

# **Body Acceptance Class Manual**

## **Enhanced-Dissonance Version**

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## OVERVIEW

### PURPOSE

This manual outlines a dissonance-based body acceptance intervention that has been developed and used at Stanford University, the University of Texas at Austin, and Oregon Research Institute. The intervention is the outgrowth of a 16-year program of research on the risk factors for eating disorders by this research team. Over 600 individuals with elevated body dissatisfaction, who are at risk for eating disorders, have gone through this program. The intervention consists of verbal, written, and behavioral exercises in which participants voluntarily critique the culturally sanctioned thin beauty ideal promoted for females during four weekly sessions. These activities have been shown to result in decreased subscription to the “thin-ideal” and consequent reductions in body dissatisfaction, negative mood, dieting, and bulimic pathology, as well as decreased risk for future obesity and eating disorders and improved psychosocial functioning (Stice, Chase, Stormer, & Appel, 2001; Stice, Marti, Spoor, Presnell, & Shaw, 2008; Stice, Mazotti, Weibel, & Agras, 2000; Stice, Shaw, Burton, & Wade, 2006; Stice, Trost, & Chase, 2003). The most rigorous trial conducted to date found that the intervention appeared to prevent 75% 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. Five independent labs have replicated the positive effects for this intervention (Becker, Smith, & Ciao, 2006; Green, Scott, Diyankova, Gasser, & Pederson, 2005; Matusek, Wendt, & Wiseman, 2004; Mitchell, Mazzeo, Rausch, & Cooke, 2007; Roehrig, Thompson, Brannick, & van den Berg, 2006). Research suggests that a reduction in thin-ideal internalization appears to mediate the effects of the intervention on change in eating disorder symptoms, providing support for the intervention theory. In addition, Green and associates (2005) found that a high dissonance version of this intervention resulted in significantly less eating disorder symptoms than a low-dissonance version of the same intervention, which also provides support for the intervention theory. To our knowledge, this eating disorder prevention program has the strongest empirical support of any available intervention (Stice, Shaw, & Marti, 2007).

### 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 distress, 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 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).

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.

## **STRUCTURE**

Groups consist of a group leader, who can be a school counselor, psychologist, nurse, or teacher. 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 email or 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 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. 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 may be willing to 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 consistently

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”). While it is extremely important to stay on track and cover the necessary information for each session, participants want to feel heard and understood.

## **THERAPIST TRAINING**

This manual has been developed for school counselors, psychologists, nurses, or teachers. It is vital for group leaders to carefully read this manual and practice each activity (i.e., role play) before attempting to lead 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 several randomized clinical studies 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 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.

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

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, sex life, etc.) 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: “You never knew what your butt looked like from the rear! Strategies for a better behind.”
    - **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 of a dress.
    - Duct-tape is often used to tape breasts 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 showing tight, firm hips, bottoms, legs, and arms.
    - 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 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.
      - 20/20 aired a story of a photo shoot of supermodel Cindy Crawford. 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**, Hollywood goddess, wore a size 12.
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.
  - Kate Moss is 5'7" and weighs 95 pounds. That is 30% below ideal body weight. Supermodels Niki Taylor and Elle Macpherson also meet the Body Mass Index criteria for anorexia.
5. Only 5% of women have the body type (tall, genetically thin, broad-shouldered, narrow-hipped, long-legged and usually small-breasted) seen in almost all advertising. (When the models have large breasts, they've almost always had breast implants.)
6. Americans spend over \$40 billion on dieting and diet-related products each year (Smolak, 1996).
  - 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).
  - 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.
  - P. Diddy has a personal trainer that makes \$500,000 a year on Puffy alone (VH-1).
  - Usher does 1000 crunches per day plus daily "forty minutes funk" (stretching & cardio) and strength training.
  - Hilary Swank for *Million Dollar Baby*: 4.5 hours per day, six days per week (from Oprah on line).
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).
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.

## SESSION 1

**Materials:** Handout – Letter to Adolescent Girl Form (Exercise #1)  
 Handout – Self-Affirmation Form (Exercise #2)  
 Pictures of models from fashion magazines  
 Flip chart (or whiteboard) and markers  
 (handouts should be placed in participants’ folders)  
 Video camera

**Topic Areas:**

- I. Introduction
- II. Group Rules and Expectations
- 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)

*Thanks for coming. All of you decided to take part in these groups because of your body image concerns—a very common issue among girls and women.*

*This class is based on a study that showed that when women talk about the “beauty-ideal,” and how to challenge pressures to be thin, it makes them feel better about their bodies. The idea is that one can improve their body image through the understanding of the cultural pressures that influence women’s body images and by learning how to respond to those pressures. Research has shown that this is one of the best classes for improving body image, and it has also been shown to lower the rates of obesity and eating problems.*

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 horseback riding? What kind of paintings do you do?).

## II. VOLUNTARY COMMITMENT AND OVERVIEW (2 MINS)

### Soliciting voluntary commitment to participating in the class

*The main idea in this class is that discussing the social pressures behind body dissatisfaction and how to respond to them will improve your body image. Experience suggests that people 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. Are 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*

### Video Taping

*We would like to videotape all sessions, for supervision and to train new facilitators. Does anyone have a problem with this?*

Turn on video camera now. If anyone does not want to be filmed, get them out of the picture frame.

### 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 email 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)

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

*First, 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?).

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, tell me what these pictures say about what society values about women's appearance?*

Pose questions to the group and promote participation and collaboration on their responses. Promoting discussion is key—let participants talk, not group leaders.

*Q: What are we told that the "perfect woman" looks like?*

(Thin and attractive, have a perfect body, toned, large-chested, tall, look like a super-model) Focus the discussion on the thin part of the thin-ideal, though it is fine to note other aspects, such as clear complexion, white teeth. Note seemingly incompatible features, such as ultra-slenderness and large breasts.

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

*We call this "look" – this thin, toned, busty woman – "the thin-ideal."*

*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 standards over time (e.g., Marilyn Monroe, figures in the Renaissance period, Twiggy, super-models of today).

*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)

*Q: How is the thin-ideal promoted to us?*

(e.g., media: television shows, magazines; diet/weight loss industry)

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

*Q: How did that make you feel emotionally?*

Discuss participant's personal experiences in these areas and the impact on their emotions and self-worth.

*Q: How do thin-ideal messages from the media 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 our 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.)

Be careful not to convey that trying to be healthy is bad—briefly make a distinction between the healthy-ideal and the thin-ideal (avoiding obesity and resulting health consequences versus striving for an unrealistic “look” by whatever means necessary). However, 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 PURSUING 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)

*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 post your video on our group website (read web address: [www.ori.org/bodyacceptanceletters](http://www.ori.org/bodyacceptanceletters)), or you can post it yourself on YouTube, Facebook, Myspace, etc. Although we would like to encourage you to post it, you are in no way required to do so. We will have a digital camera to record the readings, but you can bring your own camera/phone to record your reading if you would like.*

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

*Second, we would like to ask you to stand in front of a mirror with as little clothing as possible 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 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).

*Does everyone understand what we are asking you to do between sessions?*

Ask one woman to paraphrase the assignments back to you.

*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:** Email/call each participant before this class to remind them to complete each home exercise.

**Materials:** Handout - Verbal Challenge Form (Exercise #3)  
Handout - Top-10 List Form (Exercise #4)  
(handouts should be placed in participants' folders)  
Video camera  
Digital camera/cell phone

**Topic Areas:**

- I. Letter to Adolescent Girl Exercise Debriefing
- II. Self-Affirmation Exercise Debriefing
- III. Role Plays
- IV. 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

*Thanks for coming to Session 2. Again, it is important to note that participation is voluntary. Are each of you willing to 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 so you can post it either on our group website, or on YouTube if you would like.*

Have each participant read her letter. Record with a separate camera or their cell phones so you can generate short individual video clips for participants. NOTE: For confidentiality purposes, it is important to make sure that the participant reading the letter is the ONLY person in the video.

*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 home exercise #1. Make sure each participant has written and signed their name on the form.

Distribute and collect consent forms.

*We have been very impressed by the letters written by participants and feel that the letters could be helpful to other women and girls struggling with body image concerns. So we'd like to get your permission to post your written letter and video recording of you reading the letter, along with your full name, on a website maintained by the research team (read web address: [www.ori.org/bodyacceptanceletters](http://www.ori.org/bodyacceptanceletters)). Allowing your name, letter, and video to be posted to the website is completely optional and your choice will not affect your participation in the study. Please read over the form, fill it out with your choice, sign and date it, and return it to me.*

Pass out consent 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.*

*Q: How did you feel when you did this exercise?*

*Q: What are three aspects of yourself that you are satisfied with, including 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 home 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 PLAYS 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). 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 partner,” “All my problems will be solved.”) Make sure each participant tries to talk you out of pursuing the thin-ideal. Be difficult to persuade, 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.

Sample statements for leaders appear below:

- *“Swimsuit season is just around the corner and so I think I will start skipping breakfasts to take off the some 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 weight loss pill, I’m going to order it right away. I can finally be as thin as I want.”*
- *An anorexic says to her friend, “I can’t meet you for dinner 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 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.”*
- *“Anyone could have the body of a supermodel if they really wanted it.”*
- *“No guy is ever going to ask me to the prom unless I drop some of this weight.”*
- *“I am never going to be selected by a sorority unless I lose 10 pounds.”*
- *“I want to make sure I don’t gain that freshman 15 this year, 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 (3 MINS)**

Home-based assignment for next session:

*We would like you to do a couple exercises at home before the next session again. The first is to give examples from your real life of pressures to be thin. Then, we would like you to come up with a verbal challenge to each pressure, just like we did in the role-plays.*

*Here are some examples of thin-ideal statements:*

- 1. A boyfriend might say that he thinks the ideal dress size is a 2.*
- 2. Your mom might comment on how another mom has really let herself go because she gained some weight.*
- 3. A friend could say that she wished she looked like a particular supermodel when looking over a fashion magazine.*

*What are other examples of thin-ideal statements one might experience?*

*How could you respond to these comments to show that you do not agree with the thin-ideal and think these sorts of comment are unhealthy?*

*Please come up with at least five examples from your life. These examples probably won't be how you actually responded to the pressure. Instead, they should be how you might respond now based on what you know about the thin-ideal.*

Hand out **Verbal Challenge Form** (Exercise #3).

*The second exercise is to come up with 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 unhealthy beauty ideal? Please write your top 10-list down and bring it to the next group.*

Hand out **Top-10 List Form** (Exercise #4) Elicit one or two examples.

Examples:

1. Write letter to fashion magazine editor saying they should include a variety of body sizes in the magazine
2. Write a letter to a company indicating that you are boycotting their product because they promote the thin-ideal in their ads
3. Stop subscribing to a fashion magazine
4. Put post-its on mirrors in women's bathrooms saying "love your body"

*Again, please include your full name and signature on your home exercises. I will be collecting all home exercises.*

Ask one participant to parrot back the three home exercises to make sure everyone understands.

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:** Email/call each participant before this class to remind them to complete each home exercise.

**Materials:** Handout – Behavioral Exercise Form (Exercise #5)  
Handout – Body Activism Form (Exercise #6)  
(handouts should be placed in participants' folders)  
Video camera

**Topic Areas:**

- I. Verbal Challenge Exercise Debriefing
- II. Role-Play
- III. Reasons for Signing Up
- IV. Behavioral Challenge
- V. Top 10 List Debriefing
- VI. 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

*Again, it is important to note that participation is voluntary. Are each of you interested in participating 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. VERBAL CHALLENGE EXERCISE DEBRIEFING (10 MINS)

*The first exercise asked you to provide examples from your life of pressures to be thin and to come up with how you might verbally challenge these pressures.*

*We would like each of you to share one example with the group and your verbal challenge.*

Please make sure they are in view of the video camera when they speak.

Solicit examples from each participant. If they cannot come up with any examples, have them think of a time when they felt pressure from *themselves* to be thin (e.g., after looking in the mirror or comparing themselves to a thin friend, thinking, "I really should lose weight"). Help them understand that pressure can often be subtle, and can come in different forms.

Collect home exercise #3. Make sure each participant has written and signed her name on the form.

### III. QUICK COMEBACKS TO THIN-IDEAL STATEMENTS (10 MINS)

*Next, we're going to do a role-playing exercise that is a little different than the one we did last week. I want each of you to challenge my "thin-ideal" statements with just a sentence or two.*

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!*
- *Lindsay has really gained weight over the holidays.*
- *I am thinking of going on a diet, do you want to join me?*
- *Don't you think that girl is a cow?*
- *I would never be friends with someone that heavy.*
- *My brother says I look too fat, what do you think?*
- *Don't you think Jennifer Lopez is a little too heavy?*
- *If I don't lose some weight, I may be dropped from the diving team.*
- *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.*
- *Only skinny girls get asked out by boys.*
- *She really doesn't have the body to be wearing that outfit.*
- *I really wish I had the body of a supermodel*
- *I was thinking of getting a tummy-tuck*
- *Does this dress make me look fat?*

#### **Role play debriefing**

*How did it feel to do these role-plays?*

Encourage discussion.

### IV. REASONS FOR SIGNING UP FOR THIS CLASS (10 mins)

*At this point, it is helpful for students to share the main reasons they signed up for this body acceptance class so that they can get some feedback from the group. What was the main reason you signed up for the group? I hope everyone is willing to honestly share why they signed up for this group. For example, some girls have signed up because of a negative comment somebody made to them or because of concerns about the shape of their body.*

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 all, 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.*

*Examples include:*

*Wearing shorts to school*

*Going to the pool in a swimsuit*

*Exercising in public*

*Wearing a form-fitting shirt or a tank top to the mall/dinner/library*

*Wearing your hair up*

*Wearing a jog bra*

*Not wearing make-up*

*Going to the Rec center*

*Revealing a part of your body, such as your feet, that you tend to cover up (like wear sandals)*

*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 tight 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 tight 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. 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). Hand out **Behavioral Exercise Form** (Exercise #5).

## 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 thin-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?*

*For example, you could put post-its that say “you look great the way you are” into weight loss books at a library or bookstore. You could put up a love your body poster in the girls’ restrooms at school. You could also do something around your sorority house.*

Be sure each participant is in the field of view of the video camera when they give their examples.

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

Hand out **Body Activism Form** (Exercise #6).

**COLLECT HOME EXERCISE #4.** 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 experiment 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.*

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

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:** Email/call each participant before this class to remind them to complete each home exercise.

**Materials:** Handout – Fat Talk List  
Handout – Self-Affirmation Exercise Form (Exercise #7)  
Handout – Letter to Adolescent Girl Form (Exercise #8)  
(handouts should be placed in participants' folders)  
Video camera

**Topic Areas:**

- I. Behavioral Challenge Debriefing
- II. Body Activism Debriefing
- III. Challenging Fat Talk
- IV. Future Pressures to be Thin
- V. Self-Affirmation Exercise
- VI. Home Exercises

**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?*

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

### II. BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGE DEBRIEFING (10 MINS)

*Q: Last week we asked you to do something that you do not normally do because of concerns about your body. How did that go?*

*Q: Let's go around the room and describe what each of you did and how it turned out.*

*Q: 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.

*Hopefully you will continue to challenge yourselves and your body image concerns in the future in a similar way.*

### III. BODY ACTIVISM DEBRIEFING (10 MINS)

*Q: Last time we also asked you to do two body activism exercises. How did that go?*

Go around the room so that each participant describes what they did and what happened. Make sure each is in view of the video camera.

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

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

### IV. CHALLENGING FAT TALK (10 MINS)

*We've spent a lot of time discussing obvious pressures to be thin that we encounter on a regular basis from the media, friends, and family members. However, we often do not notice some of the more subtle ways the thin-ideal keeps going. Can you think of some ways you (or others) might be promoting the thin-ideal without even knowing it?*

(e.g., Complimenting others on weight loss; Joining in when friends complain about their bodies; Talking about weight loss diets)

Hand out **Fat Talk List**.

*Here are some common things we might say or hear others say.*

*Q: How do these statements keep the thin-ideal going?*

*Q: What can you say to stop this sort of talk? Or, how can you change the subject?*

*Q: How do you think changing the way you talk about your body might impact how you feel about your body and how others respond to you?*

*Now we'd just like to do a little practice with these, so we would just like to go around the room and have each of you respond to two of the statements in a way that signals you do not approve of the pro-thin-ideal statement.*

Role-play so that each participant responds to a comment that signals her disapproval of the pro-thin-ideal statement.

Try to help participants become more aware of the ways in which they can begin to promote more healthy attitudes about their bodies.

#### V. FUTURE PRESSURES TO BE THIN (10 MINS)

*Can each person think of one example of a future pressure to be thin that might come up?*

(e.g., fitting into prom dress, senior pictures, summer vacation, “Freshman Fifteen,” pregnancy, getting older/slower metabolism).

For each example given, have participant say how they would respond, soliciting input from the group.

*How do you plan on responding to them?*

Have each participant provide one example and discuss **amongst each other** how they will respond to that pressure.

#### VI. SELF-AFFIRMATION AND OTHER EXERCISES (5 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, play tennis, 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’m so flat chested” 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 through soccer practice 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 during the next week and let us all know how it goes? If you are willing, I’d like you to email me and the other group members, telling us what you did and how it went. 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 #7).

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

*Second, we would like you to do one form of “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 email or text messages. 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.

*Third, we would like you to complete one more exit exercise. Would you all be willing to write another letter to a teenage girl telling her how to avoid developing body image concerns? Use the information you have learned in these sessions, and any additional ways you may think of on your own. The goal is to help her understand the different things she can do, say, avoid, or learn that will help her develop or maintain a positive body image. Please send this letter, via regular or email, to the actual person if you are willing.*

Hand out **Letter to Adolescent Girl Form** (Exercise # 8).

## VII. HOME EXERCISE (3 MINS)

*So, we would like each of you to do one of the positive body talk exercises during the next week and email the group telling us how it went. Second, we would like you as a group to do one additional form of “body activism.” Third, we would like you to write an email letter to a teenage girl telling her how to avoid developing body image concerns and send the letter/video to us ([bodyproject.ori.org](http://bodyproject.ori.org)) and the group, if you like.*

## VIII. CLOSURE (3 MINS)

*Is anyone willing to say what you feel you got out of participating in this group?*

*Once again, thanks again for deciding to be 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!!*