) assigned home exercises for the participants to complete between sessions. Throughout the manual all handouts are distinguished by **underlined bold print**. Instructions to group leaders are presented in regular typeface. Verbal instructions that group leaders should say, or paraphrase, to participants are presented in *italics*.

The Body Project: Facilitator Fact Sheet

**Note to Facilitators: It may be that the vast majority of adolescents in the community have not had exposure to some of the people and experiences described on this Fact Sheet. It is helpful however, for the purposes of this program, that the Facilitator should have a good understanding of the way in which the “thin ideal” is perpetuated in society as a whole to better see how this ideal has infiltrated the Jewish community. Even though Internet access and technology use are limited, many of the adolescents in the Jewish community visit and shop at mainstream stores, which are filled with examples and symbols of the “thin ideal”. Others are exposed to images of this ideal while shopping online or when ordering from catalogs. These images can be found on billboards and in public advertisements that these adolescents encounter in their everyday life, even if they choose not to shop in mainstream stores. Pay special attention to the examples of the thin ideal that can be found within the Jewish community and think of ways that you may have observed this in your own life.*

1. **Fashion Magazines** (According to former fashion magazine editor; International Conference on Eating Disorders)

- **Function of a fashion magazine:** To convince women that something is wrong with them (e.g. hair, body, intimate life, etc.) and that maintaining a specific appearance makes life worthwhile so that they can sell their product (i.e., the content of the magazine) to fix it. The more anxious they make you, the more likely you will buy the magazine and the larger their readership, which increases advertising sales.
- How they convince you something is wrong
 - **Lead articles:** Pulitzer Prize winning article on eating disorders or cancer not going to win author a big bonus. However, writing an article which produces the following title will: “Lose a dress size in a week!”
 - **Idealized images:** Digital enhancement, make-up, clothes pinning etc.
- At this editor’s magazine, many of the key staff had eating disorders due to a culture of disordered eating and weight/shape attitudes.
 - Couldn’t bring food onto the floor, because it was too upsetting for some staff
 - One woman brought scale to work and moved scale around bathroom floor until she got an acceptable weight.

2. **Advertising Strategies**

A. Physical Tactics

- Bras are stuffed with pads to fill out the front of a dress that is too loose.
- Padded underwear is also used to fill out the back and front of a dress.
- Duct-tape is often used to tape chest area together to create cleavage.
- Girdles are used to squeeze the flesh of models into a dress sample size that is too small.
- Excess flesh is duct-taped in the back for a front angle photograph depicting a taut, streamlined, wrinkle-free body. Models can be taped from the front for a rear or side angle photograph, which gives the appearance of a tighter, smaller shape.

- Heavy clamps are used to cinch clothing in and weigh it down to create an illusion of the perfect fit.

B. Computer Tactics

- Once a photo shoot is complete, images are altered even further through a process called re-imaging. By scanning the photograph into a computer, the image can be altered in thousands of ways. Almost every magazine, billboard, or advertisement uses computer re-imaging.
 - Complexion is cleaned up, eye lines are softened, chins, thighs and stomachs are trimmed, and neck lines are removed.
 - Some pictures of models in magazines are not real. The pictures are computer-modified compilations of different body parts.
 - A news program aired a story of a photo shoot of supermodel How much time was spent digitally editing and airbrushing her face and body? **2 hours.**
3. The average American woman is 5'4" tall and weighs 140 pounds. The average American model is 5'11" tall and weighs 117 pounds.
 - The average American woman wears a size 12 to 14.
 - Marilyn Monroe, a historical Hollywood icon, wore a size 12. In other words, most successful models from years ago wore sizes much closer to the average American woman and significantly larger than models of today.
 4. Most fashion models are thinner than 98% of American women (Smolak, 1996).
 - Twenty years ago, models weighed 8 percent less than the average woman. Today they weigh 23 percent less and many fall into an anorexic weight range.
 - One popular model is 5'7" and weighs 95 pounds. That is 30% below ideal body weight. Two of the top supermodels also meet the Body Mass Index criteria for anorexia.
 - Many of the models shown on television, advertisements, and in other forms of popular media are approximately 20% below ideal body weight, thus meeting the diagnostic criteria for anorexia nervosa (Dittmar & Howard, 2004).
 5. Only 5% of women have the body type (tall, genetically thin, broad-shouldered, narrow-hipped, long-legged and usually small-chested) seen in almost all advertising. Many models have plastic surgery to achieve that body type. (When the models have large chests, they've almost always had plastic surgery.)
 6. Americans spend over \$60 billion on dieting and diet-related products each year (Marketdata Enterprises, 2010).
 - A study of mass media magazines discovered that women's magazines had 10.5 times more advertisements and articles promoting weight loss than men's magazines did (Guillen & Barr, 1994).
 - Even in Jewish magazines such as *Mishpacha Family First* and *Bina*, there are countless advertisements for exercise and diet tips. One magazine even has a weekly column called "Girl on a Diet". The *Jewish Press* recently published an editorial plea

for mothers of young women of marital age to employ all techniques to increase the beauty potential of their daughters via dieting, makeovers, and even plastic surgery.

- 95% of enrollees in weight loss programs are women although the sexes are overweight in equal proportions.
 - Women who have a history of chronic yo-yo dieting can decrease their overall lifespan of up to 20%!
7. In 1995, before television was first introduced to Fiji, there were no cases of eating disorder. Sixty-five adolescent school girls were followed over 3 years...
 - After the introduction of British and American television, **12.7%** of the girls had developed high eating disorder symptoms after 1 month and **29.2%** after 3 years.
 - Self-induced vomiting as weight control went from **0% in 1995** to **11.3% by 1998**.
 8. Often, body doubles are used in films, TV commercials and advertising.
 9. Celebrity work-outs ranging from 90 minutes to up to 6-7 hours A DAY at times.
 10. A study in 1995 found that after just three minutes spent looking at models in a fashion magazine, 70% of women reported feeling depressed, guilty, and ashamed of their bodies (Stice & Shaw, 1995).
 11. A 1996 study found that the amount of time an adolescent watches soaps, movies, and music videos is associated with their degree of body dissatisfaction and desire to be thin (Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996).

We would imagine that feelings would be similar after spending time shopping in a mall where shoppers are surrounded by similar images and advertisements.

12. If shop mannequins were real women, they would be too thin to menstruate and bear children.
 - **Could Mannequins Menstruate?** (British Medical Journal; Rintala, Mustajoki, 1992)
Store mannequins do not have enough body fat to menstruate. The researchers visited clothes stores and based on measurements of their mannequins calculated the percentage body fat that a woman the shape of a mannequin would carry. In direct contradiction to the slim, healthy and fertile physique that mannequins seek to portray and inflict on women, the finding of the study was that, overwhelmingly, shop mannequins, if they were people, would be infertile!
 - Clothing on mannequins is pinned, so clothes would never look the same on a real person unless it was pinned exactly perfect.
13. Women naturally carry fat on their hips and thighs - it is vital for fertility, prevention of osteoporosis, healthy skin, eyes, hair and teeth.
14. The National Weight Loss Registry, which tracks those that have achieved significant, long-term weight loss and is run by the Universities of Pittsburgh and Colorado, has

documented that not one person has been successful by eliminating or severely restricting one of the macronutrients (protein, carbohydrate and fat).

- Long term weight loss typically associated with low-fat, low calorie maintenance diet along with 1 hour of moderate exercise most days per week.
15. In the study, *Exposure to the Mass Media and Weight Concerns Among Girls*, the authors use a cross-sectional survey of 548 girls in 5th grade through 12th grade to assess influence of the media on weight concerns, weight control behaviors and perceptions of body weight and shape.
- A majority of girls (59%) reported dissatisfaction with their body shape, and 66% expressed the desire to lose weight; the prevalence of overweight in this study was 29%.
 - Girls were asked about their frequency of reading women's fashion magazines. Some 69% reported that appearance of models in the magazines influenced their image of a perfect female body, and 47% desired to lose weight because of the magazine pictures.
16. An observation of style shifts in exclusively Orthodox owned clothing stores show slimmer more fitted cuts and designs in a range of clothing items. An interview with an Orthodox clothing manufacturer reported changes in design styles to allow for “slimmer cuts” including clothing for girls, such as pencil skirts and belted dresses. The owner described their difficulty in balancing customer demands for more form-fitting attire, inclusive of sleepwear, with their own religious views of what is appropriate.
- These changes can lead to criticisms of growing young bodies that do not fit these styles, rather than a critique of the changes in the styles themselves.

SESSION 1

Materials: Handout – Letter to Adolescent Girl Form (Exercise #1)
Handout – Self-Affirmation Form (Exercise #2)
Handout – Thin-Ideal Perpetuation Form (Exercise #3)
(handouts should be placed in participants’ folders)
Pictures of models from fashion magazines (See provided images)
Packet of thin and healthy weight women for each participant
Flip chart (or whiteboard) and markers
Video camera

Topic Areas:

- I. Introduction
- II. Voluntary Commitment and Overview
- III. Definition of the Thin Ideal
- IV. Costs Associated with the Thin Ideal
- V. Home Exercises

Session Overview: The focus of Session 1 is to provide an overview and introduce participants to the rules and expectations of the group. The session is largely interactive with discussions of the definition and origins of the thin ideal, and costs associated with pursuing the thin ideal. The importance of attendance and completing the home exercises is also stressed.

I. INTRODUCTION (5 MINS)

Research shows that when women/girls talk about the “thin ideal” shown in the mass media, and how to challenge pressures to be thin, it makes them feel better about their bodies Even though we try to shelter ourselves from the influence of the mass media, we know that we are still exposed to and influenced by the thin ideal. This has been found to be the best class for improving body image and to reduce unhealthy weight gain and eating problems.

We would like to videotape all sessions to make sure we cover all the exercises. All names and identifying information would be omitted from the tapes. Is this OK?

That’s also why I’ll be referring to this script throughout the class. What we do here is based on scientific research, so I want to be sure to cover everything we know to be helpful.

Turn on video camera now. If anyone is concerned about being filmed, they can have the option of sitting outside of the field of view. Although we do not require that all sessions are video-recorded, it increases accountability for anti-thin-ideal statements, which theoretically maximizes intervention effects.

The group leader begins by introducing herself to the group. Introductions include name, professional status, and personal information (e.g., something interesting or unique about themselves). The group leader asks the co-leader (if available) and group members to introduce themselves.

Let's start by getting to know each other better. Can each of you tell us your name and something unique or interesting about you? I will go first.

Group leaders should spend a few moments with each participant to elicit specific information and show interest (e.g., How long have you been painting? What kind of paintings do you do?).

II. VOLUNTARY COMMITMENT AND OVERVIEW (2 MINS)

Soliciting voluntary commitment to participating in the class

Students get the most out of these groups if they attend all four meetings, participate verbally, and complete all of the between meeting exercises. It is important to clearly note that participation is voluntary. Is each of you willing to volunteer to actively participate in the group?

Go around the room and have each participant say they are willing to actively participate.

During the four sessions we will:

- 1. Define the thin ideal and explore its origin*
- 2. Examine the costs of pursuing this ideal*
- 3. Explore ways to resist pressures to be thin*
- 4. Discuss how to challenge our personal body-related concerns*
- 5. Learn new ways to talk more positively about our bodies, and*
- 6. Talk about how we can best respond to future pressures to be thin*

Attendance

It is important that everyone attends all four meetings. If you need to miss a session, please let me (or co-facilitator) know as soon as you know that you are going to be gone. We will schedule a make-up session with you before the next regular group session so you will be caught up with everyone else.

Group leaders should **call or e-mail participants** the day before each session to remind participants of the session and to bring any assignments they should have completed. If a participant must miss a session for any reason, please schedule a brief (15-minute) individual make-up session to discuss key points from the session and get the participant “caught up” before the next session. Ask them to complete the home exercises before the next session too.

III. DEFINITION AND ORIGIN OF THE THIN IDEAL (15 MINS)

Where do you shop or get most of your clothes from?

Allow participants to generate several responses. Then you could prompt by asking if they ever shop at malls, mainstream stores, outlets, online shopping, etc. [If school has a no-internet policy, assure students that online shopping will not be reported back to the administration.]

What kinds of images do you see when you're shopping?

Allow participants to generate their own responses and then begin to prompt by asking about mannequins, advertisements, or store displays.

The group leader should spread out pictures of models from magazines on the table (there should be about three pictures for each participant).

Has anyone ever seen images like these?

Allow for responses.

Include a question: *“What kinds of images do you see when you're shopping? Where do you see these images?”*

If they can't generate responses, provide prompts of things below.

These pictures are examples of the types of images that could be found in malls, stores, advertisements, and billboards. These are some very common pictures and similar images could be found anywhere.

I would like each of you to choose two pictures.

Do not tell participants the purpose of the exercise—just ask them to pick one that appeals to them.

Now that you've selected pictures, can you to tell me what caught your eye?

Seek a response from each participant. Encourage participants to focus on appearance related themes (e.g., is there something about her appearance that appealed to you?). If a participant says something like “I really like handbags, so I picked this one,” you might say “Yes, but was there something about the model holding the handbag that attracted you?” If a participant says something like “I really like her hair,” ask for more details (e.g., “What does this photo say that a woman's hair should look like?”).

Write down physical feature from each participant on the whiteboard/posterboard, write the participant's first name next to it. Leave this on the board for the entire session.

Now that you said what you like about these super-models, what do these pictures say about what the “perfect woman” looks like?

Pose questions to the group and promote participation and collaboration on their responses. Promoting discussion is key—let participants talk, not group leaders. Thin and attractive, have a perfect body, toned, fit-looking, large-chested, tall, looks like a model or actresses. Focus the discussion on the thin, unrealistic part of the appearance ideal, though it is fine to note other aspects, such as clear complexion, white teeth. Note seemingly incompatible features, such as ultra-slenderness and a large chest.

Underline features participants said appealed to them. Add new features below that list (without names).

We call this “look” – this thin, toned, large-chested woman – “the thin ideal, or appearance ideal.”

The thin ideal is not the same as the healthy ideal. With the thin ideal, people go to extreme measures to look ultra-thin, (like a super model) including some very unhealthy weight control behaviors and excessive exercise. The goal of the thin ideal is to attain thinness that is neither realistic nor healthy. With the healthy ideal, the goal is health, fitness and longevity. A healthy body has both muscles and adequate fat tissue. The healthy ideal involves feeling good about how our body both feels and works.

Q: Has this “thin ideal” always been the ideal for feminine attractiveness? Has there ever been a time in history when the “perfect woman” looked different?

(Answer: No, differs with differing times)

Solicit examples of different beauty or appearance standards over time (e.g., Note models in the past and specific to Jewish culture, example of how women used to wear “choker necklaces”³ to enhance their weight. Weight was primarily seen as a sign of wealth, indicating that there was enough food to eat at home, and also that one was healthy enough to bear children. Over time, standards of beauty have become more and more equated with thinness, especially in countries where food is plentiful).

Q: Where did this ideal come from/what are the origins of the thin ideal in our current society?

(e.g., media, fashion industry, diet/weight loss industry) ****Note to facilitators: These responses may differ somewhat, allow for alternative responses.

Q: How is the thin ideal perpetuated in the Orthodox community? What are some examples of how you have noticed this in your own lives?

(e.g., magazine articles, more orthodox gym opening, shidduchim requirements) ****Note to facilitators: These responses may differ somewhat, allow for alternative responses.

³ (Mishnah in Shabbos Rav, Rashi 57b)

Q: How is the thin ideal promoted to us?

(e.g., media: television shows, magazines; diet/weight loss industry) ****Note to facilitators: These responses may differ somewhat, allow for alternative responses.

Q: Have any of you ever been the recipient of a negative comment about your weight or shape from your friends, family, or teacher?

Q: How did that make you feel?

Discuss participant's personal experiences in these areas and the impact on their emotions and self-worth (i.e., emphasize the personal costs of society's focus on the thin ideal for women).

Q: How do thin-ideal messages from the media, clothing stores, or people in your own lives impact the way you feel about your body?

(e.g., feeling inadequate because they do not look like a model, dislike of their own bodies, negative mood)

MAKE SURE ALL PARTICIPANTS RESPOND.

Q: What does secular culture tell us will happen if we are able to look like the thin ideal?

(e.g., we will be accepted, loved, happy, successful, wealth.)

Differentiate the thin ideal from the healthy ideal if they say you are healthier if you conform to the thin ideal.

Q: Do you really think these good things happen if you get thinner?

(No, they will likely have little impact.)

Please do not describe (or allow participants to discuss) the benefits of thinness in general or give the impression that the thin ideal is close to the healthy ideal (i.e., it is possible to be well within the healthy weight range, but not meet the cultural standards for the ultra-thin ideal).

IV. COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH PURSING THE THIN IDEAL (20 MINS)

We've discussed the thin ideal and where it comes from – now let's think about the costs involved with this ideal.

Get participation from group.

Q: What are the costs of trying to look like the thin ideal for the individual person?

(i.e. decreased self-worth; expensive; physically and mentally exhausting; can hurt themselves, health problems, often negatively encourages unhealthy weight management techniques, depression, anxiety)

Q: If so many women are dealing with these issues, then what are the costs for society?
(i.e. increased mental health care costs, promotes a culture of discontent)

Q: Who benefits from the thin ideal?

(e.g., diet industry; media; fashion industry) *****Note to facilitators: These responses may differ somewhat, allow for alternative responses.

Q: Are you one of the people who benefit from the thin ideal?

(e.g., are you a media executive, a supermodel, the founder of a diet program?)

Q: Given all these costs, does it make sense to try to look like the thin ideal?

(Answer: No)

Make sure that each participant makes a public statement against the thin ideal at this stage (and anywhere else possible).

V. HOME EXERCISES (3 MINS)

Group participants are reminded of the home-based assignment for next session:

Now that we have begun discussing costs of the thin ideal, would you be willing to write a letter to a teenage girl who is struggling with her body image about the costs associated with trying to look like the thin ideal? Think of as many costs as you can, and feel free to work with others to come up with ideas.

Please bring this letter to our next meeting so you can read it and we can discuss your feelings about writing it. I am going to record you reading the letter, and then, if you want, we can include a copy of your letter in a packet that we are trying to put together for future groups like this one.

Hand out **Letter to Adolescent Girl Form** (Exercise #1).

Second, we would like to ask you to stand in front of a mirror in private in your most form-fitting clothes and write down at least 10 positive qualities. This includes physical, emotional, intellectual, and social qualities. For instance, you may like the shape of your arms, the strength of your legs, your long dark hair, the sound of your laugh, or the fact that you are a good friend.

We know it can be hard, but please make sure to include at least some specifically physical attributes on your list. It may be difficult at first and may seem silly, but we really want you to do

this because it is important to recognize each of these areas about yourself. Past students have found this exercise to be very helpful and empowering.

Please bring your list of positive qualities to group next week so you can share them with the group.

Hand out **Self-Affirmation Form** (Exercise #2).

Third, please privately complete the brief checklist of thin-ideal behaviors. It is designed to increase awareness of behaviors that perpetuate the thin ideal.

Refer to the **Thin-Ideal Perpetuation Form** (Exercise #3).

Does everyone understand what we are asking you to do between sessions? Can someone tell me what the home exercises are for this week in their own words?

1. Write a letter to a younger girl about the costs of pursuing the thin ideal.
2. Do the self-affirmation mirror exercise.
3. Complete the thin-ideal perpetuation form.

Experience shows that students get the most out of this class when they do the exercises the best they can. Does everyone feel that they can do this?

Get some form of public commitment from each participant.

Please include your full name and signature on your home exercises. I will be collecting all home exercises.

We want these exercises to be fun as well as thought-provoking, so please feel free to talk about them with others between group sessions.

Time permitting:

Can everyone tell me something that “worked for you” in this session, or “hit home”?

That’s all for today. Thanks for coming. We are looking forward to seeing you next week!

SESSION 2

Prep: Call each participant before this class to remind them to complete each home exercise.

Materials: Handout – Rewind Response Letter (Exercise #4)
Handout - Top-10 List Form (Exercise #5)
(handouts should be placed in participants' folders)
Video camera
Digital camera/cell phone

Topic Areas:

- I. Reinforcing Voluntary Commitment
- II. Letter to Adolescent Girl Exercise Debriefing
- III. Self-Affirmation Exercise Debriefing
- IV. Role Play: Discourage Pursuit of the Thin Ideal
- V. Home Exercises

Session Overview: The focus of Session 2 is to review the materials discussed in the previous session and discuss reactions to the two home assignments. Additionally, this session involves role-plays to elicit verbal statements against the thin ideal.

I. REINFORCING VOLUNTARY COMMITMENT (2 MINS)

Thanks for coming to Session 2. Are each of you willing to actively participate in today's session?

Go around the room and get a verbal affirmation that they are willing to actively participate. Turn on video camera now.

II. LETTER RECORDING AND DEBRIEFING (20 MINS)

Last week we asked if you would be willing to write a letter to a teenage girl about the costs of trying to look like the thin ideal.

I would like to get a video-clip of you reading your letter.

Have each participant read her letter. It is best to have a video recording, but we could do a tape recording instead. Specify these will only be used with this project. Record with a separate camera or their cell phones so you can generate short individual video clips for participants. After each participant concludes reading her letter, respond by thanking her and/or making a positive comment about her letter.

NOTE: For confidentiality purposes, it is important to make sure that the participant reading the letter is the ONLY person in the video.

NOTE: If a participant is unwilling to read her letter, ask her if she is willing to summarize it or choose an excerpt to read.

Everyone clearly spent a lot of time writing these letters and did a great job on them. Please hand them in - be sure your name and signature are on them!

Collect the **Letter to Adolescent Girl Form (Exercise #1)**. Make sure each participant has written and signed their name on the form.

Distribute and collect assent forms.

We have been very impressed by the letters written by participants and feel that they could help other young women struggling with body image concerns. So we'd like to get your permission to post a copy of your written letter on a school bulletin board for others to read. If you are interested, please read over this permission form, sign it, date it, and hand it back to us.

Pass out assent forms; collect forms when participants have filled them out. Confirm all forms are signed.

III. SELF-AFFIRMATION EXERCISE DEBRIEFING (10 MINS)

The other exercise we asked you to do was to look in a mirror and list some of your positive qualities.

How did you feel when you did this exercise?

Now that you have gone through this, we'd like to have you share your lists with the group. Remember that thinking positively about your bodies requires practice, and this is one exercise that will give you practice in reminding yourselves of all of the aspects of yourselves that you're happy with!

What are three aspects of yourself that you are satisfied with, including at least two physical features?

Have each participant share positive qualities they listed. Discourage “qualified” statements (e.g., “I guess my stomach is not too horrible”). If you get “qualified” statements, accept them and ask the participant for an additional statement that is completely positive (e.g., “Okay, can you give me one more statement you had that was completely positive?”).

Collect the **Self-Affirmation Exercise Form (Exercise #2)**. Make sure each participant has written and signed their name on the form.

Hopefully, you recognize the positive things about yourselves and will remember them, particularly as the pressure of the thin ideal surrounds you. Given that these are potent pressures – let's discuss ways to resist them.

IV. ROLE PLAY GAME TO DISCOURAGE PURSUIT OF THE THIN IDEAL (20 MINS)

Leaders take the role of either a severe dieter or eating disordered individual for each participant. Let each participant spend approximately 2 minutes attempting to dissuade the character from pursuing the thin ideal (do two role plays if necessary). Make sure each participant tries to talk you out of pursuing the thin ideal.

Tips on being “in character:”

- Parrot, or echo back, any pro-thin-ideal comments previously made by participants while you are playing a thin-ideal role.
- Focus on the unrealistic benefits of the thin ideal (“I’ll be happy all of the time if I’m thin,” “Everyone will like me,” “I’ll have the perfect husband,” “All my problems will be solved.”)
- Make statements that hint at the costs of pursuing the thin ideal (“It will take time away from schoolwork and friends, but I’ll find a way to do it,” or “I really don’t think dieting like this is that dangerous”) so that the participant can point out those costs to you.
- Be difficult to persuade (you and the participants should volley the role play back and forth several times), but it is OK to be playful with this exercise. Feel free to go over the top a bit with the more resilient participants.

Now I would like to go through some examples of thin ideal statements, and practice how one could respond to them. I will play a person that is obsessed with the thin ideal and your job will be to convince me that I shouldn’t be. Feel free to use any of the information brought up in our earlier discussions.

The facilitators should model the role-play before having participants do them. Then select group members to participate, making sure each participant has a turn. Start with the most gregarious participant, or if no one volunteers, start with the person next to you and go around the room.

Sample statements for leaders appear below:

- *“I just got a job as a lifeguard for the summer and so I think I will start skipping breakfasts to take off some of the extra weight.”*
- *An anorexic says, “I am sure that people will accept me and love me if I only lose a little more weight.”*
- *“I just saw an ad for this new diet in a magazine , I’m going to start it right away. I can finally be as thin as I want.”*
- *An anorexic says to her friend, “I can’t go shopping with you tonight because I have to go spend a few hours at the gym. I only went for two hours yesterday.”*
- *“I feel a little dizzy lately, which may be from these new diet pills I’m on, but I don’t care because I have already lost 10 pounds.”*
- *“Most people have weak will power and give in to hunger – I will show people how much self-control I have by not eating anything but grapefruit.”*

- *“To be the best runner, I have to be down to my lightest weight. I am only doing this for my health – this will help me avoid injuries.”*
- *“I have to be thin or my life is ruined.”*
- *“My sister’s getting married this month and my mom wants me to lose weight so I can fit into my new gown.”*
- *“No one is ever going to want to marry me at this size unless I drop some of this weight.”*
- *“My mom said my skirts are getting so tight that I should really stop eating breakfast.”*
- *“I don’t want to look like a horse at my brother’s bar mitzvah, so I better stop eating so many snacks and sweets.”*
- *“I’ve got to lose 10 lbs. or I won’t look good in my graduation pictures.”*
- *“I want to make sure that I don’t gain weight during seminary in Israel , so I am going to only eat a banana for breakfast and an apple for lunch every day.”*

Leaders should generate additional statements as needed and may tailor the statements to be appropriate for their group members.

Role play debriefing

How did it feel to do these role plays?

Let participants reflect on how it felt to argue against someone who is fixated on pursuing the thin ideal.

Do you think it might be beneficial for you to challenge people when they make thin-ideal statements?

Promote discussion on why it is helpful to speak out against pressure to conform to the thin ideal. Please let participants come up with the arguments.

V. HOME EXERCISES (5 MINS)

Home-based assignment for next session:

Great. Now we would like to describe two home exercises for you to do before the next session. The first is to write a letter to someone in your life who pressured you to conform to the thin ideal, such as a parent, sibling, teacher or friend. Please tell them how this affected you and indicate how you would respond now, in light of what you have learned in these groups.

If no one has pressured you to be thin, please make up an example or use an example you have heard from others in the group or a friend.

Pull the **Rewind Response Letter Form** from your packet (Exercise #4).

The second exercise is to come up with a top-10 list of things girls/women can do to resist the appearance ideal. So unlike the verbal challenge form in which you challenge the appearance

ideal at the individual level, we are asking how you can challenge the appearance ideal at the societal level. What can you avoid, say, do, or learn to battle this unhealthy appearance ideal in your community? Please write your top 10-list down and bring it to the next group.

Does anyone have some ideas for this right now? I'd like to get a couple of examples in case anyone is confused.

Refer to the **Top-10 List Form** (Exercise #5) Elicit one or two examples.

Examples:

1. Write a letter to a local magazine asking that they stop printing so many stories that focus on weight loss, exercise, and dieting.
2. Write a letter to Orthodox clothing manufacturers asking them to provide cuts and styles that accommodate different body types, especially age-appropriate clothing for children.
3. Write a letter to a company indicating that you are boycotting their product because they promote the thin ideal in their ads.
4. Put post-its on mirrors in women's bathrooms saying "Be happy with who you are".
5. Make a pact with friends to stop pro-thin-ideal talk for a week (or more).
6. Identify a younger female friend or relative and commit to helping her fight the thin ideal as she grows up.

Can someone tell me what the home exercises are for this week?

1. Complete verbal challenge form.
2. Generate top 10-list of ways to challenge the thin ideal at a societal level.

Time permitting:

Can everyone tell me something that "worked for you" in this session, or "hit home"?

Next meeting, we will talk more about resisting the thin ideal and how to challenge our personal body concerns. Does anyone have any questions before we leave today?

Thanks again for coming. We are looking forward to seeing you next week!

SESSION 3

Prep: Call each participant before this class to remind them to complete each home exercise.

Materials: Handout – Behavioral Exercise Form (Exercise #6)
Handout – Body Activism Form (Exercise #7)
Handout – Letter to Adolescent Girl Form (Exercise #8)
(handouts should be placed in participants’ folders)
Video camera

Topic Areas:

- I. Reinforcing Voluntary Commitment
- II. Verbal Challenge Exercise Debriefing
- III. Role-Play: Quick Comebacks to Thin-ideal Statements
- IV. Thoughts Before Coming into the Class
- V. Behavioral Challenge
- VI. Top 10 List Debriefing
- VII. Home Exercises

Session Overview: The focus of Session 3 is to further discuss how to resist the thin ideal, how to challenge personal body-related concerns, and how to respond to future pressures to be thin. Role-plays are also used so participants can practice making statements that counter the thin ideal.

I. REINFORCING VOLUNTARY COMMITMENT (2 MINS)

Again, it is important to note that participation is voluntary. Are each of you willing to actively participate in today’s session?

Make sure everyone at least gives you a head-nod in response.

Turn on video camera now.

II. REWIND RESPONSE LETTER DEBRIEFING (10 MINS)

Last week we asked you to write a letter to someone in your life who has pressured you to conform to the thin ideal. We asked you to tell them how this affected you. We also asked you to indicate how you would respond now, in light of what you have learned from these groups.

Is each of you willing to read your letter out loud?

How did it feel to write this letter?

Please turn in your rewind response letter form and please make sure you signed

it. Thanks!

Collect Home Exercise #4. Make sure participants write their name on it and sign it.

III. QUICK COMEBACKS TO THIN-IDEAL STATEMENTS ROLE PLAY GAME (10 MINS)

Last week we asked you to talk someone out of pursuing the thin ideal in an extended role-play game. This week we are going to do something a little different – we would like each of you to briefly challenge “thin ideal” statements with a quick comeback. Your goal is simply to derail the fat talk.

For example, if I say: “Does this shirt make my stomach look fat? ” You could say: “I think it best if we don’t ruminate about appearance issues like that.”

Role-play using counter thin-ideal statements to resist pressure from peers. Ask each participant to generate two counter thin-ideal statements in response to two statements that leaders generate. Go around the circle twice. Sample statements:

- *Look at that fatso over there!*
- *Sarah has really gained weight in seminary.*
- *I am thinking of going on a diet, do you want to join me?*
- *Can’t that girl control herself?*
- *I would never be friends with someone that heavy.*
- *My sister says I look too fat, what do you think?*
- *If I don’t lose some weight, I may never get married.*
- *I hate my body so much—I wish I could just wake up in a different one.*
- *You know if you just stopped eating cheese, you would lose enough weight to look attractive.*
- *I could never be friends with someone skinnier than me*
- *Only skinny girls are happy.*
- *She really isn’t thin enough to be wearing that skirt.*
- *Only skinny girls get married.*
- *She really doesn’t have the body to be wearing that outfit.*
- *I was thinking of getting the lap band.*
- *I am thinking of becoming vegetarian because I hear it helps you lose weight.*
- *Does this dress make me look fat?*
- *Doesn’t that girl care that she’s fat? Why is she eating so much?*

Role play debriefing

Do you think you could challenge your friends and family if they make thin-ideal statements?

Encourage discussion.

IV. Thoughts Before Coming Into the Class (10 MINS)

One of the goals of this class is to address appearance concerns.

If volunteered for group: What body image concerns prompted you to sign up for this group?

If did not choose to participate: Research shows most women have some concerns about their body image. Who wants to start by providing their own body image concerns?

Facilitators can give examples of own body dissatisfactions and model supportive comebacks if group seems hesitant. It is best to start with the most outgoing student.

Have participants discuss as much as they are comfortable sharing. The purpose is to allow participants to share specific body image concerns and have the group challenge the thoughts and feelings that participants have about specific body parts.

Listening to you, it sounds like it would be helpful to some of you to challenge some of your fears and concerns related to your body image.

V. BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGE (10 MINS)

Are there things you do not do because of body image concerns?

(e.g., wearing certain clothes, going specific places, etc.)

Are you willing to do an experiment to help you feel better about your bodies? We would like to challenge you to do something that you currently do not do because of body image concerns. Doing this should increase your confidence and disprove your fears.

Note to facilitators: Only discuss laws of modesty if examples continuously relate to it rather than body image concerns. (We want to be clear that the activities and events we're discussing here are things that bad body image or negative thoughts may have prevented you from doing. These are not things that you do not do because of the laws of modesty (tznius), but things that you would do if you didn't feel bad about your bodies. ***Make the distinction that this is separate from the laws of modesty.**)

Note to facilitators: You can use some of the examples that participants came up with to offer as examples of challenges.

{Provide dressing room example if someone has a question: "Imagine you are trying on clothes in a dressing room. You put on a shirt and decide not to purchase it because it is either too revealing or immodest. This would be related to the laws of modesty. However, if you chose not to buy the shirt because you thought that it made you look fat or emphasized parts of your body that you think are not acceptable or thin enough, this would be an example of a decision that was driven more by body image concerns."} If this generates a discussion of tznius, offer to discuss this after the session and redirect the participants to the task at hand.

**If this generates further discussion or explanation, this should be addressed outside of the session and documented. In the model that we are working with, the laws of modesty are not the purpose of this exercise and deviating from the format of the exercise could negatively impact the effectiveness of the exercise. Please document if this happens.*

Examples include:

- *Going to the pool, even if you are unhappy with the way that you look in a swimsuit*
- *Exercising in public*
- *Wearing your hair up*
- *Wearing a color you like even though it doesn't flatter your figure (i.e. wearing something besides black)*
- *Not wearing a sweater over your uniform shirt to cover up your body*
- *Wearing a skinny belt over an outfit even if you think it makes you look fat but you had liked the look of it. ****Emphasize that this is something you want to do, but your body image prevents you from doing. *****
- *Not wearing make-up*
- *Leaving the house in the morning without getting "done up"*
- *Eating dessert with friends*
- *Choosing a regular soda when out with friends, even though they are all drinking diet and you would have previously done the same even though it's not what you prefer.*

Can you promise to do this at least twice in the next week? We would like each of you to do this challenge and then let us know during the next session how it went. Please take a moment to think of something you would like to do but haven't done yet. Each of you will need to have a plan before we leave.

Note that the purpose of this exercise is not to simply have participants do something they would not normally do (e.g., wear a more form-fitting shirt because it just isn't their style preference), but that it needs to be something they would otherwise do if they did not have body image concerns (e.g., would *like* to wear a more form-fitting or different style shirt, but do not because they think it makes their stomach look too fat).

Have each participant come up with two behavioral challenges that they will do in the next week.

Refer to the **Behavioral Exercise Form (Exercise #6)**. Have them record their plan on the form.

Group leaders should help participants select challenges that are appropriate and that they will be able to do in the next week (e.g., do not select wearing a bathing suit to the pool if it is winter). As needed, push participants to be specific in their plan (e.g. who will they do the activity with [if anyone], when will they do it, where will they do it, and how will they do it).

VI. TOP 10 LIST DEBRIEFING (15 MINS)

The second exercise from last session asked you to list 10 things that girls/women could do to resist the appearance ideal – what you can avoid, say, do, or learn to fight this social pressure. This might be referred to as “body activism.”

Can each of you share three items on your list?

We would like each of you to do at least two acts of body activism and then let us know how they go. Would you all be willing to do that?

Have each participant choose two behaviors from their list to do during the next week.

Refer to the **Body Activism Form** (Exercise #7).

COLLECT HOME EXERCISE #5. MAKE SURE EACH PARTICIPANT HAS WRITTEN AND SIGNED THEIR NAME ON THE FORM.

VII. HOME EXERCISES (3 MINS)

Again, we would like each of you to (1) do the behavioral challenge relating to your personal body image concerns, and (2) engage in two body activism exercises. We will talk about how each of these exercises went during the next session.

We would also like you to do a third exercise. Would you be willing to write a letter to your younger self, describing how to avoid developing body image concerns? Draw from what you have learned in these sessions. The goal is to give yourself advise on things you can do, say, avoid, or learn to help yourself develop a positive body image.

Please include your full name and signature on your home exercises. I will be collecting all home exercises.

Refer to the **Letter to a Younger Self Form** (Exercise #8).

Ask one participant to paraphrase home exercises in her own words to make sure they are clear.

Time permitting:

Can everyone tell me something that “worked for you” in this session, or “hit home”?

Once again, thanks for coming. See you next week for the final session.

SESSION 4

Prep: Call each participant before this class to remind them to complete each home exercise.

Materials: Handout – Self-Affirmation Exercise Form (Exercise #9)
Handout – Group Body Activism Exercise Form (Exercise #10)
(handouts should be placed in participants’ folders)
Video camera

Topic Areas:

- I. Reinforcing Voluntary Commitment
- II. Behavioral Challenge Debriefing
- III. Body Activism Debriefing
- IV. Letter to a Younger Self Debriefing
- V. Benefits of the Group/Closure Discussion
- VI. Self-Affirmation Exercise
- VII. Home Exercises
- VIII. Closure

Session 1 Overview: The focus of Session 4 is to discuss participants’ experiences with the behavioral challenge and body activism exercises, and to discuss how the ways in which we talk about our bodies may promote the thin ideal. This final session focuses on having participants come up with more positive alternative ways of talking about their bodies and encouraging participants to continue to challenge their body image issues in the future.

I. REINFORCING VOLUNTARY COMMITMENT (2 MINS)

Are each of you willing to participate verbally in today’s session?

Make sure everyone at least gives you a head-nod in response.

Turn on video camera now.

II. BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGE DEBRIEFING (10 MINS)

Last week we asked you to do something that you do not normally do because of concerns about your body.

Let’s go around the room and describe what each of you did and how it turned out.

Did you find this exercise useful? What did you learn?

Have each participant discuss her experiences.

If they did not do the exercise, ask about the barriers to doing it. How can they overcome them? Is there something they can do that might be easier to try out first? Encourage participants to continue to challenge their body-related concerns.

We appreciate that you were willing to try something new. Hopefully you will continue to challenge yourselves and your body image concerns in the future in a similar way.

Collect the **Behavioral Exercise Form** (Exercise #6). Make sure each participant has written and signed her name on the form.

III. BODY ACTIVISM DEBRIEFING (10 MINS)

Last time we also asked you to do two body activism exercises. Let's go around the room so we can hear what each of you did and how it went.

Go around the room so that each participant describes what they did and what happened.

How do you think this type of exercise could make a difference?

Is anyone willing to do more body activism in the future? If so, what would you do?

Try to let participants talk themselves into doing more of these types of body activism.

Collect the **Body Activism Form** (Exercise #7). Make sure each participant has written and signed her name on the form.

IV. LETTER TO YOUNGER SELF DEBRIEFING (10 MINS)

Last week we asked if you would be willing to write a letter to your younger self, instructing yourself on how to avoid developing body image concerns.

I would like to get a video-clip of you reading your letter.

Have each participant read her letter. After each participant concludes reading her letter, respond by thanking her and/or making a positive comment about her letter.

NOTE: If a participant is unwilling to read her letter, ask her if she is willing to summarize it or choose an excerpt to read.

Everyone clearly spent a lot of time writing these letters and did a great job on them. Please hand them in - be sure your name and signature are on them! We will mail these letters to you in 6 months to remind you of all the wisdom regarding body acceptance that you have gained from this group.

Collect the **Letter to a Younger Self Form** (Exercise #8). Make sure each participant has written and signed their name on the form.

V. DISCUSSION OF BENEFITS OF THE GROUP AND CLOSURE (10 MINS)

Given that this is our last group, I wanted to talk about things you may have learned from participating in this group.

Can you tell me some of the benefits of body acceptance?

Did any particular activity really stand out as helpful to you?

How has this experience changed the way you think and feel about your own body?

How has your participation in The Body Project changed what you do, or will do in the future, to promote your own body acceptance?

How has this group changed how you interact with friends, romantic partners or any other people in your life? As privileged, educated women, how can you “pay it forward” and empower others?

What have you gotten out of this class?

Try to get all participants to reflect on any growth they have shown or insights they have learned. The idea is for them to consolidate what they have learned.

VI. SELF-AFFIRMATION EXERCISE (10 MINS)

As we come to the end of our sessions, we would like to encourage you to continue to challenge some of your body-related concerns. Part of doing this is talking about our bodies in a positive, rather than a negative, way. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- 1. Choose one friend or family member and discuss one thing you like about yourselves.*
- 2. Keep a journal of all the good things your body allows you to do (e.g., sleep well and wake up rested, go swimming, go on a long hike, etc.).*
- 3. Pick one friend to make a pact with to avoid negative body talk. When you catch your friend talking negatively about their body, remind them of the pact.*
- 4. Make a pledge to end complaints about your body, such as “I have such wide hips” or “I hate my legs.” When you catch yourself doing this, make a correction by saying something positive about that body part, such as, “I’m so glad my legs got me to school today.”*
- 5. The next time someone gives you a compliment, rather than objecting (“No, I’m so fat”), practice taking a deep breath and saying “Thank you.”*

Can each of you choose one of these ideas (or one of your own) and do it sometime next week and call us to let us know how it goes?

Consider this an “exit exercise.” Doing these kinds of things makes it more likely that you will talk about yourself in a more positive way. Think of which specific exercise you can do. I’d like to go around the room and ask each of you to share.

Hand out **Self-Affirmation Exercise Form** (Exercise #9).

Have each participant state which affirmation exercise they are willing to do during the next week.

VII. OTHER HOME EXERCISES (5 MINS)

Second, we would like you to do one more form of “body activism” and call or talk to us about what you did.

Are you willing to do a form “body activism” as a group? This could consist of writing a letter that you all sign and sending it to a magazine or company that promotes the thin ideal. You decide what you want to do and check in with one another about it by phone or in person at school. Are there any ideas about what could be done? Would someone be willing to be the leader of this and make sure it happens? [Select one or two group members to be leader.] We’d like to hear what you decide to do as a group.

Make a note of potential Group-Based Body Activism exercise.

Hand out **Group Body Activism Exercise Form** (Exercise #10)

VIII. CLOSURE (3 MINS)

Once again, thanks again for being a part of this group. We have been very impressed with your thoughtful comments and participation—they are much appreciated!

We would also like to encourage you to tell your friends about the group, as we will be recruiting again in a couple of weeks!!

Body Project Group Materials

Session One:

- Home Exercise #1: Letter to Adolescent Girl
- Home Exercise #2: Self-Affirmation Exercise Form
- Home Exercise #3: Thin-Ideal Perpetuation Behavior Checklist

Session Two:

- Home Exercise #4: Rewind Response Letter
- Home Exercise #5: Top-10 List Form

Session Three:

- Home Exercise #6: Behavioral Exercise Form
- Home Exercise #7: Body Activism Form
- Home Exercise #8: Letter to a Younger Self

Session Four:

- Home Exercise #9: Self-Affirmation Exercise Form
- Home Exercise #10: Group Body Activism

Name:

Signature:

Session One, Exercise #1: Letter to Adolescent Girl

Please write a two page letter to an adolescent girl who is struggling with body image concerns about the costs associated with pursuing the thin ideal. Think of as many costs as you can. Feel free to work with a friend or family member in generating ideas or use any of the ones we discussed in the group. Please bring this letter to our next meeting so we can discuss your responses and feelings about this assignment.

A series of horizontal lines for writing, spanning most of the page width and from approximately the 10% mark down to the 90% mark.

Name:

Signature:

Session One, Exercise #2: Self-Affirmation Form

Please stand in front of a mirror and look at yourself and write down all your positive qualities. Please list at least 10. This includes physical, emotional, intellectual, and social qualities. For instance, you may like the shape of your arms, the strength of your legs, your long dark hair, the sound of your laugh, or the fact that you are a good friend. Please make sure to include at least some physical attributes on your list.



Name:

Signature:

Session One, Exercise #3: Thin-Ideal Perpetuation Behavior Checklist

This checklist is designed to increase awareness of behaviors that serve to perpetuate the thin-ideal in our culture. Please record which of these behaviors you have engaged in over the last few years.

Complimented someone because they lost weight	yes
Made a negative comment about someone's appearance	yes
Made a negative comment about someone's weight	yes
Instantly judged someone negatively because of their weight or appearance	yes
Made a negative comment about my own weight or appearance that was contrived	yes
Asked someone if they have lost weight	yes
Encouraged someone to try a weight-loss diet	yes
Given a sibling a hard time about his/her weight	yes
Decided not to talk with or befriend someone because they were overweight	yes
Purchased products that promote the thin-ideal in their ads	yes
Weighed myself multiple times a day	yes
Wore clothes that specifically hid parts of my body that I was embarrassed about for reasons related to shape or weight	yes

Name:

Signature:

Session One, Exercise #4: Rewind Response Letter

Please write a letter to someone in your life who pressured you to conform to the thin-ideal, such as a parent, sibling, teacher, or friend. Please tell them how this affected you and indicate how you would respond now, in light of what you have learned in these groups. If no one has pressured you to be thin, please make up an example or use an example you have heard from others in the group or a friend. Use any of the information you have learned in these sessions, and any additional ways you may think of on your own.

Name:

Signature:

Session Two, Exercise #5: Top-10 List Form

Please generate a top-10 list of things girls/women can do to resist the thin ideal. What can you avoid, say, do, or learn to battle this appearance ideal? Please write your top-10 list down and bring it to the next group.

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

9)

10)

Name:

Signature:

Session Three, Exercise #6: Behavioral Exercise Form

We would like to challenge each of you to do something that you currently do not do because of body image concerns to increase your confidence. For example, not getting “done up” before leaving the house, going to the pool even though you do not like the way that you look in a swimsuit, exercising in public. Please do this at least once in the next week. We would like each of you to do two behavioral challenges and then let us know during the next session how it turned out. Please take a moment to think of something you would like to do but haven’t done yet. You may wish to write your behavioral goal down on this page to remind yourself of it.

Name:

Signature:

Session Three, Exercise #7: Body Activism Form

The second exercise from last session asked you to list 10 things that girls/women could do to resist the thin ideal – what you can avoid, say, do, or learn to combat this social pressure. This might be referred to as “body activism.”

Please choose two behaviors from your list to do during the next week. You may want to write your body activism goal on this sheet to remind yourself of it.

Name:
Signature:

Session Three, Exercise #8: Letter to a Younger Self

Please write another letter, this time to a younger version of yourself (approx. three pages), on how to avoid developing body image concerns. Use any of the information you have learned in these sessions, and any additional ways you may think of on your own. The goal is to help the younger version of you understand the different things she can do, say, avoid, or learn that will help her develop or maintain a positive body image.

Lined writing area with multiple horizontal lines for text entry.

Name:

Signature:

Session Four, Exit Exercise #9: Self-Affirmation Exercise Form

Part of challenging body-related concerns involves talking about our bodies in a positive, rather than negative, way. We discussed some examples of this in the group, for instance, making a pledge to end complaints about your body or accepting compliments rather than objecting to them. Please choose three ideas that we talked about, or one of your own, to practice over the next week, and let us know how it goes in person or by giving us a call.

Session Four, Exit Exercise #10: Group Body Activism

We would like you, as a group, to do one additional form of “body activism.” As a reminder, “body activism” is something you could avoid, say, do, or learn to resist the thin ideal. This could consist of writing a letter that you all sign and sending it to a magazine or company that promotes the thin ideal. You decide what you want to do and check in with one another about it by phone or in person. Please list some ideas you may have below, and then one person can report back to us about what you did as a group.



Group members:

Name:

Name:

Name:

Name:

Name:

Name:

Name:

Name:

Name:

Name: