

THE BODY PROJECT

A Dissonance-Based Body Acceptance and Eating Disorder
Prevention Program

6-Session Manual



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The Body Project

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) is excited to present you with this manual, which outlines a dissonance-based body acceptance intervention referred to as the Body Project. Backed by two decades of research and evaluation data, the Body Project was developed and evaluated at Stanford University, the University of Texas at Austin, and Oregon Research Institute. This intervention has been delivered to over one million young women around the world and has repeatedly been shown to effectively reduce body dissatisfaction, negative mood, unhealthy dieting, and disordered eating. There is further evidence that the Body Project intervention reduces the risk of future onset of eating disorders and obesity.

This manualized intervention consists of written, verbal, and behavioral exercises in which participants voluntarily critique our culturally promoted appearance ideal for women during four weekly sessions. These activities are designed to induce dissonance regarding the pursuit of the appearance ideal, which in turn is thought to result in improvements in body dissatisfaction, negative affect, and eating disorder symptoms. 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. Thus, the overarching goal of this intervention is to have the participants speak, write, or act in a way that is contrary to the appearance-ideal. It is vital for the participants to generate the costs of the appearance-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 appearance-ideal, because this will only undermine the effects of the intervention.

Consistent with the intervention theory, reductions in appearance-ideal internalization mediate the Body Project's 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 appearance 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). Participants who completed the Body Project showed a reduction in brain reward region response to thin models, when compared to controls (Stice, Yokum, & Waters, 2014), indicating that this body acceptance intervention reduces neural response to stimuli thought to play a key role in promoting disturbances in body image and eating.

Further, the underlying theoretical model for the Body Project has received support in mediational analyses, studies that have manipulated dissonance-induction procedures, and moderation analysis. Even more striking is the evidence that this intervention produced positive effects when delivered by undergraduate students (Becker et al., 2005; Becker et al., 2010; Stice, Rohde, Durant, Shaw, & Wade, 2011). Thus, it appears that, given appropriate training, the Body

Project, can be effectively delivered by a range of group leaders – an essential criterion for dissemination.

No other body acceptance intervention/eating disorder prevention program has been found to significantly reduce future eating disorder onset, outperform alternative credible interventions, produce effects that persist through a three-year follow-up, or produce effects that have been replicated by independent research teams. A rigorous trial found that the intervention prevented 60% of the cases of eating disorders that emerged in the control condition over a three-year follow-up, suggesting that for every 100 young women who complete this program, there should be nine fewer young girls who develop eating disorders over the subsequent three-year period. The effects produced by this intervention are superior to those of several alternative interventions. Numerous independent labs have replicated the positive effects of 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).

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. Moreover, it is important to note that the research evidence accumulated to date has focused on female high school and college students; there is no evidence that this intervention is efficacious for early adolescent (middle school students) or middle-aged or older women. These are important directions for future research. Nonetheless, it is encouraging that the dissonance intervention has produced effects for other clinically meaningful outcomes, including mental healthcare utilization and functional impairment. Perhaps most importantly, the fact that a brief intervention produced a 60% reduction in the incidence of eating disorders over a 3-year follow up (Stice, Marti, Spoor, et al., 2008) suggests that if this intervention were widely disseminated and delivered with fidelity and competence, it could reduce the incidence of eating disorders.

NEDA AND THE BODY PROJECT

In 2014-2015, the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) partnered with five Title I schools in New York City to disseminate the renowned Body Project. The program was delivered to ethnically diverse student populations, expanding the program's reach and presenting exciting opportunities to improve the activities with cultural competency adaptations. Results from the pilot initiative indicated a general trend of improvement in all measures: (a) thin ideal internalization, (b) dietary restraint, (c) body dissatisfaction, (d) negative affect and (e) eating disorder symptoms. While participants in the New York State pilot showed improvement across measures, NEDA made adjustments to the script to better suit more diverse populations. Previous versions of the Body Project manual used the term "thin-ideal" to define the cultural appearance ideal; however, results from NEDA's pilot study indicate that the thin ideal is not representative of all cultural appearance ideals.

As of January 1, 2018 NEDA has trained facilitators from 27 states and four countries outside the US. With funding from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, NEDA partnered with 15

community organizations to disseminate the Body Project to NYC youth. Through this partnership, NEDA is continuing to evaluate the cultural competency of the Body Project program script and will incorporate a social media campaign based on body activism projects.

NEDA has created a password-protected website (<https://bp.nationaleatingdisorders.org>) for NEDA-trained facilitators and trainers. The website enables those trained by NEDA to access up-to-date resources and tracking tools, so that NEDA can provide feedback on the Body Project's reach and impact on both a national and local level. We encourage NEDA-trained facilitators post questions or share tips with other NEDA-trained facilitators or trainers. If you have any comments or questions, contact NEDA's Senior Program Associate, Chelsea Kronengold, at ckronengold@myveda.org.

STRUCTURE

The Body Project is run in a group rather than individual format. The structure serves several purposes, including capitalizing on social cohesion and support among group members, promoting attitudinal change by hearing peers express statements against the appearance-ideal, and maximizing cost effectiveness. Further, several exercises used in the Body Project to create cognitive dissonance require multiple participants.

The group meets for six consecutive weeks in 45-minute sessions (or four, 1-hour sessions). Groups are led by a facilitator or two, who can be educators, youth program coordinators, psychology and social work graduate students, eating disorder specialists, and more. Program facilitators are empathetic, experienced in facilitating group discussions, and have an interest in women's health and empowerment. Experience suggests that the optimal group size is approximately 6 to 8 participants, with a maximum of 12, as this is large enough to ensure that participants feel publically accountable for statements they make against the appearance-ideal during the session, but small enough to ensure that everyone can participate verbally. Smaller groups may not invoke sufficient public accountability, particularly if one or two participants drop out. Larger groups typically do not allow enough time for all attendees to participate verbally in all of the exercises in the sessions, which would theoretically reduce the effects of the intervention. We recommend against allowing people to join ongoing groups, as the in-session exercises build on each other.

As noted, it is often useful to include a co-facilitator to help conduct the sessions (e.g., pass out material and write participant responses on a white board, keep track of time to ensure that all of the material is covered). The co-facilitator can be another experienced facilitator, someone in training to lead their own group, or someone who has simply been a participant in a previous group willing to help conduct the sessions. We have often had volunteers from local colleges who wish to gain clinical experience serve as a co-facilitator. One benefit of this approach is that college students are typically closer in age to Body Project participants, which can facilitate participant acceptance of the intervention messages.

The Body Project was designed to consist of four 1-hour sessions conducted over four consecutive weeks. However, this version consisting of six 45-minute sessions is useful in

settings where sessions need to be completed in less than an hour or for facilitators who simply want to cover less material per session. Clinical experience suggests that conducting the sessions spaced one week apart helps foster learning and practicing of the skills discussed in-session, and also allows ample time for participants to complete between-session assignments. Moreover, participants are more likely to attend the sessions if they occur on a weekly versus less frequent basis. However, positive intervention effects have also been obtained when the program has been delivered in a shorter, more condensed period, although the effects tend to be somewhat weaker when delivered in this fashion.

The sessions are cumulative, with each session building on what was learned and practiced in the previous session. Thus, attending all of the sessions and participating in the in-session and between-session exercises is very important. We recommend that facilitators clearly explain and reinforce the rationale for the in-session and between-session exercises during sessions.

COMMON CHALLENGES

Missed Sessions: The Body Project intervention was developed for high school and college students, who may miss a session due to a scheduling conflict or an upcoming test. Missing sessions should be discouraged whenever possible, and can be avoided by conveying the importance of attending all sessions from the onset, and sending email or text reminders before each session. If a participant must miss a session, try to schedule a brief individual 15-minute make-up session with the student that covers the key points and exercises from the missed session before they attend the next session. We sometimes do this right before the next session begins, but it does not allow the participant to complete her home practice exercises. One can also do a brief review of the session content over the phone.

Home Exercises: The home exercises in the Body Project intervention play an important role in helping participants adopt an anti-appearance-ideal stance and serve to cement the ideas that are taught and practiced in the group. The likelihood that participants will complete home exercises depend on their overall commitment to improving body satisfaction and enjoyment of the group sessions, as well as the extent to which facilitators emphasize the importance of completing these exercises. The home exercises are cumulative, building on skills and concepts that are practiced in the groups, and represent opportunities to practice challenging peers, family members, and themselves to question the appearance-ideal.

Participants occasionally resist completing the home exercises. To encourage full participation, we try to make the home exercises not feel like “homework” per se, but rather a natural extension of what is learned. For this reason, we avoid using the term “homework” in the sessions, preferring the term “home exercises.” Contacting participants via email, phone or text a day before the scheduled session can also help prompt them 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. The intervention script also includes some time for “troubleshooting,” when participants can work together to devise ways to ensure that they remember to complete their home exercises. At the end of each session, we suggest that facilitators ask one participant to paraphrase the home assignments to

the group, which helps ensure that everyone understands the exercises. Because the second through fourth sessions include group discussions wherein each individual discusses the assignment(s) from the last session, there is also peer pressure from the other group members to complete the work. If a particular participant forgets to complete a home exercise, encourage them to complete it while waiting for the group to begin or while other participants are presenting what they did for their home exercises

Investment in the Appearance-Ideal: The Body Project is aimed at helping young women with body image concerns develop an attitude that is counter to the prevailing sociocultural standard of pursuing unrealistic appearance-ideals promoted by mass media. Some participants can be extremely invested in the appearance-ideal at the beginning of the intervention, and may have difficulty letting go of this pursuit. It is therefore very important that participants spend a maximum amount of time in the sessions arguing against the appearance-ideal, as this will promote the intended attitudinal shift. This means that as a facilitator, it is beneficial to refrain from lecturing participants about the negative consequences of pursuing the appearance-ideal or attempting to argue them out of pursuing the appearance-ideal. Instead, facilitators should provide participants with as much time as possible to actively engage in these discussions.

Always keep in mind that the primary goal of the intervention is to get the participants to criticize and challenge the appearance-ideal. Because the main goal of the intervention is to get participants to adopt an anti-appearance-ideal stance, the role of the facilitator is to get other group members to speak out against the appearance-ideal or pose counter arguments to pro-appearance-ideal statements voiced by participants. Experience indicates that the program does not work if participants do not critique the appearance-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 appearance-ideal. Facilitators 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 facilitators to keep self-disclosure to a minimum to ensure that participants maximize the time spent critiquing the appearance-ideal.

Appearance Ideal vs. Healthy Ideal: It is useful to make a distinction between the appearance-ideal and the healthy-ideal. The appearance-ideal is about conforming to a very rigid societal/cultural standard of beauty, such as 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 appearance-ideal, in part because it is healthy to have muscles. Healthy looks different on everyone. Further, individuals pursuing the healthy ideal do not engage in unhealthy weight control behaviors, such as fasting and laxative abuse. Clarifying this distinction is an important means of encouraging participants to adopt an anti-appearance-ideal stance, and avoiding any confusion about the goals of the intervention.

Participant Engagement: As noted, it is important to actively engage all participants during the group sessions. Although it is crucial to follow the manual closely, participants often

get bored if group leaders read directly from the script with little or no eye contact or personalization of the material. Thus, we recommend that facilitators become familiar with the main points in order to minimize in-session reliance on the script. Formal facilitator training will help in learning the script and understanding the rationale behind the intervention. In addition, we recommend that facilitators spend a few minutes before each session reviewing the session content and materials. If you are working with a co-facilitator, it is helpful to decide beforehand which person will be responsible for presenting each section of the script. This preparation will allow you to focus your efforts on getting all participants involved.

Maintaining eye contact with participants during the entire session helps encourage discussion. 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 systematically 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). Asking for a volunteer to begin the discussion is also a good strategy. 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”). Although it is extremely important to stay on track and cover the necessary information for each session, participants want to feel heard and understood.


Depending on the maturity level of participants, it may be necessary to establish ground rules if disruptive behaviors emerge. If participants interrupt each other, say that everyone should respect what others have to say during the discussions, allowing people to finish their points. If participants’ cell phones ring or they text during the sessions, request that everyone turn off or silence their phones, as this reduces the effectiveness of the sessions.

It is particularly crucial for facilitators to manage the sessions effectively and make sure that *all listed exercises* are completed. A co-facilitator can help with this. 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 six 45-minute version of the Body Project, which provides a little more time for activities. Alternatively, consider adding an additional few minutes per session, if possible.

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. If a participant

misses a session, try to schedule a brief 15-minute mini-session that covers the important points and exercises with them. This is usually offered over the phone a few days before the next session or right before the next session begins. Although this represents extra work for the facilitators, it minimizes the number of missed sessions and helps girls feel their participation is important, and maximizes intervention effects.

The manual describes each of the six 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. Each session provides distinguished spaces to fill in the **On point leader:** _____ for the section. Instructions to facilitators are presented in regular typeface. Verbal instructions that group leaders should say, or paraphrase, to participants are presented in *italics*. Throughout the manual all handouts are distinguished in a box with **underlined bold print.** Some questions end with a  as a reminder to pause and allow the participants to respond to the question.

NEDA's Guidelines for Facilitators

GUIDELINES FOR SELF-DISCLOSURE

- As the Body Project has decades of evidence supporting the effectiveness of the program as written, it is crucial to follow the script to allow for the best possible results.
- Know your limits. Remember, because you are not an expert or professional in the eating disorders field, you are not responsible for providing therapy. If you suspect a group member is currently struggling, share your concerns with the representative from the school. NEDA has numerous resources to help you or someone you know struggling with an eating disorder:
 - Call our toll free, confidential Helpline number at 1-800-931-2237
 - NEDA maintains a [database of treatment options and support groups](#)
 - Our [parent](#), [educator](#), and [coach/athletic trainer](#) toolkits tackle the complex nature of eating disorders in a way that is useful and easy to understand.
- If participants ask questions you are unsure of how to answer, it is absolutely fine to say, “You know, I’m actually not sure, but I will look into that,” and refocus participants on the topic at hand. Check-in with NEDA’s program coordinator with any questions, comments or situations that concerned you or made you feel uncomfortable. Your role is to guide participants through the sessions, not to be able to answer every question that arises during the program.
- Know what you are and are not willing to share. As the goal is to engage the participants in actively speaking out against societal beauty ideals, group facilitators should keep sharing to a minimum. There are ways to empathize with feelings and pressures that participants identify, without disclosing details of your personal experiences. Try validating participants’ feelings with statements like:
 - “I understand, that is really hard.”
 - “Yeah, those thin-ideal comments really bothered/confused me too.”
 - “It’s really common to feel that way”
 - “I bet a lot of women have had a similar experience”
 - “I’m so glad you felt comfortable sharing that with the group... can anyone else relate to that experience?”

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SELF-CARE

- First and foremost, commit to your own recovery. Before becoming a body image advocate and leading group discussions of body image, relationships with food/disordered eating and societal beauty ideals, be sure you are an advocate for yourself. Leading groups for teens who are navigating confusing messages about health & appearance, and who may be at risk for developing an eating disorder, is a big responsibility!
- Understand that the topics and exercises of the Body Project may bring up a lot of emotions. It is imperative to stay focused on your own recovery before taking steps to

The Body Project National Eating Disorders Association Proud2Bme.org help others. If you are currently working with a professional, or have worked with one in the past, please ask for her/his feedback regarding your decision to facilitate the Body Project.

- Before leading a group, ask yourself, “Am I able to model truly healthy eating behaviors in groups and outside of groups?” If you are not, this may not be the right time for you to facilitate the Body Project. Talk to NEDA’s Volunteer Program Supervisor to discuss other ways to get involved with NEDA and Proud2Bme.
- Be prepared for assumptions. As a facilitator, you are in a unique position to clear up some widespread myths about weight bias, dieting and the prevalent photo manipulation. Study the facilitator fact sheet in the beginning of your handbook, and prepare to respond to assumptions & questions with facts. Practice how you might respond to some frequently asked questions or prevalent misunderstandings, and how you might move the conversation forward, staying focused on the topic at hand. Don’t get caught up in debates and side conversations, as this can be a detriment to the flow and impact of the program, and will leave less time for the entire group to actively participate in proven effective exercises.
- Remember your reason for getting involved with the Body Project. Before leading a group, consider your motivation for doing so. While it may be personally rewarding, also keep in mind that you have an important obligation to empower the teenage members of your group with knowledge and positivity to raise their body satisfaction and prevent disordered eating.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FEEL TRIGGERED

- Be mindful of how you feel as you read and practice each session. Are certain topics or exercises particularly difficult for you? If it is helpful, ask your co-facilitator to lead those exercises that are uncomfortable for you.
- Check-in with yourself after each session. How did you feel throughout the session? Journal or meditate if that is helpful to you.
- If you are currently working with a therapist, discuss your experience as a group leader. If you do not have a therapist and would like to connect with one, you can refer to NEDA’s directory of facilities and treatment providers.
- Call NEDA’s toll free, confidential Helpline at 1-800-931-2237.
- If at any point you feel unable to continue as a group leader, please contact the program coordinator ASAP and we will work with you on a smooth transition. Your health is top priority.

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.
 - In 2012, Israel passed a law that regulates the body mass indexes of models and forces brands to disclose whether ad images have been retouched. In 2015, France adopted a similar law.

3. Social Media Use

- A 2015 Common Sense Media Survey found that many teens who are active on social media fear how they're perceived, and that girls are particularly vulnerable:
 - 35% are worried about people tagging them in unattractive photos.
 - 27% feel stressed about how they look in posted photos.
 - 22% felt bad about themselves if their photos were ignored
 - One study of teen girls found that Facebook users were significantly more likely than non-Facebook users to have internalized a drive for thinness and to engage in body surveillance. (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013)
 - Another study found Instagram use is linked to self-objectification, and using Instagram for merely 30 minutes a day can change the way you view your own body (Fardouly, Willburger, & Vartanian, 2017)
4. Most fashion models are thinner than 98% of American women (Smolak, 1996).
- The average American woman is 5'4" tall and weighs 168.5 pounds. The average American model is 5'11" tall and weighs 117 pounds.
 - 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).
 - Plus-size models have shrunk, too. A decade ago, plus-size models averaged between size 12 and size 18. Today, the majority of plus-size models an agency boards are between size 6 and size 14,
5. The Model Alliance joined together with researchers at Northeastern University and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health to conduct an industry survey of professional models (Rodgers, Ziff, Lowy, Yu, & Austin, 2017):
- 68.3% of models suffer from anxiety and depression.
 - 64.1% have been asked to lose weight by their agency.
 - 48.7% do "fasts," cleanses, or otherwise restrict their food intake over short periods to lose weight.
 - 31.2% have had eating disorders.
6. As of 2012, it is estimated that 67% of American women are plus-size — size 14 or larger. The CDC currently reports the average American woman's measurements equate to a size 14, while other studies report an average size between 16 and 18 (Christel & Dunn, 2016).
7. Americans spend over \$60 billion on dieting and diet-related products each year (Marketdata Enterprises, 2010), and the U.S. beauty market is expected to grow to \$90 billion in 2020 (Euromonitor International, 2016).
- A content analysis of weight-loss advertising in 2001 found that more than half of all advertising for weight-loss products made use of false, unsubstantiated claims. (Hobbs, 2006)
8. According to Global Dove Research: The Real Truth About Beauty: Revisited (2010)

- Only 4% of women around the world consider themselves beautiful (up from 2% in 2004).
- Only 11% of girls globally are comfortable describing themselves as “beautiful.”
- 72% of girls feel tremendous pressure to be beautiful.
- 80% of women agree that every woman has something about her that is beautiful, but do not see their own beauty.
- More than half of women globally (54%) agree that when it comes to how they look, they are their own worst beauty critic.

9. **Dieting & Drive for Thinness**

- By age 6, girls especially start to express concerns about their own weight or shape. 40-60% of elementary school girls (ages 6-12) are concerned about their weight or about becoming too fat. This concern endures through life. (Smolak, 2011)
- Children of mothers who are overly concerned about their weight are at increased risk for modeling their unhealthy attitudes and behaviors. Parental weight talk – either encouraging a child to diet or speaking about their own diet –is linked to the development of both eating disorders and overweight in the child. (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2003; Golden, 2016)
- 12.6% of female high school students reporting taking diet pills, powders, or liquids to control their weight, without a doctor’s advice. (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2003)
- Women who have a history of chronic yo-yo dieting can decrease their overall lifespan of up to 20%!

10. **Weight Stigma**

- Weight stigma poses a significant threat to psychological and physical health. It has been documented as a significant risk factor for depression, low self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction. (Andreyeva, 2008)
- In August 2016, the American Academy of Pediatrics released guidelines on preventing both eating disorders and obesity in children. They included discouraging dieting, focusing on healthy habits rather than weight, promoting positive body image, discouraging “weight talk,” encouraging more frequent family meals, and asking about bullying. (Golden, 2016)
- Experiencing weight stigma increases the likelihood of engaging in unhealthy eating behaviors and lower levels of physical activity. (Andreyeva, 2008)
- Up to 40% of overweight girls and 37% of overweight boys are teased about their weight by peers or family members. Family weight teasing predicts weight gain, binge eating, and extreme weight control measures. (Golden, 2016)

11. 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**.

12. 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).
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. 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.
15. Of the 1.7 million cosmetic surgeries performed in 2015, breast augmentation is number one (American Society of Plastic Surgeons)

SESSION 1

Prep: Email/call/text each participant before this session to remind them about the time and location of the first group.

Materials:

- Flip chart (or whiteboard) and markers
- Handouts (should be placed in participants' folders)
- Nametags

Topic Areas:

- I. Introduction
- II. Voluntary Commitment and Overview
- III. Definition and Origin of the Appearance-Ideal
- IV. Costs Associated with the Appearance-Ideal
- VI. 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 appearance-ideal, and costs associated with pursuing this ideal. The importance of attendance and completing the home exercises is also stressed.

I. INTRODUCTION (5 MINS)

On point leader: _____

Thanks for coming. All of you decided to take part in this group because of your body image concerns —a common issue among women/girls.

Research shows that when women/girls talk about the “appearance-ideal” shown in the mass media, and how to challenge pressures to conform to this ideal, it makes them feel better about their bodies. This has been found to be the best class for improving body image and for reducing unhealthy eating problems.

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.

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.

The group leader begins by introducing herself to the group. Then, the group leader asks the co-leader (if available) and group members to introduce themselves.

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)

On point leader: _____

Soliciting voluntary commitment to participating in the class

Participants get the most out of these groups if they attend all six meetings, participate verbally, and complete all of the between-meeting exercises. It is important to clearly note that participation is voluntary, so I will ask each of you to go around the room and say, “I am willing to actively participate in the group.” I will start...

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

During the six sessions we will:

1. *Define the appearance-ideal and explore its origin*
2. *Examine the costs of pursuing this ideal*
3. *Explore ways to resist pressures to conform to the appearance-ideal*
4. *Discuss how to challenge our 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 body pressures*


Attendance

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

Group leaders should **call or e-mail or text 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 APPEARANCE-IDEAL (18 MINS)

On point leader: _____
Scribe: _____

Now we are going to define the cultural appearance-ideal for women to understand exactly what we are discussing. Imagine what society tells us the “perfect woman” looks like. What are her physical characteristics? Our scribe will create our “perfect woman” list on the board. 

Have participants shout out aspects of the “perfect woman.” Scribe writes “The Perfect Woman” on the board. Focus the discussion on the physical aspects of the appearance-ideal, though it is fine to note other characteristics, such as smart, confident, etc. Possible responses include:

| | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Tall | Young | Tan |
| Thin | Toned | Big, round butt |
| Small waist | Long legs | Straight, white teeth |
| Large breasts | Full lips | Clear skin |
| Flat stomach | Long, voluminous hair | Petite hands and feet |

Leave this list on the board for the entire session.

So the “perfect woman” has...

Read back the list on the board playfully highlighting incompatible features, such as ultra-slenderness and large breasts.

We call this “look” – this [thin, toned, busty] woman – “the appearance-ideal.” 

When defining the appearance-ideal, draw from whichever description the group provided (i.e. curvy, small-waist, tall, etc.) for the “perfect woman.”

At this time, the on-point leader should pause as the scribe crosses out “The Perfect Woman” on the flip chart and writes “The Appearance Ideal.” This should be a dramatic (and humorous) moment in which the participants realize the “perfect woman” does not exist. Instead, they are describing the unrealistic appearance-ideal perpetuated by society.

Depending on one’s cultural influences, the terms “beauty-ideal” or “thin-ideal” may be used interchangeably with “appearance-ideal.” The appearance-ideal is not the same as the healthy-ideal. With the appearance-ideal, people use extreme measures to look like a supermodel, including some very unhealthy weight control behaviors. The goal of the appearance-ideal is to achieve a figure that is neither realistic nor healthy.

The healthy-ideal is the way your unique body looks when you are doing the necessary things to appropriately maximize your physical health, mental health, and overall quality of life. With the healthy-ideal, the goal is health, fitness, functionality 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, and looks different from person to person.

Where did the appearance-ideal come from and how do we learn about it?

Media (e.g., television shows, magazines, social media), diet/weight loss industry, fashion industry, friends/family, etc.

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

Nods are an acceptable answer.

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 appearance-ideal for women). If they have never received such comments, encourage them to think of an example from TV or friends.

How do appearance-ideal messages from the media or other people in your life affect how you feel about your body?

Feeling inadequate because they do not look like a model, dislike of their own bodies, negative mood.

What does our culture tell us will happen if we are able to look like the appearance-ideal?

We will be accepted, loved, happy, successful, wealth.

Differentiate the appearance-ideal from the healthy-ideal if they say you are healthier, more attractive, or happier if you conform to the appearance-ideal. Former is about thinness at any cost (including health), whereas latter is about function and health.

Do you really think all of these good things happen if you look like the appearance-ideal? Another way to think about this is to ask: do celebrities, who often come the closest to the appearance-ideal, have perfect lives?


No, they will likely have little impact and have a plethora of problems like substance addiction, no real friends, etc.

Do not describe (or allow participants to discuss) the benefits of thinness in general or give the impression that the appearance-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 an ultra-thin appearance-ideal).

IV. COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH PURSUING THE APPEARANCE-IDEAL (20 MINS)

On point leader: _____
Scribe: _____

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

What are the costs of trying to look like the appearance-ideal for women/girls? Our scribe will make a list for us on the board. 

Decreased self-worth; expensive; physically and mentally exhausting; can hurt themselves, health problems; often negatively encourages unhealthy weight management techniques, depression, anxiety; isolating, pressure; never satisfied. Another cost is that when people feel bad about their own bodies they are actually less likely to do things that help them be healthy, like exercising regularly and eating a well-balanced diet.

If so many women are dealing with these issues, then what are the collective costs for society?

Increased mental health care costs, decreased productivity, promote a culture of discontent. Perpetuating fictitious ideal and reinforces patriarchy.

Who benefits from the appearance-ideal? In other words, are you getting rich from this ideal?

Diet industry, media, fashion industry, fitness industry, plastic surgeons, etc.

Given all these costs, does it make sense to try to look like the appearance-ideal?

No! Make sure that each participant makes a public statement against the appearance-ideal at this stage (and anywhere else possible).

If they say yes, validate that these messages are engrained in us and encourage them to stick with us and hopefully we can help change their mind in future sessions.

V. HOME EXERCISES (5 MINS)

On point leader: _____

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

Now that we have begun discussing costs of the appearance-ideal, would you be willing to write a letter to a younger girl who is struggling with her body image about the costs associated with trying to look like the appearance-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.

Pull the **Letter to Younger Girl** form from your packet (Exercise #1).

Second, we would like to ask you to stand in front of a mirror with as little clothing as you feel comfortable with and write down 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.

Please make sure to include at least some physical attributes on your list. It may be difficult at first, and it is important to recognize each of these areas about yourself. Students have found this exercise to be very helpful and empowering. When I did this exercised for the first time, I really enjoyed it because...

Make testimonial statement to encourage participants to complete this exercise.

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

Pull the **Mirror Exercise Form** from your packet (Exercise #2).

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

Pull the **Appearance-Ideal Perpetuation Behavior Checklist** from your packet (Exercise #3).

Can someone tell me what the home exercises are for this week in your own words?

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

We will discuss exercises next session. 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 (i.e., head nods).

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/text each participant before this session to remind them about the time/ location of this session and to complete the home exercises.

Materials:

- Nametags

Topic Areas:

- I. Reinforcing Voluntary Commitment
- II. Letter to Younger Girl Exercise Debriefing
- III. Mirror Exercise Debriefing
- IV. Role Play: Discourage Pursuit of the Appearance-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 appearance-ideal.

I. REINFORCING VOLUNTARY COMMITMENT (1 MIN)

On point leader: _____

Thank you for coming to Session 2. As we mentioned in the first session, participation in this program is voluntary, so I would like each of you to go around the room and state that you are willing to actively participate in today's session. I will start...

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

II. LETTER TO YOUNGER GIRL DEBRIEFING (15 MINS)

Last week we asked if you would be willing to write a letter to a younger girl about the costs of trying to look like the appearance-ideal. We are now going to go around the room so that each of us can share our letter with the rest of the group.

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. Thank you!

III. MIRROR 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.

What are at least three aspects of yourself that you are satisfied with, including two physical features? If you can, please try and pick more challenging areas to get the most out of this activity. I'll start, I like my...

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?”).

Hopefully, you recognize the positive things about yourselves and will remember them, particularly as the pressures of the appearance-ideal surround you. Given that these are potent pressures — let's discuss ways to resist them.

IV. ROLE PLAYS TO DISCOURAGE PURSUIT OF THE APPEARANCE-IDEAL (20 MINS)

On point leader: _____

Now let's review some examples of appearance-ideal statements, and practice how one could respond to them. I will play a person that is obsessed with the appearance-ideal and your job will be to convince me that I shouldn't be. Feel free to use any of the costs and information brought up in our earlier discussions.

Facilitators take on the role of an appearance-idealist for each participant. Let each participant spend anywhere from **30 seconds – 45 seconds** attempting to dissuade your character from pursuing the appearance-ideal (do two role plays if necessary).

Tips on being “in character:”

- Parrot, or echo back, any pro appearance-ideal comments previously made by participants while you are playing an appearance-ideal role.
- Focus on the unrealistic benefits of the appearance-ideal (“I’ll be happy all of the time if I’m thin,” “Everyone will like me,” “All my problems will be solved,” etc.)
- Make statements that hint at the costs of pursuing the appearance-ideal (“It will take time away from my 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.
- Don’t give in. Be difficult to persuade (you and the participants should volley the role play back and forth several times). It is OK to be playful with this exercise; feel free to go over the top a bit with the more resilient participants.

My co-facilitator and I will model the role-play first. I will be the facilitator who is obsessed with this ideal, and my co-facilitator will play the role of the participant who is trying to talk me out of it.

Facilitators should demonstrate first. 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 one at a time.

Sample statements appear below and continue on page 25. Leaders should generate additional statements as needed and may tailor the statements to be appropriate for their group members.

General Statements

- *“I’m thinking of going on a diet, do you want to join me?”*
- *“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.”*
- *“Anyone could have the body of a supermodel if they really wanted it.”*
- *“I just got an app on my phone that helps me budget my calories. It says that in order to lose 10 pounds by next month, I can only have half of what I usually eat.”*
- *“I’m going to start wearing a waist-trainer. I heard it’s bad for your health, but I don’t care as long as it makes me look good.”*
- *“I’m thinking about getting a boob job before I go to college. What do you think?”*
- *“My butt is so flat. What do you think of butt pads? They look a little uncomfortable, but I think I can make it work.”*
- *“I want to get lip injections so I can have a better pout.”*
- *I love watching “Keeping Up with the Kardashians,” but it makes me sad that I don’t look more like Kim.”*
- *“You’re so brave for coming to school with no makeup on. I wouldn’t be caught dead without a full face of makeup.”*
- *“My coach says that if I cut out breakfast, I could be a better athlete.”*
- *“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’m going to do 200 squats a day before bathing suit season so my butt will look good in a bikini.”*

Weight-Based Statements

- *“My schedule is packed so I never have time to eat. I know I could probably make time, but I like how much weight I’m losing”*
- *“The Holidays/Prom/Swimsuit Season is around the corner; I am going to spend 3 hours at the gym every morning so I don’t pack on the pounds.”*
- *“I feel a little dizzy lately, which may be from these diet pills and laxatives I’ve been taking, but I don’t care because I have already lost 10 pounds.”*
- *“No guy is ever going to ask me out unless I lose/gain some of this weight.”*
- *“Do you think smoking will make me skinny? I’ve heard it’s a great way to suppress your appetite.”*

- “To get closer to that thigh gap I’ve been striving for, I think I’ll spend an hour on inner thigh exercises each day this week.”
- “I’m thinking of becoming a gluten-free vegan because I hear it helps you lose weight”

Role-play debriefing

How might it be beneficial for you to challenge people when they make appearance-ideal statements?

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

V. HOME EXERCISES (5 MINS)

On point leader: _____

Home-based assignment for next session:

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 appearance-ideal, such as a parent, sibling, dating partner, 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 made appearance-related comments to you, 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. The goal of this exercise is to do something that will actually change your environment/the world, at least a little bit, in a way that will benefit other young women. Think of yourself as a social activist who is combating the appearance-ideal. What can you avoid, say, do, or learn to battle this unhealthy beauty ideal in your community? Please write your top-10 list down and bring it to the next group.

Pull the **Top-10 List Form** from your packet (Exercise #5).

If nobody has any ideas, elicit one or two examples:

1. Write a letter to a fashion magazine editor saying they should include a variety of body sizes in the magazine.
2. Put post-its on mirrors in women's bathrooms saying "love your body" or "your mind makes you beautiful."
3. Write a Facebook, Twitter, or blog post that critiques the appearance-ideal and share it with family and friends.
4. Invite friends to join you in a boycott of a fashion magazine that promotes the appearance ideal.

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

1. Complete the rewind response letter.
2. Generate top 10-list of ways to challenge the appearance-ideal at a societal level.

Time permitting:

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

We will discuss home exercises next session. Thanks again for coming. We are looking forward to seeing you next week!

SESSION 3

Prep: Email/call/text each participant before this session to remind them about the time/ location of this session and to complete the home exercises.

Materials:

- Nametags

Topic Areas:

- I. Reinforcing Voluntary Commitment
- II. Rewind Response Letter Exercise Debriefing
- III. Role-Play: Quick Comebacks to Appearance-Ideal Statements
- 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 appearance-ideal, how to challenge personal body-related concerns, and how to respond to future pressures to conform to the appearance-ideal. Role-plays are also used so participants can practice making statements that counter the appearance-ideal.

I. REINFORCING VOLUNTARY COMMITMENT (1 MIN)

On point leader: _____

Thanks for coming back to session 3. Like always, it is important to note that participation is voluntary. Is everyone willing to actively participate in today's session?

Get a verbal affirmation that each participant is willing to actively participate.

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 appearance-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.

We would like each of you to read your letters to the group. Who would like to start?

Go around the room and have all participants read their letter. After each participant concludes their reading, respond by thanking them and/or making a positive comment about their 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.

Thank you all for sharing your letters with the group!

III. QUICK COMEBACKS TO APPEARANCE-IDEAL STATEMENTS ROLE PLAY (12 MINS)

On point leader: _____

Last week we asked you to talk someone out of pursuing the appearance-ideal in an extended role-play. This week we are going to do something a little different — we would like each of you to briefly challenge “appearance-ideal” statements with a quick comeback. Your goal is simply to derail the negative body talk. You might do this by pointing out a cost of pursuing the “appearance-ideal,” or you might just end the negative body talk altogether.

For example, if I say: “Buy it a size smaller; it will be good motivation.” You could say: “There is nothing wrong with the size I currently wear.”

I would like each of you to counter two appearance-ideal statements I make. We will go around the room twice, each of you combatting one comment at a time.

Role-play using counter appearance-ideal statements to resist pressure from peers. Ask each participant to generate appearance-ideal statements in response to **two statements** that leaders generate. Go around the circle twice. If participants provide a lengthy answer, gently interrupt them and ask them to provide a response in just a sentence or two.

Sample statements for appear on pages 28 – 29. Leaders should generate additional statements as needed and may tailor the statements to be appropriate for their group members.

General Statements

- “Nobody is ever going to date me with this body.”
- “Delete that picture of us on Instagram; I look disgusting!”
- “I would never be friends with someone who is ugly.”
- “My brother told me I’m ugly, what do you think?”
- “I hate my body so much; I wish I could just wake up in a different one.”
- “She really doesn’t have the body to be wearing that outfit.”
- “I really wish I had the body of a model”
- “You are so pretty; you have nothing to worry about.”
- “I have to look like Kylie Jenner or my life is ruined.”
- “Coach says only to eat salads for lunch.”
- “I’m trying a new juice cleanse, you should do it too!”

- *“You think you’re out of shape? Look at me!”*
- *“I wish I was your height; I hate how tall/short I am.”*
- *“She looks like an Oompa-Loompa with that fake tan.”*
- *“Of course I wear a full face of makeup to the gym — people see me there!”*
- *“You look like a clown with all the makeup you wear.”*
- *“Why did you cut your hair? It looked much better when it was better long.”*
- *“I’m going to a tanning salon every day after school this week so I look good for prom.”*
- *“I’m so flat chested, I look like a boy”*
- *“She looks ridiculous wearing a low-cut shirt without cleavage.”*
- *“You should consider investing in a push up bra given how flat chested you are.”*
- *“You shouldn’t wear a skirt like that if you don’t have a butt to fill it out.”*
- *“My partner says I should get breast implants. What do you think?”*
- *“Beauty is supposed to be painful – anyone who says otherwise is a wimp.”*

Weight-Based Statements

- *“Does this dress make me look fat?”*
- *“Lindsay has really gained weight over the holidays.”*
- *“I’m thinking of going on a diet, do you want to join me?”*
- *“I would never be friends with someone that heavy.”*
- *“My coach says I need to stop eating breakfast if I want to get to my ideal weight.”*
- *“I think it’d be really cool if we could both achieve a thigh gap.”*
- *“You know if you just stopped eating cheese, you would lose enough weight to look attractive.”*
- *“You are so thin, how do you do it?”*
- *“You look great – have you lost weight?”*
- *“If I don’t lose some weight, I know my partner is going to cheat on me.”*
- *“Spring break is coming up; do you really think you should be eating that?”*
- *“He told me he only dates girls with a thigh gap”*
- *“Buy it a size smaller; it will be good motivation.”*
- *“I can’t imagine anyone wanting to date someone that heavy.”*

Role-play debriefing

Do you think you could challenge your friend and family if they make appearance-ideal statements?

Encourage discussion with additional questions as necessary (e.g., “Which statements were more challenging to respond to?” or “What would it be like in real life to indicate that you don’t support the appearance-ideal?”).

IV. BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGE (10 MINS)

Are you willing to do an experiment to help you feel better about your bodies? We would like to challenge you to do things 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 if your legs are an area of concern for you*
- *Going to the pool in a swimsuit if you're usually scared to*
- *Participating in a physical activity that you might otherwise avoid*
- *Wearing a form-fitting shirt or a tank top to the mall/dinner/library*
- *Wearing your hair up if you normally wear it down*
- *Not wearing make-up*
- *Choosing shoes based on comfort rather than style*

We would like each of you to do two behavioral challenges in the next week (or the same challenge twice) and let us know how it went. Please take a moment to think of two things you would like to do but haven't done because of body image concerns. Each of you should have a plan before we leave.

Pull the **Behavioral Challenge Form** from your packet (Exercise #6).

V. TOP 10 LIST DEBRIEFING (10 MINS)

On point leader: _____

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 this week and then let us know how they go at the next session. Would you all be willing to do that? For example, you could:

1. *Put post-its that say, “You look great the way you are” into weight loss books at a bookstore.*
2. *Put up a “love your body” poster in the girls’ restrooms at school*
3. *Hang body acceptance fliers in a public space.*

4. *Create a body talk jar that friends and family put change in any time they make a negative body statement.*

Pull the **Body Activism Form** (Exercise #7).

VI. HOME EXERCISES (2 MINS)

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

1. Do the behavioral challenge rating to your personal body image concerns twice
2. Engage in two acts of body activism.

Time permitting:

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

We will talk about how each of these exercises went during the next session. Thanks for coming. See you next week!

SESSION 4

Prep: Email/call/text each participant before this session to remind them about the time/ location of this session and to complete the home exercises.

Materials:

- Nametags

Topic Areas:

- I. Reinforcing Voluntary Commitment
- II. Behavioral Challenge Debriefing
- III. Body Activism Debriefing
- IV. Challenging Negative Body Talk
- V. Home Exercises

Session 4 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 appearance-ideal.

I. REINFORCING VOLUNTARY COMMITMENT (1 MIN)

On point leader: _____

Thanks for coming. Are all of you willing to participate verbally in today's session?

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

II. BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGE DEBRIEFING (15 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. Who would like to start?

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.


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

Get a general response (e.g., it was empowering)

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.

III. BODY ACTIVISM DEBRIEFING (15 MINS)

On point leader: _____

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. As needed, ask questions to prompt additional discussion (e.g., “X, it sounds like you enjoyed doing this exercise. Tell me more about what made it enjoyable” or “X, what aspects of this exercise were challenging?”).

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?


Give participants an opportunity to talk themselves into doing more body activism activities in the future.

IV. CHALLENGING NEGATIVE BODY TALK ROLE PLAY (10 MINS)

We've discussed pressures to conform to the appearance-ideal 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 appearance-ideal is perpetuated.

For example:

- 1. Complementing others on weight loss.*
- 2. Joining in when friends complain about their bodies*
- 3. Talking about diets*

Can you think of some other ways you or others promote the appearance-ideal without knowing it? 

Possible responses include complementing others' weight loss, commenting on what or how much you are eating, devoting a lot of time to thinking about how you can cut calories by

becoming gluten-free or vegan, complaining about your body, and talking about celebrities who are either very thin or look as though they have gained weight.

Here are some common things we might say or hear others say:


Sample statements:

- “I’m so fat.”
- “I need to lose a few pounds”
- “You look great. Have you lost weight?”
- “I can’t eat that – it will make me fat.”
- “Can you believe how much she let herself go?”
- “You’d be so pretty if you lost weight.”

How do these statements keep the appearance-ideal going?

What can you say to stop this sort of talk? Or, how can you at least change the subject?

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?

On that note, why do you think so many of us find it difficult to complement ourselves? 

Get a general response (e.g., fear of being seen as conceited).

How can we teach young girls that there is a difference between confidence and arrogance, and that being confident is good?

Confidence = “good enough” and arrogance = “I’m better.”

Confidence is quiet, arrogance is loud.

V. HOME EXERCISES (4 MINS)

For your first home exercise, we would like to ask you research various ways in which the mass media promotes the appearance-ideal. Then, please write a short “news flash” report or bullet points to give next session. You can focus on a wide variety of topics, such as photo touch-ups used in magazines, image alternation used in movies, the thin actor bias for TV and movie actors, and the stereotypes of fat folks propagated by the mass media.

Pull the **Media Misrepresentation News Flash Form** (Exercise #8).

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 send to a magazine or company that promotes the appearance-ideal. Alternatively, you could all make a pledge to not watch a show that glorifies the appearance-ideal (e.g., Pretty Little Liars) and send a co-signed note to the producers stating this.

Are there any ideas about what could be done? 

What activity sounds best to the group?

Would someone be willing to be the leader of this and make sure it happens? We'd like to hear what you decide to do as a group.

Select one or two members to be leaders.

Pull the **Group Body Activism Form** (Exercise #9).

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

1. Do a news flash report on media misrepresentations
2. Do a group act of body activism.

Thanks for coming this week. We were very impressed by your level of participation in the group.

SESSION 5

Prep: Email/call/text each participant before this session to remind them about the time/ location of this session and to complete the home exercises.

Materials:

- Nametags

Topic Areas:

- I. Reinforcing Voluntary Commitment
- II. Appearance-Ideal News Flash Debriefing
- III. Group Body Activism Debriefing
- IV. Group Body Activism at Your School or Organization
- VII. Home Exercises

Session 5 Overview: The focus of Session 5 is to discuss participants' experiences with the appearance-ideal news flash and group body activism exercises. It focuses on how to respond to future pressures to conform to the appearance-ideal and assigns the group body activism at your school exercise and the mirror exercise round two.


I. REINFORCING VOLUNTARY COMMITMENT (1 MIN)

On point leader: _____

Thanks for coming! Is everyone willing to actively participate today?

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

II. MEDIA APPEARANCE-IDEAL NEWS FLASH DEBRIEFING (14 MINS)


Last week we asked you to write a short news flash regarding the various ways in which the mass media promotes the appearance-ideal. We would like to ask each of you to read these news flashes to the group. Who would like to start? 

Have each participant read her news flash. After each participant concludes reading her notes, respond by thanking her and/or making a positive comment about what she wrote.

NOTE: If a participant is unwilling to read her news flash, ask her if she is willing to summarize it or discuss what topic she chose to research.

Were any of you surprised by what you learned? Did this exercise change how you view the media?

III. GROUP BODY ACTIVISM DEBRIEFING (5 MINS)

Last time we also asked you to do a group body activism exercise. How did that go? 


Ask the group to present on what they did collectively.

How did it feel to act together to challenge the appearance-ideal?

IV. GROUP BODY ACTIVISM AT YOUR SCHOOL OR ORGANIZATION (10 MINS)

On point leader: _____

We would like to ask you to come up with some sort of group body activism activity that you can do to affect people at your school. Social change is a powerful tool to promote broader body acceptance. We suspect that each of you know someone at your school/organization with body image concerns who did not sign up for this body acceptance class.

What types of things could you do as a group to promote body acceptance in other students in your community? 

Let students brainstorm. Offer suggestions below as necessary.

Here are a few examples:

- Put up a “love your body” or “beauty comes in all forms” sign in the bathroom.
- Make a commitment with your broader social group to compliment others regarding their appearance (e.g., your hair looks great today or I really like that shirt) on a certain day at your school.
- Hang up signs about the damaging effects of appearance-related teasing.
- Make a commitment with your broader social group to do something during National Eating Disorders Awareness Week (#NEDAawareness) the last week of February.

Pull the **Group Body Activism at Your School or Organization Form** (Exercise #10).

V. FUTURE PRESSURES TO CONFORM TO THE APPEARANCE-IDEAL (10 MINS)

Can each person think of one example of a future pressure to conform to the appearance-ideal that might occur? It is often helpful to think of how to respond to such pressures before they happen. Some examples might be: joining a sorority, spring break, or the expectation to look a certain way on your wedding day.

We will go around the room to hear your anticipated pressures to conform to the appearance-ideal and how you might respond. I'll start...

Go around the room and have each participant provide an example.

VI. HOME EXERCISES (5 MINS)

On point leader: _____

In addition to the group body activism, we would like you to write a letter to your younger self, describing 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 your younger self understand the things you can do, say, avoid, or learn that will help her develop or maintain a positive body image.

Pull the **Letter to Younger Self Form** (Exercise #11).

For your third home exercise, we would like you to do the mirror exercise like you did after our first group session. Hopefully, after going through the group sessions, you will recognize more positive things about yourselves. As you did last time, we would like you to stand in front of a mirror with as little clothing as possible and write down at least 10 positive qualities you are satisfied with. Your list should include some physical and some emotional, intellectual, or social qualities.

We know it can be hard, and please make sure to include at least some physical attributes on your list. We would also like you to list as many qualities as possible that are different than those that you listed last time. Past participants have said that this exercise becomes easier each time you do it.

Pull the **Mirror Exercise Round 2 Form** (Exercise #12).

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

1. Group body activism
2. Letter to younger self about avoiding body image concerns
3. Mirror exercise round 2

Thank you for coming this week. We were very impressed by your level of participation in the group.

SESSION 6

Prep: Email/call/text each participant before this session to remind them about the time/ location of this session and to complete the home exercises.

Materials:

- Nametags

Topic Areas:

- I. Reinforcing Voluntary Commitment
- II. Group Body Activism Debriefing
- III. Letter to Younger Self Debriefing
- IV. Discussing Benefits of Body Acceptance and Closure
- V. Exit Self-Affirmation Exercise

Session 6 Overview: The focus of Session 6 is to debrief the letter to younger girl and mirror exercise round 2 home exercises, discuss the benefits of body acceptance and closure of the group, and assign an exit self-affirmation exercise.

I. REINFORCING VOLUNTARY COMMITMENT (1 MINS)

On point leader: _____

Thank you for coming to the last session! Is everyone willing to actively participate today?

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

II. GROUP ACT OF BODY ACTIVISM AT THEIR SCHOOL OR COMMUNITY DEBRIEFING (4 MINS)

How did the group act of body activism at your school go?

Get a general response.


Did you talk with people outside the group about this activity?

Nods are an acceptable answer.

How do you think these types of activities can help promote body acceptance at your school or in your community? 

Give participants an opportunity to talk about the benefits of body activism.

III. LETTER TO YOUNGER SELF DEBRIEFING (10 MINS)

Last week we asked if you would be willing to write a letter to your younger self about how to avoid developing body image concerns. We would like each of you to read your letters to the group. Who would like to start? 

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.

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

Have each participant discuss her experiences.

Everyone clearly spent a lot of time writing these letters and did a great job on them.

IV. MIRROR EXERCISE ROUND 2 DEBRIEFING (10 MINS)

Last week we asked you to stand in front of a mirror and list 10 positive qualities. We are going to go around the group so each of us can share 1 physical and 1 emotional quality we are satisfied with. Please choose different qualities than the ones you told us during your first mirror exercise. For instance, if you told us you liked your eyes last time, please tell us another physical quality like your strong legs or your height. Who would like to start? 

Each participant shares 1 physical and 1 emotional quality.

How did it feel to do the mirror exercise for a second time?

Did you notice other positive qualities that you didn't recognize during your first attempt?

V. DISCUSSION OF BENEFITS OF BODY ACCEPTANCE AND GROUP CLOSURE (15 MINS)

On point leader: _____

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

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

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

How has this group changed the way you interact with friends, romantic partners, or any other people in your life?

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

What do you feel you have 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.

V. EXIT SELF-AFFIRMATION EXERCISE (5 MINS)

On point leader: _____

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., do a long hike, play tennis well, 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 next week and email us about how it goes?

Nods are an acceptable answer.

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.



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

Pull the Self-Affirmation Exercise Form (Exercise #13).

If school/organization **IS** continuing Body Project groups and recruitment:

We also wanted to see if you would be willing to encourage at least 3 of your friends to give the Body Project class a try, based on your positive experience with this class. Please have your friends email me.

So, we would like each of you to do one self-affirmation exercise during the next week and email us about how it went. Second, we would like you to encourage three friends to attend a future Body Project group and to send us their contact information so we can get them scheduled.

If school/organization **IS NOT** continuing Body Project groups:

So, we would like each of you to do one self-affirmation exercise during the next week and email us about how it went.

We like to end sessions by giving everyone a chance to say one last thing. Can everyone tell me something that “worked for you” in these sessions, “hit home” or even something that you just liked?

Once again, thank you for deciding to be a part of this group. We have been very impressed with your thoughtful comments and participation—they are much appreciated!

Body Project Group Materials

Session One:

Home Exercise #1: Letter to Younger Girl

Home Exercise #2: Mirror Exercise Form

Home Exercise #3: Appearance-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 Challenge Form

Home Exercise #7: Body Activism Form

Session Four:

Home Exercise #8: Media Misrepresentation News Flash

Home Exercise #9: Group Body Activism

Session Five:

Home Exercise #10: Group Body Activism at Your School or Organization

Home Exercise #11 Letter to a Younger Self

Home Exercise #12: Mirror Exercise Round 2 Form

Session Six:

Home Exercise #13: Self-Affirmation Exercise Form

Blank lined paper for writing.

Session One, Home Exercise #2: Mirror Exercise Form

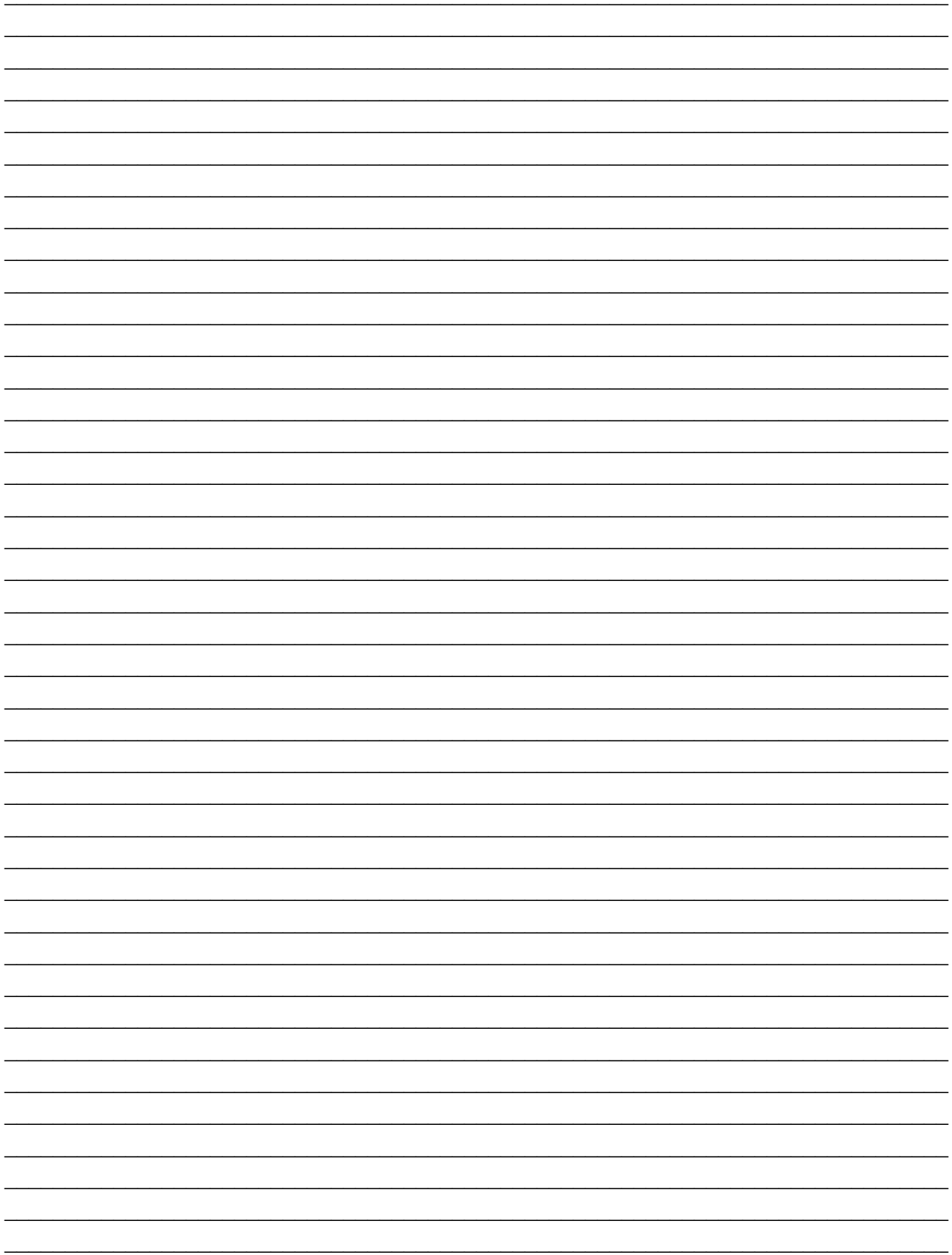
Please stand in front of a mirror and look at yourself and write down all your positive qualities. Please list at least 10. This includes physical, emotional, intellectual, and social qualities. For instance, you may like the shape of your arms, the strength of your legs, your long dark hair, the sound 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.



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

This checklist is designed to increase awareness of behaviors that serve to perpetuate the appearance-ideal in our culture. Please circle “yes” for the behaviors you have engaged in over the last few years.

| | |
|--|-----|
| Purchased a fashion or beauty magazine | yes |
| Subscribed to a fashion or beauty magazine | yes |
| Gone to a fashion show with a runway and live models | yes |
| Watched a TV show focused on the thin-ideal (America’s Top Models) | yes |
| 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 |
| Made a critical comment about the weight of an actor, musician, or model | 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 appearance-ideal in their ads | yes |
| Dined at an establishment that promotes the appearance-ideal (e.g., Hooters) | yes |
| Covered up parts of my body that I was embarrassed about | yes |
| Weighed myself multiple times a day | yes |
| Considered or got plastic surgery (e.g., a nose job, a boob job, or liposuction) | yes |



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

Please generate a top-10 list of things girls/women can do to resist the appearance-ideal. What can you avoid, say, do, or learn to battle this beauty 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)

Session Three, Home Exercise #6: Behavioral Challenge Form

We would like to challenge each of you to do two things that you currently do not do because of body image concerns to increase your confidence. For example, wearing shorts to school, going to the pool in a swimsuit, exercising in public. We would like each of you to do two behavioral challenges next week (or the same one twice) and then let us know how it turned out during the next session. Please take a moment to think of something you would like to do but haven't done yet. Please write your behavioral goal down on this page to remind yourself of it.

Session Three, Home 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 appearance-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.

A series of horizontal lines for writing.

Session Four, Home Exercise #9: 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 appearance-ideal. This could consist of writing a letter that you all sign and sending it to a magazine or company that promotes the appearance-ideal. You decide what you want to do and check in with one another about it by email or text messages. Please list some ideas you may have below, and then one person can email us about what you did as a group.



Group members:

Name:
Name:
Name:
Name:
Name:
Name:

Name:
Name:
Name:
Name:
Name:
Name:

Session Four, Home Exercise #10: Group Body Activism at Your School or Organization

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 appearance-ideal. This could consist of placing a “Love Your Body” poster in the women’s restroom that you all sign. You decide what you want to do and check in with one another about it by email or text messages. Please list some ideas you may have below, and then one person can email us about what you did as a group.



Group members:

Name:
Name:
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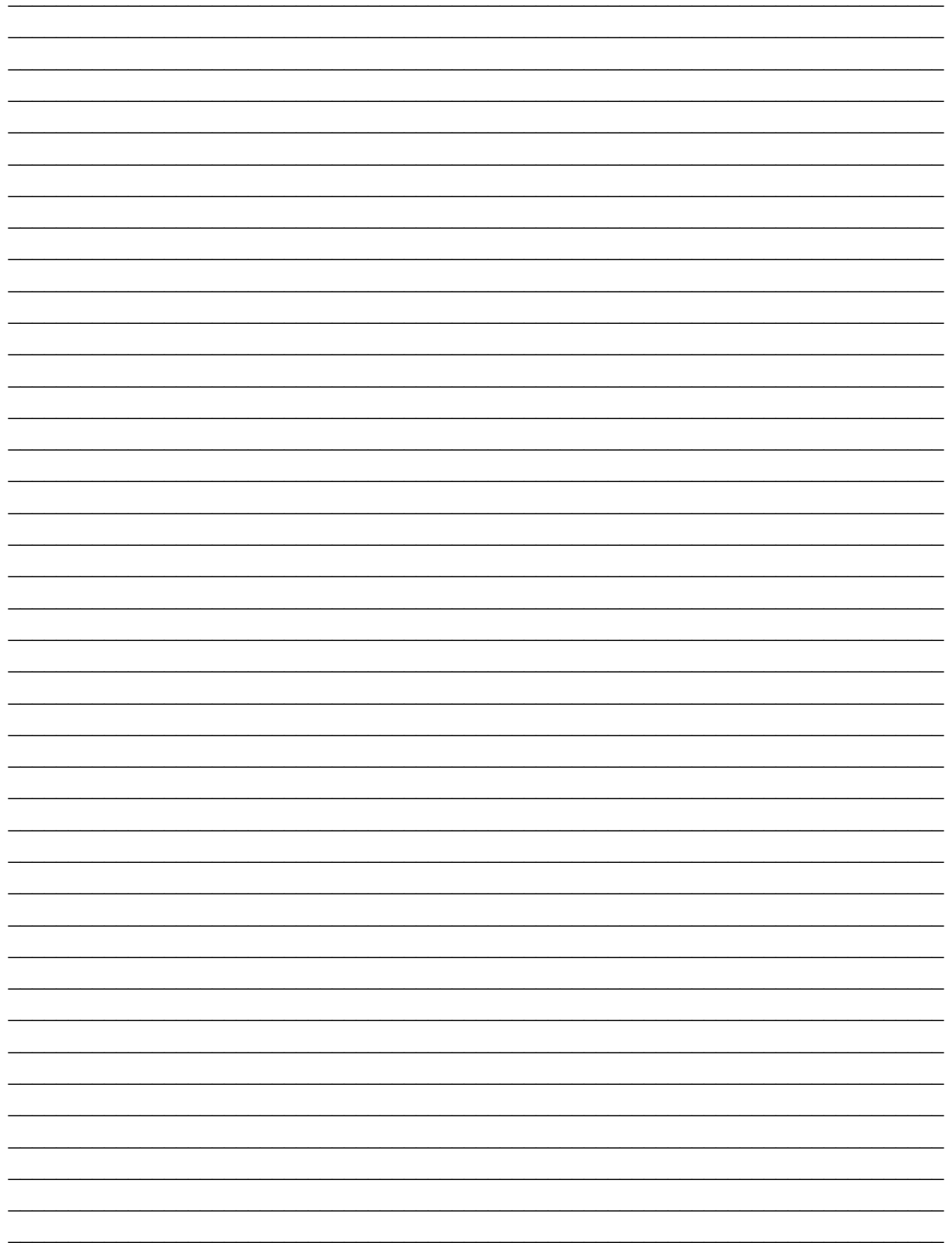
Session Five, Home Exercise #12: Mirror Exercise Round 2

Please stand in front of a mirror and look at yourself and write down all your positive qualities. Please list at least 15. 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. We would also like you to list as many qualities as possible that are different than those that you listed the first time you did this exercise.



Session Six, Exit Exercise #13: 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 via email.



Lined writing area with horizontal lines.