Body Image: Complexity and Conflict within the Classroom Teacher

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Toni Leigh Jesteadt

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Toni Leigh Jesteadt, candidate for the degree of Master of Education in Educational Psychology, has presented a thesis titled, *Body Image: Complexity and Conflict Within the Classroom Teacher*, in an oral examination held on February 4, 2013. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

External Examiner: Dr. Jennifer Tupper, Curriculum & Instruction

Supervisor: Dr. Scott Thompson, Educational Psychology

Committee Member: Dr. Twyla Salm, Curriculum & Instruction

Committee Member: Dr. Toni Liechty, Faculty of Kinesiology & Health Studies

Chair of Defense: Dr. Donald Sharpe, Department of Psychology

*Not present at defense*
Abstract

The role of the teacher in educating and socializing children is an extremely important one. The beliefs and understandings that a teacher possesses impact her behaviors and practices. In turn, the classroom and its pupils are also impacted. It is therefore important to consider that the ways in which a teacher’s definition of body image, understanding of her own body image, and perceived role with respect to the curriculum will have an impact on the beliefs and values of her students. This thesis examines health teachers’ positions in relation to body image to better understand what teachers bring to their teaching of body image, and to their interactions with adolescent students. It analyzes five female health teachers’ interview responses to explore the understandings and meanings they attach to body image. Three key themes emerged: The complexity of body image, the conflicted perceptions of the curriculum as related to health and body image, and the lived experience of the teacher.
Acknowledgements

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Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to offer deepest gratitude to my interview participants who shared their time and stories and without whom this research would have been over before it even began.
Dedication

I would like to extend special thanks to my husband for all of his loving support and understanding throughout all of my educational endeavors. I would also like to thank my parents for instilling in me a deep-rooted value for life-long learning. Also I would like to extend many thanks to each of my friends, colleagues, and family members who have shown undying interest in the progress of my research, and who have offered support and assistance in any way they could.
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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Review of the Literature

Body image is comprised of an individual’s feelings, thoughts, and perceptions about his or her body and incorporates body size estimation, the evaluation of body attractiveness, and emotions associated with the size and shape of one’s body (Grogan, 2008). Interrelated evaluative aspects of body image exist, including weight satisfaction or drive for thinness; size perception; body (dis)satisfaction, concern, or esteem; appearance evaluation or orientation; and drive for muscularity (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999; McCreary 2007). Body dissatisfaction, which is the affective component of body image (Smolak, 2004), generally refers to negative subjective evaluations of one’s body (Stice & Shaw, 2002), and is the single strongest predictor of eating disorder symptomology (Stice, 2002). This component impacts not only adults, but children and adolescents as well. Adolescence is a period filled with various dramatic cognitive, social, and physical changes, many of which cause individuals to feel particularly self-conscious (Tiggemann & Pennington, 1990), may influencing adolescents to focus more on their body and appearance.

Frisen and Holmqvist (2010), explain that the study of body image has always been pathology-focused, and that ample attention has been paid to body dissatisfaction, which is the negative component of body image. Links to depression (Stice, Hayward, Cameron, Killen, & Taylor, 2000) and eating disorders (Stice, 2002) have been well established, and factors that intensify negative body image (e.g., teasing or other negative messages from peers and family members) have been discussed. However, aspects of
positive body image are generally overlooked. Wood-Barcalow, Tylka, and Augustus-Horvath (2010) interviewed college women as well as body image experts to compiling a definition for positive body image. This definition included several characteristics. The first was an overarching love and respect for the body that allows individuals to appreciate the unique beauty of their bodies and the functions that it performs for them. The second was that individuals accept and even admire their bodies, including those aspects that are inconsistent with idealized images of thin women. Further, individuals were to feel beautiful, comfortable, confident, and happy with their bodies, which is often reflected as an outer radiance, or a “glow.” Likewise, individuals with a positive body image would emphasize their bodies’ assets rather than dwell on their imperfections. The fifth aspect of having a positive body image was for individuals to have a connection with their bodies’ needs such as a balanced diet and appropriate exercise. Finally, individuals with healthy body image interpreted incoming information in a body-protective manner whereby most positive information is internalized and most negative information is rejected or reframed.

Ata (2007) outlines the way that positive body and higher self-esteem are linked to positive affect, and suggests that positive affect may also protect against mental health issues such as depression (Klaczynski, Goold, & Mudry, 2004; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2003). Poor body image, however, is associated with lower self-esteem, negative affect, and ultimately, eating disorders (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2003; Phares, Steinberg, & Thompson., 2004; Stice & Bearman, 2001). Generally, researchers explain that an individual with higher self-esteem evaluates his or her body more positively and exhibits more satisfaction with his or her body at all ages (Paxton, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannon, &
Eisenberg, 2006; Tiggemann 2005) and across genders (Petrie, Greenleaf, & Martin, 2010). O’Dea and Abraham (2000) propose that programs which target body image can increase self-esteem, and that programs which target general self-esteem can also improve body image. These programs are particularly important since adolescence is a time when self-esteem and satisfaction with appearance often decline and dieting behavior increases (Barker & Bornstein, 2010). However, it may be necessary for these programs to avoid directly addressing body concerns to reduce the possibility of inadvertently raising body concerns in younger children who may not have considered body image problematic prior to the intervention (O’Dea, 2004). Targeting appearance satisfaction may be a more effective strategy in preventing eating problems, and may help to lift adolescents’ global self-esteem at the same time (Barker & Bornstein, 2010) as it includes all aspects of appearance, such as clothing, hair, and make-up, as opposed to simply the size and shape of the body.

Evidence also suggests that “children learn from their families, teachers, friends and the media that fat is ‘bad’ and thin is ‘good,’ and they learn this lesson well before adolescence” (Flannery-Schroeder & Chrisler, 1996, pp. 243-244). Further, people have a profound, and potentially lifelong, influence on how others feel about their own body and their physical abilities which in turn helps to shape individuals’ identities, lifestyles, and body weights (Pelican et al., 2005). For instance, a perceived pressure from mothers to lose weight predicts body dissatisfaction among adolescent girls (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001). The media repeatedly transmits messages in which female role models with slender bodies are rewarded for having attained the thin ideal body (Harrison & Cantor, 1997). Girls are faced with pressures from same-sex peers to diet (Stormer & Thompson,
1996), and are teased by their peers about physical differences. For example, girls who are late to develop get called ‘a carpenter’s dream’ or ‘flat as a board’ (Larkin & Rice, 2005). Clearly, family, peers, school, and media are critical in socializing students about appearance, and the messages perceived are often not positive in tone (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2009). While peers and family members are the most common sources of weight-related teasing and criticism (Cash, 1995; Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, & Perry, 2003; Lunner, Werthem, Thompson, Paxton, McDonald, & Halvaarson, 2000; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Perry, & Irving, 2002), teachers have also been identified as having damaged students’ identities, as well as their desire to develop healthy habits, with statements about students’ body and physical abilities (Pelican et al., 2005; Thompson, Humbert & Mirwald, 2003).

The school is a significant context for learning about physical appearance (Eisenberg et al., 2005; Evans, Rich, & Holroyd, 2004) and requires much more attention in the literature (Evans et al., 2004). Some argue schools are institutions that promote standards of perfection and performance, and contribute to the existing cultural pressures to fit a particular body ideal. Specifically, attractiveness and its association with success is salient in schools. It has been observed that more attractive students tend to be seen as more popular with peers, and perhaps with teachers as well (Boyatzis, Baloff, & Durieux, 1998). Others (Eisenberg et al., 2005) argue that schools may develop their own ‘culture’ surrounding weight loss techniques such as low-carb diets, cleanses, or fasting. While there is also evidence that teachers do indeed include preventative material addressing body image in lesson plans (Piran, 2004), and take part in school-wide prevention programs, the specific messages students perceive about appearance from
their schools are not clear. It is suggested that the school, as a source of socialization, is often characterized as failing to deliver any message at all to students about body image, positive or negative (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2009), contributing to the fallout which is produced by the words and behaviors of peers in social situations, which may often be characterized as bullying (Pelican et al., 2005).

The role of teachers is extremely important to the development of children and adolescents. The amount of time they spend with students provides a unique opportunity to observe the students interacting in a social environment with same-aged peers of both genders; however, no studies clearly outline what this role entails (McCabe, Ricciardelli, Stanford, Holt, Keegan, & Miller, 2007). A few suggestions have been made. Cash (1995) looks at appearance related teasing. He explains that it is not necessarily the frequency or severity of body related harassment (which Lunner (2000) labels “a putative risk factor”) or of positive comments and reinforcement (Calogero, Herbozo, & Thompson, 2009) that determine the impact that feedback has on an individual. He reveals that it is the way an individual interprets and internalizes feedback related to body image that determines the impact that feedback has on an individual. Given this, it has been implied by Frisen and Holmqvist (2010) that targeting adolescents’ thinking patterns may be a valuable tool for increasing positive body image. They explain that the teachers’ role in this could be stressing the importance of evaluating the body not so much for its appearance as for its functions.

Frisen and Holmqvist (2010) also outline the importance of acknowledging that even though a person is not “perfect,” he or she should accept and embrace his or her imperfections. Beauty is a social construction based on ideals that are often retouched to
perfection using computers. Helfert and Warschburger (2011) declare that, as a preventative approach, it is important to encourage students to reflect on their own personal beliefs and practices before adopting those of their friends. They also argue that the exclusion of an individual from academic or social interactions plays a role in body image. Therefore, it can be suggested that teachers not only encourage students to reflect on personal beliefs, and to practice them with conviction, but also foster an appreciation for inclusion of peers while limiting the opportunity for exclusion of peers. Frisen and Holmqvist (2010) also advise that adolescents should be encouraged to engage in physical activity on a regular basis, particularly in activities that they find enjoyable. Thus, the importance of physical education at school is highlighted as an opportunity for students to find a physical activity they enjoy, to develop basic competence, gain confidence in their motor skills, and enjoy being active for a lifetime (Frisen & Holmqvist, 2010; Pelican et al., 2005). These have the potential to increase confidence and competence, allowing individuals to appreciate their bodies as tools that are functional and not simply visible objects.

Pelican et al. (2005) also propose that a health-based, as opposed to a weight-based, approach to well-being can emphasize the development of a positive lifestyle and attitude in contrast to striving for a specific body size, shape, or weight. They also advise that individuals need to acknowledge the importance of their reciprocal relationships with others, and that in addition to attending to their own health, that lending support to one another is important. Individuals have the power to strengthen and protect one another, or to damage one another with comments about one another’s bodies and physical abilities. Coaches, for instance, have been identified as a source for support and a
message of worthiness, competence, and self-efficacy (Pelican et al., 2005). The current study includes teachers among the potential mitigating factors for media’s negative messages, and as allies for positive messages from families who are engaged and involved in the lives of their children. While the literature has made a few observations and recommendations regarding what teachers’ roles should or could be, it is important to gain an understanding from the perspective of teachers regarding what they feel their role could or should be, and what they are already doing to address this.

1.2 Significance and Purpose of the Study

It is clear in the literature that body image is an important factor in adolescent self-esteem. While many negative factors are clearly discussed in the literature (media, peers, parents, siblings, teachers), much less attention is given to mitigating factors for adolescent body image, which can also include media, peers, parents, siblings, and teachers. Further, very limited attention is paid to the role that teachers play in fostering positive body image amongst adolescents. Adolescence is a developmental period that will be defined as including those students in grades 5 through 9, or what are often referred to as the middle years. As Pelican and colleagues (2005) explain, an emphasis on contributing constructively to the accumulated experiences of other individuals will foster the competence needed to adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle: “Indeed, it is our unique capacity and moral responsibility to decide how we want to treat one another and to choose the values that we wish to uphold” (Buchanan, 2004, p. 153). The purpose of this study is to understand how teachers define body image, their perceived efforts to construct that understanding in their classrooms, and how they try to promote positive body image. In doing so, this study will not only contribute to the current body of
literature and provide direction for future research, but will inform teachers, program
developers, and policy makers of the potential role that teachers may play as mitigating
factors. The next section will outline the methodology used to explore the questions
posed.

2.0 Methodology

This chapter summarizes the research process I used for this study. An outline of
my perspective and background is provided, followed by an account of phenomenology
as it influenced this study, a descriptive introduction to the participants, an explanation of
and rationale for using the semi-structured interview, and finally an outline of the data
analysis process.

2.1 Researcher

I am a white woman in my late twenties. I conducted this research in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Educational
Psychology. My previous education included a 3-year B.A. in Psychology, and a B.Ed. in
Middle Years Education. My primary work experience has included almost three years of
experience providing therapeutic counseling to adolescents. I had also completed two
full-time years teaching high school Mathematics, as well as a few middle years
humanities classes, and two part-time years teaching Wellness and Mathematics. During
the final stages of writing I took on a position teaching Health 9 and Life Transitions 9 in
addition to my counseling load.

My interest in this content area was sparked during my undergraduate work while
exploring sexuality education in schools; I began to ponder whether healthy body image
could serve as a mitigating factor for risky sexual behavior among adolescents. During a Research Methods course in my undergraduate work, “I was conducting research towards making a proposal for a province-wide model that would provide effective sex and sexuality education for youth and adolescents. It hit me that looking to address student sexual health, especially risky sexual behavior, was perhaps futile if we could not first address their self-worth and body image. I also thought about who this ‘we’ was, and settled on it referring to educators” (From researcher journal, April 15, 2011).

Indeed, there is evidence to support my ponderings. Research has found that women with a negative body image are more likely to be concerned about being judged worthy by significant others (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Cash, Theriault, & Annis, 2004), and that body dissatisfaction was a predictor of substance use in adolescents (Striegel-Moore & Huydic, 1993). Building upon this research, Littleton, Breitkopf, and Berenson (2005, p. 197) investigated body image and risky sexual behavior and found that “the association of appearance shame with inconsistent condom use and having multiple partners suggest that shame potentially impacts a woman’s level of confidence and security in relationships.” Given research such as this, as well as the observations I made working with adolescents, I felt that the role teachers play in the development of adolescent body image was paramount, complex, and unclear, as well as worthy of investigation.

I thought about my own teachers and adolescence. Like many adolescents, I experienced confusion and discomfort with respect to myself as a sexual being and struggled with my own personal body image. In my researcher journal (August 30, 2011) I shared a time when a male peer “scoffed at me and told me I was flat as a board,” and
also when “my peers called me ‘ricket’ because we took a unit in Health about Anorexia Nervosa, and a video mentioned that having Anorexia made you susceptible to rickets. Since I was skinny I guess they thought it made sense,” and another instance where a teacher called me an “Ethiopian child,” during the time of famine and starvation in that country. There was also “a lot of reference to sex and sexuality in my class and school, I guess it is because a lot of my peers had older siblings” (from researcher journal, August 27, 2011). I was not able to make sense of these experiences at the time and so that added to the confusion I felt surrounding my body and its purpose. Those experiences have also driven my curiosity surrounding youth and adolescent body image and sexuality, and have sparked me to wonder whose responsibility it is to educate and protect youth and adolescents.

2.2 Phenomenology

Due to my lack of previous practical experience in research design or analysis, I needed to review pertinent literature pertaining to qualitative research, interviewing, and various methodologies. In addition to performing a literature review I spent several months reviewing literature published by authors like Moustakas, Creswell, Saldana, Kvale, Brinkmann, Seidman, Grogan, Yin, Charmaz, and van Manen. Upon completing this research, I was confident that between my personal beliefs and background, and what I had learned during my research, hermeneutic phenomenology was appropriate for pursuing the goals of my research.

As suggested by Geertz (1973), I started with my own interpretation of my participants’ experiences, and then sought to systematize them by providing my informants the opportunity to lead me closer to understanding. Using an interpretive
approach (Geertz, 1973) informed by hermeneutic phenomenology, my priority was to capture the meaning that each interviewee ascribed to her lived experiences of the identified phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). I sought to describe common elements that the teacher participants shared including the way they understood body image and how they constructed those understandings in their classrooms (Creswell, 2007). That is, my aim was “to systematically develop a certain narrative that explicates themes while remaining true to the universal quality or essence of a certain type or experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 97). I used personal interviews to gather rich and in-depth data and to capture the essence of the teachers’ experiences. The interview format I used was semi-structured, allowing participants the freedom to share in-depth expressions of feelings without experiencing pressure to adjust experiences to pre-planned response alternatives (Grogan, 1999). Further, my interviews explored each participant’s experiences in terms of her own understanding of, and experiences with, body image. Contexts and situations that have influenced or affected their experiences with body image were described, and the way in which these understandings and experiences shaped their classrooms were explored. Open-ended questions focused attention on gathering data that lead to a textural and structural description of the experiences, and ultimately provided an understanding of the common experiences of the teachers interviewed. This holistic account of the essence of the phenomenon is not bound by cause and effect, but by identifying the complex interactions of factors in the situation (Creswell, 2007).

2.3 Participants

I used purposeful sampling, seeking participants who self-identified as: female; middle-years Health and/or Life Transitions teachers; working in an urban center; and
having at least five years of experience teaching in this subject area. In an effort to understand body image education, I thought it best to examine what the practitioners of it do (Geertz, 1973). I chose to limit this study to only include female participants because this topic is quite gender sensitive and to include males would go beyond the scope of this thesis as it is a Master’s level thesis to be completed in 15 credit hours. I felt that the intricate relationship women have with body image would lend itself to rich data. I also was aware that the majority of teachers in the middle years are women. I felt it was important to choose teachers who work in the subject area of Health or Life Transitions so they could speak to their experiences with body image in terms of the formal curriculum as well as the informal curriculum, and I wanted teachers with at least five years of classroom teaching experience so that they could draw on several years of interaction with students. The choice was made to include only teachers within a single urban center in an effort to remain within the scope of this paper. Each participant was a middle years, grades 5 through 9, female teacher in the urban center (in either the Public or Catholic system) with between 5 and 26 years teaching experience in the subject area of Health. Other subjects the participants taught included Math, Language Arts, Fitness, Visual Art, Social Studies, Career Guidance, Physical Education, Drama, Science, Religion, and French. The grades taught by the participants were grade 6, 7, 6/7 split, and a 7/8 split. In depth semi-structured interviews were conducted until patterns were observed in participant responses. These patterns indicated the common experiences of the participants, as well as the aspects of their stories that stood as outliers to the data; this required 5 participants. It was after the fifth participant that outliers in participant responses clearly emerged, highlighting the existing patterns.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years teaching</th>
<th>Health of total teaching</th>
<th>Teaching Responsibilities</th>
<th>Education Degree</th>
<th>Distinguishing Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jayne</td>
<td>6 of 6</td>
<td>Health, Math, English Language Arts (ELA), Fitness, and Visual Art 7</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>“When I was doing my cleanse, the kids notice that you only had a drink at lunch, you know? So what does that say? I kind of question myself and people pick up on that…maybe I didn’t think that they’d pick up on that that much.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenda</td>
<td>17 of 27</td>
<td>Health, Math, ELA, Social Studies, and Career Guidance 6</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>“If I can get all the kids in the room to respect one another, and treat each other with care, then I have been successful.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn</td>
<td>11 of 16</td>
<td>Health, Math, ELA, Social Studies, Physical Education, Visual Art, and Drama 6/7</td>
<td>Middle Years</td>
<td>Middle Years</td>
<td>“…my number one goal [for working out] is that I will be confident in a pair of shorts in public…. it’s more the thigh thing is about looks but my very very number one goal was that I was having back pain and I knew that I had to get a stronger core …”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bev</td>
<td>25 of 25</td>
<td>Health, Math, ELA, Science, Social Studies, French, and Religion 6/7.</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>“Tell the kids the truth and make them feel that they’re fine and things are going to be better and they have a safe place to fall.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Subject Areas</td>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>Quote</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurie</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Health, Math, ELA, Science, and Visual Art</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>“Why don’t we care for [our bodies] better? …. the body gives you back what you give to it”, “it should just be how your body’s functioning, how it’s working.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The names shown are the pseudonyms that were assigned at the onset of each interview.*
I delivered electronic flyers outlining the purpose of the interview (to examine the role teachers play in student body image) to several acquaintances. Some of these acquaintances were teachers and others were not. I asked the acquaintances to pass the flyers on to any individuals who may be interested in the research, and who may fit the identified criteria to participate. This strategy respected the research process, and limited potential coercion since interested teachers contacted me about participating instead of my directly approaching them as prospective participants. I then responded to those who expressed interest in participating via email or telephone to make arrangements for the interview. All interviews took place over a period of two autumn months. One interested candidate could not take part due to scheduling conflicts, and two interested candidates could not take part because they did not fit the criteria for being a participant. The order in which interviews were conducted was dependent solely on the schedules and availability of the participants. I obtained informed consent from each participant prior to beginning her interview, and reiterated the purpose of the study as well as all measures that were being taken to ensure confidentiality. I discussed limitations to confidentiality with each participant, primarily the lack of ability to guarantee anonymity due to the likelihood of sharing stories over the course of the interview that participant’s co-workers, friends, spouses, students etc. may be privy to. I used pseudonyms in the thesis, made no reference to participant’s schools or families, and all materials and data have been stored securely. Despite the sensitive nature of the content, no participants displayed signs of emotional distress and therefore no measures were necessary to ensure appropriate support following the interviews. Upon the completion of each interview I
presented each participant with a thank-you card indicating my gratitude as well as a $20 gift card to a local business in appreciation for her time.

2.4 Semi-Structured Interview

Qualitative methods are a useful tool for examining messages about appearance, particularly from understudied socialization sources, such as the school (Gillen & Lefkowitx, 2009). Open-ended questions allow for the identification of messages that existing and pre-determined scales may not capture (Gillen & Lefkowitx, 2009). Further, open-ended interviewing from an interpretive phenomenological perspective allows the researcher to gather experiential material via conversation as a means of developing a deeper and richer understanding of the phenomenon being studied, including the meaning of the experiences shared (van Manen, 1990). Based on this, I utilized an interview protocol (as shown in Appendix A) as a guideline during the interview. This protocol ensured the interview stayed on track and covered all major points, and allowed for flexibility in terms of the wording and order of questions. Probing was used to encourage participants to clarify and expand on responses. Prior to its use, my supervisor and committee members reviewed the interview protocol to improve effectiveness.

It was important to me to be in tune with my participants and sensitive to their level of comfort. The face-to-face interviews allowed me to observe non-verbal behaviors and displays of emotion. Participants were individually interviewed at the venue of their choice. Two chose to be interviewed in their homes, two chose to be interviewed in the school where they taught, and one chose to be interviewed in the school where I worked. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 4 hours, with most averaging approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes. I used a tape recorder to aid transcription, and to ensure I was free
to engage in the interview in such a way that I could tailor the interview to each individual participant to obtain the richest data possible.

Member checks were also used to ensure accuracy of interview data, which is consistent with Colaizzi’s methods of analysis (1978). These checks were performed via email. Participants were given the opportunity to make omissions, additions, or clarifications on their transcripts. Of the five participants, one changed the transcript slightly by formalizing her language, and further contributed additional experience regarding the nature of the Physical Education classes in her school and the fact that girls and boys are taught separately. One participant did not respond to the requested member check. The other three participants responded to my correspondence requiring no additions, omissions, or revisions to the data. Note that all of the quotes used in the Results chapter come from interview data unless otherwise stated.

In an effort to ease into the interview, I began with questions related to each participant’s demographics and employment or classroom situation. Upon approaching questions related to body image, I asked general questions related to body image in the school prior to delving into questions about the participant’s personal body image. I explored each participant’s experiences with, and attitudes toward, body image so that these experiences and attitudes could be accounted for when examining the construction of that participant’s classroom as she explained it. I used open-ended questions that focused attention on gathering data that led to a textural and structural description of the stories shared, ultimately producing an understanding of the common experiences of the participants. Based on all factors considered, the specific topics chosen to explore included each participant’s perceived definition of body image, her description of her
own body image, her professional role, the expectations she perceived with respect to addressing body image with the students, the type of body image issues she observed in her school and classroom and how she responded to those issues, the role the curriculum played in addressing body image, challenges or limitations the participants’ faced when addressing body image in the school or classroom, and particular aspects of each individual teacher which may have impacted her ability to effectively address body image with the students.

After 5 interviews, patterns could be observed and overall themes were emerging from the stories being told by the participants (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2010). Also, it was at this point that any pieces of data that were outliers began to stand out. For instance, Glenda was much less comfortable defining and discussing body image than the other participants and Marilyn felt that as a teacher it is her duty to always dress and present herself professionally.

2.5 Data analysis

Following each interview, I transcribed the audio recording verbatim. Completing the transcription on an interview-by-interview basis allowed me to observe, reflect upon, and improve my interviewing skills. I then analyzed the transcripts interactively, constantly comparing the codes with the data. In doing so, much of my focus was on the “convergence of, or consistency among, evidence from …one participant and another” (Brantlinger, Jiminex, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005, p. 201). Further, my analysis was consistent with the methods outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2010) which consist of reading and re-reading the transcripts in a line-by-line fashion, making initial notes, extracting statements that were significant primarily based on the exact
words and phrases participants used, examining to formulate meanings, categorizing into clusters of themes, and searching for connections across emergent themes within and between subjects. I also ascribed to certain elements of van Manen’s (1990) analysis, particularly in the isolation of thematic statements. In doing so, I combined the selective or highlighting approach in which I identified statements that seemed particularly revealing about the phenomenon, and also the detailed or line by line approach where I looked at the transcripts line by line distinguishing revealing qualities. As such, my analysis took place as follows:

1. I began analysis by reading the interview transcripts between three and four times to gain familiarity with their content and to determine whether or not further interviews would be necessary. Beginning on the second read through, I started to underline and highlight significant statements.

2. I then placed each transcript in an electronic two-column table where the transcript was in the left-hand column, and there was space to make notes in the right hand column. I made note of any observations or ideas alongside particular quotes, paying particular attention to the exact words used by the participants. I began to code the observations I made in the transcription tables based on participant language and word choice.

3. As patterns emerged, I began to group the codes into categories by transferring quotes to a separate table, and creating a matrix showing the interaction between the participants and the categories. As the categories were collapsed and reduced, a total of 18 patterns were identified based on
prevalence and intrigue as related to the relationship between teachers and adolescent body image.

4. Categories were then combined, and 3 major themes resulted: The complexity of body image, the perceptions of the curriculum, and the reality of the teacher’s classroom experience. When interwoven with the experiences of the participants, this approach allowed the essence of the data to emerge naturally (Creswell, 2007), avoiding data that had been fit into a pre-existing frame, and producing a rich, detailed, and complex account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The nature of the analysis and synthesis for this study was interpretive, meaning that my own context, background, and prior understanding, as well as that of the participants and the audience, influenced my understanding and description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In the Implications chapter I made every effort to provide thick description addressing the meaning behind the participants’ statements as opposed to simply providing straightforward observation (Geertz, 1973). I also maintained the philosophy throughout my analysis that social actions are a manifestation of something much deeper (Geertz, 1973). I explored my own experiences, as well as the context and situations that have influenced my experiences, through written reflection in a progress journal so that I was able to describe and display the phenomena as experienced by the study population in the participants’ own terms (Moustakas, 1994). Also, my supervisor and committee members reviewed my declaration of positionality and gave me the opportunity to discuss what this meant to me. This allowed me to better navigate the range of elements, dimensions, classes, and positions within the social phenomenon,
displaying the nature or features of the phenomenon, and to describe the meaning that people attach to the phenomenon (Ritchie & Lewis, 2010).

I conveyed the meaning of the participants’ responses accurately leading the audience from the literature, to the question, through the methods, and finally to the conclusions. I also kept brief notes of my personal thoughts, experiences, and ideas as the process continued to unfold. This journal became part of my audit trail, and therefore the marker of quality which kept “track of interviews conducted” and was “used to document and substantiate that sufficient time was spent in the field to claim dependable and confirmable results” (Brantlinger et. al, 2005, p. 201).

Similar to indicators discussed by Brantlinger and her colleagues (2005), the quality indicators within my qualitative study were related to both the interview format used, as well as the rigorous data analysis. In terms of the interview format used, participants were appropriately selected, questions asked in the interview were reasonable, a quality audio recording was obtained for each interview, and confidentiality was ensured. In terms of the data analysis the sorting and coding of the data was done systematically and in a meaningful way, what was and was not included in the report was based on sound rationale, the methods used to establish credibility were clear, there was evidence of my reflection upon my own personal position, participant quotes were used to substantiate conclusions, and I connected my work to related research including, but not limited to, Frisen and Holmqvist (2010), Macdonald (2002), Hetherington & Burnett (1994), Aquilino and Supple (2001), Kluck (2010), Vincent and McCabe (2000), and Killeya-Jones, Costanzo, Malone, Quinlan, and Miller-Johnson (2007). Further, my writing was consistent with two major strategies used for writing phenomenologically, as
described by van Manen (1990). I used “the emerging themes as generative guides” (p. 168), exploring the phenomenon in a theme-by-theme fashion maintaining systematic treatment of themes “even though one theme always implicates the meaning dimensions of other themes” (p. 168). I also wrote analytically, including life stories or anecdotes that illustrate or highlight particular themes. Further, I displayed the participant’s behavior with exactness, communicating behavior patterns and social action, as a part of her own lived experience so the essence could be articulated and interacted with the transcripts in a creative and imaginative way as opposed to a concrete way (Geertz, 1973).

3.0 Results

This section of the paper will outline the major themes that emerged during the analysis of the data. First is the complexity of body image. Within the discussion of this theme each participant’s definition of body image, a description of her personal body image, and her experiences and influences with body image, will be explored. Next, the negotiation which shapes the reality of the classroom will be explored with respect to the participants’ perceptions of the formal curriculum and the informal curriculum.

The teacher participants discussed how their behaviors, beliefs, philosophy, approach and assessment influenced classroom dynamics. Participants felt that a teacher’s identity depended, to varying degrees, on her understanding of body image as well as her own personal body image. As such, she must be conscious of the way she intertwines her own body image and the needs of the students in her classroom. Since a teacher continuously grapples with her own complex body image, her classroom practices will evolve and take new shape if and when her own body image evolves and changes. A
teacher must consider the impact a negative body image or a positive body image may have on her practices in the classroom, and also whether she can conduct herself and her classroom in the way she wants given her current body image. Regardless, the participants expressed having addressed the priorities of the students by creating a student-centered and safe learning environments by embodying a positive role model, by working with parents, and by appropriately navigating the advantage afforded to them as female teachers.
Table 2
Participants at a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Snapshot of the participant’s perception of body image</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jayne (28 years)</td>
<td>Jayne, without hesitation, explained that body image is “a sense of comfort within yourself…YOUR perspective on the way your body looks, and your appearance.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenda (52 years)</td>
<td>Glenda expressed, “I’m not quite sure what your definition of body image is. And that’s where my difficulty comes in,” but did share her understanding of body image: “respecting and celebrating the differences in everyone… each of us is made differently… therefore if you are tall or short or fat or skinny or blonde or whatever, it doesn’t matter. We need to celebrate that and be respectful of that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn (46 years)</td>
<td>Marilyn described body image as “How I feel about myself, how a person feels about their own body… It is a specific part of image of self. Who are you, what is my body like, how do I see myself?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bev (49 years)</td>
<td>Bev said, “it’s the way they perceive themselves, and how others perceive them. I think it’s more of a package of body image. How they fit in, how normal they are…. I think body image is how they feel about themselves and if it’s normal.” She shared, “Normal means I think physically if they are physically fitting in with their gender, whether that’s the guys with the height and all these things that the guys you know need to be cool about and the girls in a way they the clothes choices they have they don’t really have like the old lady young clothes and the young clothes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurie (57 years)</td>
<td>Laurie shared her definition: “how we feel about ourselves, I suppose what we think about ourselves because we send, huge messages are sent…how the other people see us. Then of course there’s the health component of the body types….our backgrounds and you know our families….how we feel about ourselves, and…kind of what, how we appear to others. Which may not be congruent actually.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1 The Complexity of Body Image

3.1.1 Body image definitions.

Teacher participants were asked to define body image. These definitions depicted body image as a reflection of self-esteem and self-respect, which are formed largely by one’s environment. As seen in Table 1, the participants gave definitions that converged at some points and diverged at others. Marilyn, Jayne, and Laurie each explained body image as being related to a feeling about one’s self, and one’s own perception of one’s body. Subjective or abstract words like “feel,” “sense,” “perspective,” and “think” were used in the definitions these women provided. What made Laurie’s definition different was her attention to the way an individual communicates her body image, the way she perceives others to view her, the link between body image and health, and what each of these points says about her own body image. In addition, while Bev said “with the kids and me,” she continued her description in third person, as if to separate herself from having a body image, and to focus on the students and their body image. She also introduced what would become the recurring idea of “normal.” Glenda struggled, showing a desire to provide an accurate definition of body image, or at least one that satisfied me. Each response indicated a unique link between that teacher’s definition of and experience with body image. Along with their definitions of body image, participants discussed their own personal body image and the factors that shaped it throughout their lives.

3.1.2 Personal body image.

Bev and Glenda, self-labeled “middle-aged” women, each described themselves as ‘normal’ when asked to describe their own personal body image. Bev and Glenda each
indicated that she was a little heavier than she would prefer, but that she was content with that, citing her weight as being beyond her control due to health factors related to her age. Each participant attributed her own body image to the peers she had growing up, the people currently around her, and to the media. Bev said:

I think I see myself in a positive light and I think that society, I think that I fit in. I’m a normal forty-nine year old woman….that means that I know that I’m heavier because of hormones, I know that there’s all I can do is try and be the healthiest I can and if I’m doing all those things I’m fine. I mean that’s just what it is like.

In a similar way Jayne described a complex contentment with her body:

I think that everybody has insecurities, right? But for the most part, I work hard, and if I want to change something, I will try to do so…. for the most part, I guess I am ok with everything that’s showing up…. I look good and I’m happy with that.

Jayne felt that since adolescence her definition of body image has become less “focused on perfection, but more health.” However, she also addressed her weight saying it was “always something that I would, you know, work to…own, or work to change a little bit. That’s probably a reason why I like to be active and… right now I am currently eating protein shakes for lunch.” She also explained above that it is when she looks good she is happy, as opposed to when she feels good. She explained that her female-dominated family has shaped the way she handles her weight. She said:

we go big or go home, and so you know when somebody’s trying to lose a couple pounds we all start getting on that game-you know, I am right now in a contest with my sister, not a contest I should say, but, you know, we’re doing manicure and pedicures for whoever loses the most weight at the end of October.

The way Jayne discussed her weight suggested that she perceived it as a characteristic of her body over which she had control. This contrasts the way in which Bev and Glenda view their weight. However, one characteristic of Jayne’s body that she explained as being beyond her control, and as causing her discontent was her nose:
Stems back to, that age of middle years, I was eating an ice cream and my nose poked it, and I had ice cream on the tip of my nose….I just died of embarrassment, I couldn’t believe it, and somebody made a comment and it has totally stuck.

Marilyn adamantly professed that her body image was completely related to health, “so I don’t like it when my stomach gets bigger because I know that’s not healthy to be that way.” She attributed what she perceived as a positive and health-oriented body image to her very supportive family. She shared, “I think every baby looks in the mirror and thinks that they are incredible and they would keep looking in the mirror and think they are incredible until someone said ‘you’re not incredible,’” outlining the huge impact the messages individuals receive can have on body image. As she continued, however, it became clear how complicated and conflicted her own body image was. Her intention was to relate body image to the function of the body: Two months ago, two friends and I, two work friends and I, decided to go to a personal trainer….one thing I noticed was that my chest has gotten a little bit bigger ….the interesting thing about it is that my response to this was, ‘oh well I really don’t need my upper body to be any bigger around,’ but hey if I can carry more I am all for it.

However, she revealed her conflicted discontent, and perhaps preoccupation, with the appearance of her thighs, as impacted by a statement made by her father:

The reason my thighs ever bothered me ever was that my father made one comment one time and it stayed with me forever…. honestly I don’t want to wear shorts in the summer ….I know that my thighs are larger than most people’s and it’s very much in my conscious I don’t wear shorts unless I am absolutely, if I am working in my garden I’ll maybe wear shorts, I do not wear shorts downtown. Although, I see many women with way bigger legs than mine wearing shorts and I just said I won’t be caught dead in shorts. And so my goal actually with this working out thing was my number one goal is that I will be confident in a pair of shorts in public.

Marilyn worked very hard to portray a healthy body image that was function oriented.

After explaining about her thighs she retracted her words saying:
I mean the thigh thing is about looks but my very, very number one goal was that I was having back pain and I knew that I had to get a stronger core and so I that was my kind of original and then what happened was after the second workout or so I saw myself in the mirror at the Y, and I went ‘ooo I’ve gotta improve those thighs because I do not look good in shorts.

She also explained specifically what she wants her thighs to look like, indicating that she may indeed be preoccupied with the appearance of her thighs:

They’re going to look like they looked when I was 13 years old I was this height, and [sigh] they’re not gonna look like that. But anyway, they’re gonna look closer to that…. it is realistic in many ways. I mean I don’t expect them to look exactly like when I was thirteen, but, I do expect to- to be strong and I expect not to have the extra stuff that’s built up there called cellulite.

In addition to commenting on the physical shape of her body, Marilyn addressed another aspect of physical appearance: ‘primping.’ She emphasized her devaluation for ‘primping,’ which she perceived as being linked to sexuality:

There have always been things that are way more important to me than how I look and so I was blessed with a brain and a brain that functioned in such a way that I always thought that was my greatest asset….I didn’t have to worry about primping before school every morning because when I got to school I got to have math class rather than going to school and [sarcastically] flipping my hair at the boys.

This is another quote which demonstrates the conflict Marilyn feels about the importance of taking the time to make herself look a certain way. It also shows that it is not necessarily the quality of her appearance that always matters so much as the intent to look a certain way. While she feels it is important to always appear put-together and professional, this should not include “primping.” Laurie also shared complex feelings about her body and the way that her environment has impacted her priorities with respect to health and appearance. She explained her experience growing up and the freedom she had to dress the way she wanted:
I was never questioned, I could always as a kid dress the way I wanted to. My dad never told me my skirts were too short, my hair was, should be long you know and I know ya a lot of young women whose fathers tell them that….made me wear some things that I didn’t- for my own warmth that I didn’t particularly like.

This indicated that when her father did intervene she felt it was to protect the health of her body. In addition to crediting her father for tending to her health, she also attributed her appreciation for her body to her father’s support, and the ways he instilled value for active living and quality nutrition. She recalled:

I remember going home crying because the boys called me skinny and flat chested and my father just supported me one hundred percent and just said, ‘you can tell them you’re a Smith, and that’s just how we are, and we’re not making cattle to send to market.

However, Laurie recalled several occasions from later in her adulthood where her mother made comments that were not supportive. Laurie explained an occasion when her mother commented on weight gain she had experienced in her mid-section and recalled thinking, “I’ve had four babies, I’m proud of every little bit of this [motioning again to stomach] whatever I have right here.” Following the loss of that weight her mother then, “commented about me being too thin, so, I just thought, oh gee, so ten months ago or something you were saying or you commented about my little belly and now...” What Laurie shared demonstrates the role her parents have played in complicating her body image both during childhood and adulthood, and perhaps suggests contrast between a daughter’s relationship with her father and her relationship with her mother. It is also possible that Laurie’s experiences reveal differences between the way men and women discuss the appearance and function of the body.
Laurie also discussed the role that clothing has played for her in terms of her own body image. She finds pleasure in preparing, presenting, and expressing herself as a professional and an individual:

I make choices in the morning what I’m going to present myself and I take a great deal of pleasure in that…. I enjoy how I dress, I enjoy sort of being unique and not dressing like every other person on the planet and I have always sort of been like that…. this is the one way we can present ourselves.

She also reflected on her first year of teaching where she worked in a school where she felt most of the staff dressed very plainly and monotonously and recalled one teacher, in his standard golf shirt and pants, who said, “oh by the way we dress very casual around here.” She shared her response, which further demonstrated her value for clothing as a form of personal expression:

‘oh that’s nice.’ Because some days I feel like wearing a suit and some days I feel like wearing a dress, some days I feel like, you know sometimes I feel like wearing, you know, leggings and a top, or something like that.

Not only did Laurie express her joy for preparing herself for the day and her appreciation for the creativity that afforded her, but she also suggested that this behavior was contrary to many of her colleagues, whose dress did not embody creativity or individuality. She outlined her value for her body’s function:

I think it’s really important that I not only take care of my you know, the area that tends to get a little chunky in the middle, but also my knees and my elbows, and my hips, and my ankles and those kinds of things, and so I probably shouldn’t be sitting with my legs crossed right now [uncrosses legs]. But taking care of it because it really is a gift. And you know our body speaks to us but it’s ok.

Laurie prepares or dresses her body for appearance, but deeply values its function, “I have a body that functions for me, that does the things I want it to do…And to honour our body, the body we’re given, it’s a gift, and to care for it and be good to it.”
Participants outlined the intricacies of their body image by sharing their conscious concerns for their health, and also their experience with their outward appearance. The next section will explore how these intricacies impact their roles as teachers. In addition, participants felt that as teachers their beliefs and attitudes about body image influenced their perceptions and experiences of the curriculum.

3.2 Negotiation in the Classroom

The institutional curriculum is a document stating the curricular objectives deemed necessary for students to learn, the programmatic curriculum is the translation of the institutional curriculum into the classroom, and the classroom curriculum makes up what is actually learned in the curriculum (Westbury, 2008). What actually happens in the classroom is a negotiation between what a teacher feels she must do (the institutional or formal curriculum), what she feels compelled to address (the programmatic or informal curriculum), and her own personal priorities. Each experience, as it relates to the formal and informal curriculum, becomes intertwined with the dynamic and fascinating ebb and flow of the classroom. While much of what goes on in the classroom is pre-planned by the teacher, teachers must be equally prepared for the situations that have not been pre-planned. According to the participants, many of the situations related to body image that arose in schools happened without planning or prompting, and were therefore not a part of the lesson plan or formal curriculum for the day. This demonstrates that these issues are salient among students and will present themselves, and it shows that teachers need to be conscious of diverse body image issues which may arise at any time and in any context. As such, issues of self-esteem and self-respect were addressed not only during instructional time, but also outside of the classroom during extracurricular activities,
during recess, before and after school, and between classes. To further complicate matters, participants felt that their own personal priorities in terms of body image were conflicted and may differ from those of their students. Each participant’s individual definition of body image, and her perception of her own personal body image was different. Through sharing their stories, the participants pointed toward a link between their own body image and the way they met the requirements they were tasked to fill.

Participants explained that the primary and obvious role of the classroom teacher is to address each of the objectives of the formal curriculum as determined by the provincial government. During the interviews, the formal curriculum was described as being “wishy-washy,” “general,” “not as clear [as the old one],” “not teacher friendly,” “difficult to deliver,” “constrictive,” “frightening,” “overwhelming,” “a guideline,” “a communication tool,” “flawed,” “condensed,” “subjective,” “discussion-based,” “student-centered,” “simple,” “fluffy,” “analysis driven,” “inadequate,” “a disservice to educators,” “does not lead to specific outcomes,” “open-ended,” “requiring students to have vast background knowledge,” and “requiring teachers to be experts in everything.” However, despite these varying descriptions and opinions, all of the participants agreed that it is the responsibility of the teacher to tailor her delivery of the curriculum to meet the needs of her students; this is often called student-centered instruction, or student-centered learning.

### 3.2.1 Student-centered learning.

The participants agreed that regardless of the instructional strategies and methods used, there are several conditions necessary to ensure student-centered instruction. Participants felt that to foster student-centered learning a teacher must ensure her
familiarity with the curriculum, get to know her students very well, approach the material in a cross-curricular fashion, and continuously try to improve her teaching practices by seeking new resources and taking advantage of professional development opportunities.

Student-centered learning can complicate the classroom. Bev explained the give-and-take involved in negotiating a student-centered classroom:

How in depth do we want to go? Do we want to do it on the surface? Do we want to get into things? Or is the issues in the class so big that … I am spending my whole year dealing with some pretty big issues, maybe bullying and- and self-esteem that making a plan, we’re just gonna try to get you so you guys aren’t killing each other.

In addition to the complex negotiation involved in organizing the learning in a classroom, inadequate time also poses difficulty. Bev challenged teachers to:

try and get the hundred minutes in, I mean, you can’t, I mean you get your sixty minutes maybe a week and with transition time you’re not getting your hundred minutes, so it’s always in every subject you’re pretty well touching on all the areas.

However, she explained cross-curricular instruction as being part of the solution to this negotiation: “cross curricular means I take minutes from there to there because I can say that applies to both Science and Language Arts, and Social and Language Arts or Math,” and, “we cover a lot of things in Religion, Phys. Ed., and in Health class.” Further, “with Health, we’re very fortunate because we do have programs implemented throughout the school that kind of take pressure off it being a topic in class.” Her mention of programs implemented throughout the school not only stresses the importance of the informal curriculum, or what goes on outside of the formal curricular objectives, but also the way the formal and informal curriculums can be woven together and complement one another and to help alleviate time-pressures that teachers face. In addition to cross-curricular
instruction and school-wide programming, it is also necessary to be familiar with the curriculum.

Laurie summarized what maintaining familiarity with the curriculum and continuously improving her practices means to her:

You’ve got your degree how can you continue improve or…professionally develop and to me it was having interns. That’s one way. But also for me to go back to learn…So I don’t have the degree and I don’t have the pedagogy…I’ve had lots of professional development experiences that gave me a good grounding in teaching Health education. And then I can say ‘this is not part of the grade seven and eight Health curriculum’ even though you have this person who gives great presentations…it does not fit here, but this is where it fits.

Marilyn explained there is a clear lack of in-service and that it is up to teachers to perform a “self-study” to become familiar with new initiatives: “Because my board doesn’t give us the time to do that. I like I keep my eyes open in the bulletin for things that are available but there really isn’t anything.” In addition to challenges and complexities at the classroom level, Marilyn explained that matters have been further complicated at the division level. She explained that the teachers in the school division she works for had not been notified when the online location of the curriculum had changed. This was particularly problematic because several of the curricula had been recently updated and so those teachers who continued to access the curriculum via the previous online location were not using the updated Health Curriculum when it was implemented. In addition, Marilyn explained that regardless of the lack of communication in her division, in her division the Health Curriculum “is down probably about fifth on the list of curriculums that we would or even sixth or seventh of curricula that we are supposed to deliver with…pay attention to.” This demonstrates her perception of a hierarchy of subject areas. She passionately exclaimed:
There isn’t the financial or the any kind of support really for the delivery of Health. And in my opinion that is a crime because we can die from not having good Health education but we can’t die from not being able to solve an algebraic equation.

Also related to school divisions, participants expressed that inadequate time was allotted for teachers to meet the various expectations they were tasked to complete: provide extra help for students outside of class time; run extracurricular programming; effectively and efficiently maintain paperwork; adequately meet the needs of students with special needs; access supports and resources; access professional development; balance their personal, familial, and professional lives; maintain a healthy lifestyle and diet; deliver all of the curricular material in a satisfactory way; and provide consistent supervision at recess, in the morning before school, and in the afternoon after school.

With a chuckle, Bev commented that teachers could use assistants, and explained:

we have supports but our problem is that we can’t get to the person that we need the support from because our time is so limited…. even just to order those Canada Food Guides, or to get the consultant to come in to talk about this….But just to phone the consultant, to plan the day, to get that, there’s no time.

Marilyn explained that there is “so much pressure with numeracy, literacy, and treaty education that we don’t have the time to put towards Health education that we should have as far as the curriculum would suggest,” she reiterated, “it’s always the Health that gets pushed aside.” Glenda agreed, saying that her school board, “emphasizes Math and Language Arts, which I tend to agree with, so [deep sigh] I don’t know, there just aren’t enough hours in the day.” Glenda’s comment summarizes the sentiments of the participants well, indicating that while she is frustrated at the lack of class time to deliver the Health curriculum, she also understands and agrees that the delivery of core subjects is of great importance.
Despite this lack of emphasis, the participants explained that body image comes up frequently. When asked to share a specific incident, Jayne replied, “A specific time hey?... Well, too many to count, because you are dealing with kids,” indicating that it would be perhaps easier to ask what goes on in the day that isn’t related to body image. Bev indicated that it is not just the age of the students that makes body image so salient, but also the social nature of their day-to-day lives:

mostly body image issues come up in their social situations here in the school too. We have, because I’m a middle years teacher, it comes up in their sports that we’re doing, uniforms we have, if you’re ordering t-shirts or- I mean there’s a lot of things that it kinda just comes up.

Social situations may include bullying or teasing, spreading rumors, dating, physical evaluation of peers’ attractiveness, and constant sexual connotations. To this end, Marilyn shared some examples she has observed:

kids being overweight, kids having greasy hair, acne doesn’t seem to be a problem too much, kids that are developed earlier than what, what the norm is… the late bloomer and the early bloomer it is always those kids get picked on.

Bev explained that the reason there are so many things that become issues for adolescents is because they take everything so personally, “they are so self-conscious that they view a lot of things very personally.”

3.2.2 The relationship between a teacher and her students.

Particularly since students are prone to taking things personally and may become self-conscious, it is important to have “that good relationship with the kids, you have to know your kids” since “they need their teacher to be an informed person...they need their teacher to have that relationship with them. To kind of be able to sense things about them” (Bev). This relationship is necessary to effectively utilize cross-curricular instruction, and maintain a student-centered classroom. Jayne reiterates this, indicating
that having analyzed the costs and benefits, she felt it was beneficial to keep instruction as student-centered as possible. She indicated that the students can guide the teacher to where they need to go in terms of Health education, and that becoming consumed with meeting the curricular objectives is not the priority, “If at the end of the day we didn’t get through a lot of what I wanted to get through, whatever! We got through what was on their mind and what they wanted to talk about.” Knowing “what was on their mind” required good rapport and intuition. Having a positive rapport and good relationship with students also helped teachers to navigate the sensitive nature of the content that students often struggled to openly discuss. Marilyn explained:

mostly grade sevens will only give me the short/tall, fat/thin… They don’t usually want to talk about anything to do with early development or late development, like they won’t go there….when kids really write about body image things or really talk about body image things I find that there isn’t that level of real honesty because heaven forbid I would never in- when I was in grade seven EVER have told someone how much my thighs bothered me, there was no way, right? So I might complain about whatever, instead.

What Marilyn has shared demonstrates students’ lack of eagerness to discuss their own personal body image in class. Marilyn used age-appropriate, pre-written stories to effectively address issues related to body image:

*We talked* through literature and how do you think so-and-so felt and that character rather than talking about specific issues that certain kids have… If it’s really an underlying issue, they are way better off dealing with a character in a story… they go through the thought processes of what does this character feel like because our body image isn’t just related to how *we* feel about our body originally, it’s related to how others comment on our body….the story about the girl that’s fat is not for the girl that’s fat, it’s for the girl that’s not fat to say, ‘oh, Maggie’s feeling this way? Maybe I shouldn’t be saying that to this person.’

While Marilyn’s emphasis is on allowing the students to practice empathy, as a way of addressing body image, Laurie explained using a very different approach:
First of all researching, doing some research on body image and connecting it to self-esteem… then working our way through how body image is actually self-esteem is reflected by body image or you know or- they are so connected….finding out their peers’ opinions about body image and self-esteem. And then finding out adults…. then maybe comparing the two…. then looking at also the components, I bring in the nutrition, the exercise…. then presenting back to our group or teaching our group really what we found out …. What do we know, what do we want to find out, do some research, find some experts.

Laurie’s approach was to have the students experience a collaborative and cyclical research process giving the students the opportunity to learn from each other and gain knowledge grounded in theory and personal experience. While Marilyn and Laurie’s approaches are different, they each pose opportunity for student-centered learning. In Marilyn’s approach, the students direct their own learning through their contribution to the discussion. With Laurie’s approach, students direct their research towards facets of body image they are most interested in.

The importance of a positive relationship between a teacher and her students was made clear by the participants. This was not only important to maintain a student-centered classroom and ensure all curricular objectives are met, but also to create a safe environment.

3.2.3 The learning environment as a safe place.

Participants emphasized the importance of creating a safe learning environment and explained several ways that they actualize this in their classrooms. The teacher participants explained that this was particularly important when considering the difficulties associated with addressing a sensitive issue in the classroom, such as body image. One way of creating a safe learning environment is by making sure that students always feel their teacher will support and take care of them. Bev in particular emphasized
this, “They just want to know that you care, and they’ve said something to somebody and it’s gonna be taken care of.” She also shared an example:

There was a guy that would take his butt and rub it all over everybody’s desk, and then the front, and take the you know, the footballs and put em in his pants and show the girls. Just stupid things like that …. Ok, we gotta clean this up, and wash this bleach and you just make them feel like ‘oh it’s gone.’

In addition, the participants ensure they have strong and trusting relationships with their students. Bev explained that students “need their teacher to have that relationship with them. To kind of be able to sense things about them.” To accomplish this, Bev shares stories about her family, “I can bring up my kids, you know my kids did that too, and that kind of thing. So they identify.” Jayne also uses her own experiences to relate to her students, but recognizes that there are limits:

I guess if I really had to put it down to it maybe I’d be, I try and always relate it back to my life, and myself, and my family, and my experiences, but would I go there about what I told you about weight and all that stuff? Probably not, you know?

Further, when a teacher genuinely knows her students, she is aware of things like: “females have more of the questions, guys just want to grow faster” (Bev). Laurie said, “The girls get leered at and you know they comment about that: ‘Somebody’s staring at me.’” Bev also mentioned girls experiencing “unwanted advances from boys or boys but then some of them seem to want to be around the boys so they send mixed messages,” demonstrating the role and complexity of the messages youth are communicating to one another. In addition to situations where girls seem to have a greater struggle, there are also instances where boys have the greater struggle. Bev and Marilyn each discussed the plight of the small boy. Marilyn discussed what she termed “short man syndrome” and explained, “there’s always a short boy every year and they always get called short in
some way and that always becomes a way bigger issue than anything else.” These events and circumstances highlight the gender specific nature of body image as well as the complex circumstances a teacher often finds herself in.

Another way the participants create a safe environment for students is by building up the self-confidence of the students. The participants discussed how important it is to make sure each student knows that he or she is beautiful and perfect in his or her own way; to emphasize universality when students are struggling; to introduce the concept of the body as ever evolving; and emphasize that the function of the body is to be appreciated. Jayne explained that she would emphasize the beauty of being unique by saying, “you’re beautiful, you’re yourself, we’re all totally different, you know, just be comfortable in yourself.” Laurie shared with her students that the body is “constantly evolving and changing. And just to enjoy and have the body we have.” Further, she helps her students experience universality, “You could ask any adult in this building and they would all say … if they could change [something] they would … make an adjustment, if they could just snap their fingers.

She also builds rapport with her students and emphasizes universality by sharing with her students her own personal experiences. She tells them how she was teased for being thin and for lacking femininity in a “time when Marilyn Monroe, and large breasts and large hips, and very curvy, and I was not curvy at all I was like a little boy.” She explains to her students that even as an adult, “if we waited for somebody else to tell us that we’re OK, you’re [laughing] gonna be waiting a really really long time,” emphasizing to students that it is not the approval of others that will bring fulfillment, but one’s own approval for one’s self.
The third way these teachers make students feel safe is to limit judgment in the classroom. Glenda describes her ideal learning environment, “A classroom where students feel free to express their opinion without being put down. A school where a child can go outside and play various activities and feel comfortable doing that….a classroom that is free of bullying basically.” Glenda outlined why this is so important for students at this age, “middle years is the establishment of the pecking order. And the pecking order starts and as a teacher I try to fight the pecking order, always.” She gave a multi-layered and moving example related to gender, which encompassed body image, as well as much broader issues:

I have a number of little girls in my room who are Muslim this year, but this one in particular little girl, the brother, was the king of the household and she definitely wasn’t so I worked really hard to make sure that she felt that she was very special and that she had a place and that the boys in the classroom were not above her.

Laurie demonstrated with an example related to weight how important it is to promote inclusion. A young boy called another student overweight. Laurie explained her response to this situation, “I dealt with that quite instantly, that we’re not making any comments about people’s appearances or body weight or any or sizes or anything really regarding things we cannot change about ourselves.” While pondering a kind and respectful classroom, Laurie asked, “We only spend five hours a day together so can we just be good to one another?” Finally, simply yet profoundly, Glenda summarized:

I think the biggest challenge is to get children to start respecting themselves, and respecting others around them…. the respect is the biggest thing. If I can get all the kids in the room to respect one another, and treat each other with care, then I have been successful.

Participants agreed that strategies to create a respectful classroom include classroom structuring, instructional strategies, and teaching methods that are mindful.
Participants explained that the rules and expectations of the classroom need to be established in the first days of school; confidentiality must be maintained; and opportunities for group work must be presented. In addition, sensitive topics like body image must be offered in a way that will be understandable to students and will not draw attention to any one individual or group of individuals. Marilyn explained why she incorporates group work, and expressed self-esteem as an indicator of body image:

I believe that kids stop picking on other kids if they know them better so I organized lots of pairings, lots of group activities where we have to have eye contact. ….at least once a day we had to do something that was to build up the self-esteem of the kids, it was all self-esteem. And by the end of the year I had a lot of improvement in how kids were treating each other.

Marilyn also pointed out how important it is to address sensitive issues discreetly,

I wouldn’t push them to deal with anything. I wouldn’t talk about for example one of the big things of course is that girls are always worried about the size of their breasts….I don’t think it’s something that needs to be talked about bluntly because it’s already in their heads. So you can kind of get them to know what you’re talking about without embarrassing anybody. Because the last thing you want is somebody looking around the room.

She also discussed how that discretion can also be applied to their written work, “the more people that will potentially read the paragraph that they write, takes away from whether they want to write it or not.” While each teacher uses strategies that are true to her own personality and teaching style, all agree that keeping the students safe is of utmost importance.

3.2.4 The negotiation continues: The informal curriculum.

As participants explain curriculum and the discussion in depth, the discussion sometimes moves further away from the formal curriculum, and towards the informal curriculum. There is often not a clear division between the two as they are not mutually exclusive. Informal curriculum in the context of this research is intended to encompass
the day-to-day activities that are not part of the formal requirements of the curriculum, yet contribute to the culture of the classroom by addressing or teaching lessons related to subjective and emotion ridden norms, morals, and values. As the participants explained, these lessons and beliefs are often a side-effect of both academic and cross-curricular programming. Aspects of the informal curriculum are complex, conflicted, and even have the potential to be controversial. The informal curriculum includes the teacher’s intentions with respect to what she hopes to inspire amongst her students in response to what she perceives her students to need. Participants explained that the most all-encompassing aspect of the informal curriculum with respect to body image education is regulating and defining normalcy, which may encompass not only what is “normal,” but also what is common, healthy, or acceptable.

Participants discussed normalcy as it is impacted by the media and manifests itself through the complexity of student clothing, the entanglement of each teacher’s personal values in education, the presentation of the body, and information restriction. In the sections that follow, I will explore the interrelatedness between normalcy and the convoluted nature of personal values in education, the teacher as a role model, the restriction of information, the media, the elaborate role of clothing, the unique position of the female teacher in relation to the male teacher, and the working relationship between teachers and parents.

3.2.5 The complexity of personal values in education.

Values education was identified by the participants as an opinion and morality-based vehicle used for addressing “normal.” Marilyn discussed her conflictedness as well as the necessity for values education, as she perceives it:
When we even do something as simple as personal standards and they don’t really have a clear picture of what personal standards would be appropriate for a child their age, I realize that I’m trying to influence what their personal standards are and that it shouldn’t be that way with the Health curriculum but I think that there are times when we have to say...‘your parents aren’t giving you the right guidance as far as physical activity, nutrition, attitude towards sex....’ Like I have kids with very very skewed attitudes towards their sexuality, and so I have to be, like, I am the do up the top and wear long enough skirts police....those girls will leave home looking the way they’re looking and their parents think it’s ok.

She gave an example of a recurring instance where she does not feel conflicted regarding whether or not it is appropriate for her to influence students’ personal standards:

Women don’t dress seductively because they are choosing that, I think they dress seductively because it has been chosen for them from someone else. And a twelve-year-old doesn’t actually choose to expose herself. She thinks it’s appropriate to expose herself because someone has shown that to her, and so in my role as a teacher I feel is that I need to say ‘stop, and look at what your influences are, and why do those influences have a right to tell you how to dress or tell you all these things? Think about how you feel in that outfit. Do you really want to have everybody looking at you and seeing more than what they should see?’

Marilyn’s view is that if it seems no one else (ie. parents) is addressing an important issue with students then it becomes her responsibility. On the contrary, cautioning against speaking to morals when addressing values, Laurie outlined the arbitrary and opinion-based nature of incorporating one’s personal morals or beliefs into the education of values in the classroom:

Maybe they wouldn’t wanna maybe do you want to go there, do you wanna address that? Cause you’re getting into...this whole sense of what we value or...your belief structure...And they’re our opinions right? It’s based on fact or opinion. Is this something that’s true? Is this really true or is this something that you’re just telling a child because of, blah blah.

Bev, who teaches in a Catholic system, felt that because of the additional courses her school provides, and because of the sexual education resources her school division has made available to her, she had an advantage over teachers in the public school
system. She explained that the primary difference was that she had an obvious time within her day to discuss values education, and felt that her division afforded her permission to candidly explore values, beliefs, and morals without any restriction. Further, she did not feel pressure to influence her students’ values in a specific direction because of her division’s religious stance, though she did express doing so when appropriate:

you *can* bring up how you are supposed to be treated and why. And you know I don’t bring it up all the time, but what would Jesus do, what are we supposed to do?… What’s acceptable? What are our values?… in the public system, sadly, there’s not that moment that even if it wasn’t called Religion, Health or something, I don’t know what you could call it but it’s just … in Religion class we’re talking about issues all the time… you’ve got that morality feature and then how it feeds into whatever the subject area that we’re in.

Whether or not each participant felt she was within her right to or had an appropriate venue to discuss morals or values, addressing issues related to personal values is undoubtedly complicated. The personal stance of a teacher greatly impacts her role in such discussions. Further, her stance or personal views impact the type and depth of content she shares with her students.

**3.2.6 Information restriction.**

Information restriction also reflects a teacher’s personal views. Four of the teacher participants explained the importance of transparency and candidness since the content that is withheld from students is as indicative of ‘normal’ as the content that is shared. Bev explained how important it is for teachers to provide students with age-appropriate facts and to arm students with the necessary tools to find relevant information. She said,

There’s all sorts of things that they need to know and we’re in a real information age, it’s just making sure that they have age-appropriate information that is relevant and factual, and we can’t be afraid to do that and say that … whether it’s homosexuality, and all these things that are on TV shows, they don’t really know
what that is, and then they’re trying to figure out, ‘oh, that’s what that is!’ All sorts of things it’s like they need to know younger because they’re exposed to this….it’s in a way sometimes too late. The things that we need to address or I’m addressing in six-seven, really should have addressed in grade four.

Glenda felt differently, “Grade 6 is probably too young. I would do that more when I taught grade 8 ‘cause grade eights are more aware of it. Grade sixes are still little kids.”

Specifically, Glenda was referring to media education addressing altered and photo-shopped photos of celebrities. Jayne reflected, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with Bev or Glenda, but providing a link between the two opposing points of view by explaining that perhaps there is value in providing students with education on sensitive topics related to body image before they become problematic:

At grade 6 most of them haven’t even hit puberty, right? They are not even really concerned that much, about their outward appearance. But maybe the teaching, the curriculum, is to try and, you know, get them before they are actually starting to criticize themselves.

The challenge is a complex one. It is clear that the participants agree that this information needs to be taught; what is not clear is the most appropriate time or context in which to provide this education. This is a dilemma of appropriateness, and a dilemma of what is “normal.” Further enacting “normal,” teachers are seen as role models.

3.2.7 Acting as a role model.

In addition to being conscious of what she says, a teacher must also be equally aware of what she does in terms of impacting student definitions of “normal.” Jayne and Marilyn shared very different views on what it meant to be a good role model. Jayne explained that to her a large part of being a positive role model is setting the example that nobody is perfect and that it is okay to have flaws and make mistakes:

You’re trying to be a role model and you’re trying so, you’re trying to embody that confidence you know, and ability to laugh at yourself and ability to make
mistakes, and to not be perfect, right, you’re trying to make that look OK, and not like such a big deal.

Marilyn, in contrast, displayed very high expectations of herself and discussed the necessity for a teacher to appear a certain way at all times, whether inside or outside of the school. She explained that a student should never see a teacher smoking, that a teacher should never have an alcoholic beverage in a restaurant if there is a student in the restaurant, and that a teacher should never be seen online in a picture with an alcoholic beverage. She said, “it’s part of our responsibility being a teacher is toeing the line and being a model citizen.” She further discussed her perception of clothing as an indicator of health and wellness:

How we dress suggests how we feel about our bodies…. when we are out in public….it’s not just about not dressing in a skanky way but I think when we’re in public we need to dress in a way that suggests pride in our bodies, so not dressing totally slumpy…. we are role models and so we have to be role models all the time…. I really think that if people can’t show a positive health image not just body image but healthy living habits, then they shouldn’t have chosen this as a profession because we have an incredible amount of responsibility.

Laurie made similar comments, and discussed the way she dresses as setting an example. She explained that though the behavior of some teachers may indicate otherwise, the way teachers dress and prepare themselves physically is an important part of the example they set, and is understood to be a reflection of their overall health and professionalism.

However, she also explained the enjoyment she gets from preparing herself as a professional each morning:

I make choices in the morning what I’m going to I’m going to present myself and, I take a great deal of pleasure in that. I enjoy it, I enjoy how I dress, I enjoy sort of being unique and not dressing like every other person on the planet and I have always sort of been like that.
If students are as intuitive as they seem, picking up on teacher’s eating patterns, it is possible that students will also pick up on a teacher who is dressing or presenting themselves in a certain way out of obligation instead of enjoyment. In turn, this communicates to students that presenting themselves in a way they are comfortable is less important than having an appearance that is acceptable to their peers. Is there really any difference between a teacher who dresses a certain way because of social or professional pressures regardless of personal comfort, and a student who does the same thing? What about eating a certain way or incorporating physical activity not for health or enjoyment, but for other reasons? If conforming to the dominant social discourse in terms of clothing, dieting, exercise, and overall appearance is impacting the body image of teachers, surely it also impacts the body image of students. Therefore, teachers are not only modeling non-authentic behavior, but also portraying and modeling damaged image of the self.

The teachers interviewed also shared that they are conscious of the eating habits they model. There is often junk food in the staff room, some staff members buy fast food for lunch, and some may exhibit dieting behaviors. However, there is also evidence that teachers are making a conscious effort with respect to nutrition. Laurie explains: “Rather than running out and grabbing a burger or grabbing something like that, fast food, most people are bringing lunches. Our fridge is jam-packed, you can hardly put your lunch in there anymore.” This indicates that perhaps bringing a home-made or healthy lunch has become “normal.” Jayne spoke directly about herself with respect to modeling good nutrition. She explained her conflict and feelings of guilt:

I have done a cleanse, the kids saw me doing the cleanse, now they’re seeing me do the shakes. [laughing] what am I sending out there, right?” Further, “when I was doing my cleanse, the kids notice that you only had a drink at lunch, you know? So like what does that say? I kind of question myself ….they ask you
‘What are you doing?’ or ‘What are you eating?’ and I’ll say ‘Oh well I’m doing this, this, and this,’ ‘Why are you doing that?’ ‘Oh well it’s a cleanse’ ‘Do you want to lose weight? Are you on a diet?’ ‘No it’s a cleanse’…. like kids bring donuts for their birthday, and a little kid passed me a donut, you know, and the one kid goes ‘no! She’s on a diet, she’s on her cleanse!’ You know? And so it’s kinda funny, like even though that was long gone, and I didn’t want the donut, I took the donut just because, I was like ‘no I’m not, I will have that donut and I will enjoy it.’ Maybe I didn’t think that they’d pick up on that that much.

Her worry about how much of her behavior the kids notice, or the way that they understand her eating behaviors, was a concern for the way students frame “normal,” acceptable, or healthy nutrition or eating patterns.

The participants also felt that the extent to which a teacher takes care of herself in terms of fitness is also a vivid aspect of being a role model. Marilyn explained that the culture among teachers is to “not really take care of yourself….teachers feel so overworked that they compromise their own bodies in order to get all those jobs done, even though I know that taking care of myself allows me to do the jobs.” Glenda perceived, on the contrary, that in her school, teachers set a positive example in terms of physical activity, “the kids are doing the fitness and the teachers are participating,” by running the Cross Country Club, by encouraging all students to participate, and by personally staying active. She also shared, “if we have marathons and things like that often in our school there’s three or four teachers that are participating in that marathon so I guess that promotes a positive image.” The difference in perception seems to be that Marilyn viewed fitness as a healthy, regular, and ongoing aspect of everyone’s lifestyle, whereas Glenda perhaps viewed it as a more specialized and individual activity that not everyone must take part in for the positive example to be set.

3.2.8 How media shapes normalcy.
Participants identify the media as being complex and as influencing normalcy. Since the media paints a skewed picture of “normal,” the scope of understanding with which the students enter the classroom can sometimes be skewed, impacting the social and learning environment of the school. As such, there are instances when teachers felt they must enter into a dialogue with students to address normalcy as shaped by the media so that the school remained a respectful place of learning. Bev explained that adolescents are watching television riddled with mature adult content both inside and outside of the home and outlined what this meant for the classroom teacher:

some of these kids have been exposed to bad adult channels, and I have had males in particular, bring up something in class that they- it was totally innocent, and you know for a fact that they would have had to watch a channel...parents are allowing kids to watch certain channels on television and they don’t monitor their television...educators have more of a role I think of saying what’s normal because they’re exposed to so many things, that they think it’s right.

Jayne reiterated this, “There’s no filter at home, I think when it comes to movies and things that they’re watching on TV,” and said that they are preoccupied with celebrities, “comparing themselves to celebrities and guys get really into talking about the hot celebrities and you know like it always seems to be that little bit of comparison or, you know, so-and-so’s hot because, or so-and-so, you know?” Jayne fears that students are experiencing “too much too fast. They don’t get it. They are not understanding that what you see on the film is, somebody who is, that is their job to look that good, and they have a LOT of help.” Teachers’ perception of the students’ desire to mimic violent behaviors as “normal” indicates the possibility that students will blindly mimic behavior in the media. If such mimicking behavior is extended to adult sexual content, body image will undoubtedly be impacted since body image is so related to sexual health (Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006; Schooler, Impett, Hirschman, & Bonem, 2008).
Social media also played a large role in defining “normal.” When students express themselves sexually via social media, they are also setting the stage for what is normal: “they will stick their tongues out and they will give gross pictures and then they’ll send them … little poses and stuff and like that.” Bev explained how these types of pictures have led to rumors that are sexual in nature, creating yet another challenge as she then must address the rumors. She explained that the fact of the matter is:

Media is so prevalent. I mean hours and hours these kids put into social media, not just television and movies, they’re constantly turning on their phones, checking for texts, wanting to text in class because of that social bond they feel so inclined to have.

Glenda, Jayne, and Marilyn note that adolescents in today’s technological society have adopted the mentality that constant social media interaction is not only “normal,” but also necessary for students to feel they belong with and are connected to their peers. These circumstances often leave teachers responsible for helping students make sense of what they have experienced, interrupting the societal norm and incorporating their own ideals into the dialogue.

3.2.9 The complexity of clothing.

Teachers have observed that student clothing and the presentation of the body as desirable and “normal” occupies a central role with respect to body image. In particular, clothing is indicated as being linked to “the embodiment of a normalized image of a perfect woman,” particularly for young females (Oliver, 1999, p 220). As the participants explained, for adolescents, clothing plays a large role in their social lives, and can be very related to belonging. Jayne addressed girls’ volleyball shorts, which are very short, but represent the norm:
You can tell that that is the standard. If they’re not wearing volleyball shorts, they’re not in with whatever’s cool or whatever fashion is going on, and you can see even girls who would not normally wear short shorts like that are putting them on just to try and fit in, a little bit.

Jayne has demonstrated one example of a time when students dress like their peers to fit in even though it may require them to wear something in which they are not comfortable. This indicates that being “normal” or fitting in is more important than being comfortable, or being true to one’s self. This behavior may indicate a lack of self-confidence, as shaped by personal body image. Respect for the self and self-confidence go hand-in-hand and are impacted by an individual’s body image. She also discussed Physical Education:

When students forget their gym clothes, my initial response is ‘can you borrow from somebody else?’ right? And girls don’t want to. They don’t’ want to wear anything that they know, that they haven’t put on before….they don’t want to …. wear something that they know doesn’t look good on them…and we of course have a stock supply, but they are not at all wanting, interested in wearing that. Then I encourage them to participate wearing their normal clothes, make sure that they’ve got deodorant or whatever, and for the most part they’ll do it.

On the other hand, Laurie directly discussed her perception of clothing as an indicator of a healthy amount of self-confidence, suggesting that a student who is dressed in a way that attracts attention to herself has a positive body image or healthy amount of self-confidence. When a student is:

Dressed every day like to the nines- like the hair’s done up, got a little wrap in the hair, the shirt off the shoulder, got a little strap showing up here, that student is portraying a fair amount of confidence. Also, kids who wear their sweat pants and t-shirt every day. You know they have almost like a uniform. You know they just wear, some kids I know have certain emotional issue- or things like that attached to clothing you know how it feels on their skin and that kind of thing.

While Laurie has observed clothing as indicating adequate self-confidence, Jayne has made observations that she perceives as indicating a lack of self-confidence. The indicator that each participant described as having determined whether the observed
student behavior indicated a high or low amount of self-confidence was whether or not it was the genuine personal preference of the student to wear the clothing in question. Laurie discussed a young girl who made a conscious choice to wear an outfit that drew attention to her physically, whereas Jayne discussed students being uncomfortable changing into unfamiliar clothing, or wearing short shorts for volleyball. Marilyn also discussed how clothing can be perceived as an indicator of a lack of self-confidence. She shared a story about a grade five girl: “she’s a tiny little girl, she wears these great big bunny hugs that cover her up. They cover her up and fall down to mid-thigh level.” This indicates that the student has made a choice to not attract attention to herself physically, and is then perhaps more like the students who do not want to change for Physical Education class. As such, Marilyn has determined this to be an indicator of the student’s discomfort with her own body and therefore a negative body image or lack of self-confidence.

Glenda explained her perception of the link between clothing and body image, “I think it’s probably respect, number one that you respect your own self, and how you are being portrayed, are you respecting the other members of your class, your peers.” Glenda noted inappropriate clothing worn by students showing too much skin or displaying offensive slogans, “shorts are waaaay too short and tops that are too skimpy, that sort of thing” perceiving the student’s level of respect for self, and “I had a young man wear a t-shirt to school, I told him that he couldn’t wear it anymore. It was a T-Shirt that said ‘Party till she’s cute’ and I found it offensive.” Glenda emphasizes her disapproval of clothing that shows disrespect for women. This disapproval is likely linked to her gender.
Likewise her gender permits her unique advantages when to addressing body image in the classroom.

3.2.10 Because I am a girl.

The teachers interviewed felt that the particular age and gender of a teacher could provide privilege with respect to addressing certain topics. The participants perceived that women were at a significant advantage over male teachers when it came to addressing body image because they are most often addressing body image issues with female students, and because female teachers are seen in a motherly role, which creates a unique closeness between teacher and student. Also, as teachers age and acquire more experience, it became easier to address sensitive issues like body image. Part of the lived experience of these participants is taking advantage of their age and gender when addressing issues of body image. Bev explained this:

I think that the male teachers probably have a harder time and probably because they are really afraid about harassment and going- talking about that subject where I think the female teacher has an easier time because I think they do really still think of you as mom…. As for the age, I think that if the teacher keeps themselves informed and kind of with it and you have that relationship with the kids, male or female wouldn’t matter…I think even as an educator that’s older, I’m not as worried about things I think as maybe I could have been when I was younger because I’m not sure where that line is, and right now, in a way, what are they going to do to me. You want to know, I am going to tell you and if I think that it’s something that maybe your parent needs to discuss I would phone your parent and say that. So, if I can’t talk to you about it that means that you need to talk to your mom or dad.

Her lens and point of reference as a woman is helpful for fostering positive body image in her students. While each of the teacher participants had their gender in common, gender is not the only lens through which a teacher gains experience and observes her classroom. These lenses are impacted by life experiences and relationships she encounters. In the next section of this thesis, I will discuss the relationship between the teacher and the
parent, and how a teacher’s lens or point of reference shapes her understanding of this relationship.

3.2.11 Work alongside parents.

Collaborating with parents helps teachers to meet the needs of the students. The nature of this collaboration varies depending on each student, each parent, and each teacher. The teacher participants expressed having filled many roles in addition to “teacher” including caregiver, guide, team member, and parent. Participants have found that at times this role also requires teachers to be gatekeepers. Bev said:

Their parents coming in here asking me, ‘should I let my kid have Facebook, do I need to get my kid a phone…’ you know. And they are asking teachers that. They ask teachers a lot… parents really rely on the teacher to get a lot of the stuff through to the kids. Years ago we would have parents that would say, I don’t know if I want my child reading Fully Alive you know because there’s that sexuality theme in there, ‘they gotta skip that theme three, and you guys talk about things.’ Whereas now I think they’re just like, ‘for God sake tell my kid something.’

Being an experienced teacher, Bev is able to share her observations of how parents’ expectations of teachers have changed over time. These demands have left her concerned about crossing the line in terms of filling a parental role:

you gotta think about where that line is. You’re always thinking about that line…. am I crossing into that parental role? But there’s so many things we’re crossing in that parental role that it depends on it- the parent just has a problem with it. Then we’ll deal with it then. But usually you’re pushed at such a point of the child wanting or needing either information or they disclose something to you or you have observed a behavior that you may ha- I’m just trying to think did I ever say anything that a parent would have not liked…I haven’t had that happen to me.

She also explained that the same years of experience that have afforded her the perspective to see the change in parents’ expectations has also put her in a position where she is comfortable filling a caregiver or parental role when working with her students.
Marilyn, however, explained that she does not so distinctly separate the role of the parent from the role of the teacher:

I strongly believe in the community of the school and the community of the school within the community and including the parents…we’re all a team here, let’s guide this child in the right way….if a parent is making a mistake in my eyes, I want to include them in the in the circle of influence.

Marilyn expressed being comfortable taking the lead in terms of guiding a child if she feels the parents are not adequately addressing an issue the student is facing. This is not always a simple task, however. Bev discussed a teacher/parent dynamic. She recalled introducing a three-day balanced meal plan in her Health class and found that the “parents were the ones that were jeopardizing this more than ever because ‘I have a health condition,’ or ‘I don’t really want anybody to know,’” indicating that parents took personal offense to being asked to journal the food in their home, perhaps feeling accused of not feeding their children properly, and also that parents were modeling behavior which suggested there was reason to be withholding or shameful of their family’s eating practices. Since food, weight, and body image are often discussed in tandem, this conflict could have the potential to make students feel that their eating habits, body weight, and their overall appearance is shameful.

The next section will provide the canvas on which to examine and discuss the implication of these rich results.

4.0 Implications

The findings of this thesis provide a rich depiction of female health teachers’ perceptions of their professional role with respect to body image. The participants discussed the workings of the classroom as well as their own personal lived experiences.
In doing so, the ways in which teachers address issues of body image and promote positive body image were revealed, as were the complexities of meeting their goals as educators while grappling with their own personal body images. In addition to their own ideals, teachers perceived the needs of the students; experienced pressure from parents; experienced expectations placed upon them from their administration, school community, peers, and school board; and experienced the pressure to conform to the dominant social discourse where teachers are constantly rushing and stressing to meet the needs of their job, their personal needs and their relational needs all while physically embodying the ideal woman. Given the stories shared by the participants in this study as well as previous findings (Macdonald, 2002), the allocation of funds within the school divisions with respect to teacher development should be reviewed. In addition to a limited amount of the traditional professional development and in-service model, it may be effective to use funds to provide group and individual sessions in which each teacher works to understand her own relationship with her body and her own body image, and to provide workshops that focus on the teacher-student relationship and building a student-centered classroom. The following section will explain this suggestion.

4.1 This is your Captain Speaking

Teachers hold great power to share ideas and inspire students to question and challenge ideas. In acquiring an inquisitive attitude, students may become more apt to negotiate and be critical of “normal” in terms of what is common, healthy, or acceptable. During this negotiation, the role of the teacher is to inspire higher level thinking and a critical analysis of society (Welch & Wright, 2011). Helfert and Warschburger (2011) affirm that it is important to encourage students to reflect on their own personal beliefs
and practices before adopting those of their friends. Further, Frisen and Holmqvist (2010) suggest that targeting adolescents’ thinking patterns may be a valuable tool for increasing positive body image. While facilitating critical thinking, teachers seek to find a balance between expressing or imposing their own ideals upon students, and adequately providing the skills and guidance necessary for students to form their own opinions.

4.2 Please Secure Your Own Oxygen Mask Prior to Assisting Others

For a teacher to effectively inspire, challenge, and target critical thinking, it is important that she first examine her own personal beliefs, ideals, and priorities. Through the use of self-reflection and self-awareness a teacher will become more familiar with her own position on and understanding of body image, and then become more able to navigate the complexities of her classroom. For the women in this study, when struggling with clarifying priorities in the classroom, the challenge was complex and in a constant state of flux. The participants had their own internalized ideals; however, each participant seemed to have a varying degree of awareness of these ideals. As a teacher becomes more self-aware, she will become better able to observe and target her students’ thinking patterns (Macdonald, 2002). Encouraging a teacher to first reflect on her own position, beliefs, and needs prior to addressing the position, beliefs, or needs of the students, will help her to clarify and prioritize the messages she conveys in her classroom. Further, if a teacher has not come to terms with her own body image or practiced discussing issues which may be personal or embarrassing, it is unlikely that she will be able to facilitate or model these discussions for her students (MacDonald, 2002). According to Macdonald (2002), self-reflection and honesty is necessary for teachers to be able to find a way to truly honour themselves, genuinely interact with students, and inspire self-respect, open
communication, and introspection within their students. This is not to suggest that a
teacher needs to have a flawlessly positive body image to be effective, but that a teacher
is more effective if she is aware of her body image and her relationship with her body in
terms of its purpose. Once this has been accomplished, genuine student-centered
classrooms with clear priorities can be established and maintained.

Even during her journey of self-reflection, each teacher will continue to grapple
with whom to honour. As she becomes more familiar with her own body image, she will
more clearly establish her own needs and priorities with respect to body image. She will
also become more in tune with the needs of her students. A teacher’s relationship with
her students, the student-centeredness of her classroom, how she intends to address
values education, how she will keep her classroom safe, and how she will exercise her
privilege as a female teacher addressing body image are complex issues. Similar to the
literature, the participants felt that it was important that the teacher create a classroom
where the direction of the students’ education was based on the interests, needs, abilities,
learning styles, multiple intelligences, and educational goals of the students (Weimer,
2002). In addition, maintaining student-centered learning can act as a barometer for
discomfort and apprehension amongst the students while addressing sensitive topics, and
it can eliminate the guess work regarding what students should or need to know.
However, the way each teacher reads the barometer or exercises discretion is unique and
related to her own values and beliefs.

Participants explained that inner conflict surfaces regularly when considering the
depth and breadth of information that is deemed appropriate to provide to the students.
Some participants believe that transparency and candidness with the sharing of
information exhibits student-centeredness. Others, however, are more apprehensive about what information is appropriate to provide, and to students of what age. These opposing views are related to each teacher’s values. As a part of the informal curriculum, values education poses conflict: Some teachers feel it is their duty to provide students with the opportunities to learn appropriate values, others argue that it is not the place of the teacher to address morality since it is based on personal opinion. The participants outlined how blurred the lines between values and morals can become. Teachers wonder: What time is appropriate for addressing sensitive issues, and at what point does the responsibility of the teacher begin and end in terms of addressing these topics? Whose responsibility is it to address these? This quandary is subjective, is a product of each teacher’s position and beliefs, and reiterates how important it is for a teacher to be in tune with herself and in tune with her students. Given this challenge, it seems particularly important that a teacher, as an agent of change and inspirer of knowledge, explore within, taking adequate time to self-reflect and learn to be honest with herself so that she may begin to negotiate societal norms and evaluate her own priorities with respect to body image both on a personal level and professional level.

Those participants who stressed the importance of rapport with the students and a student-centered classroom also shared a great value for being as transparent and candid as possible, particularly when students divulge having taken part in risky behavior or when asking direct questions. These behaviors include oral, anal, and vaginal sex, mutual masturbation, or sharing sexual photos via social networking. Direct questions include questions about anatomy, sexuality, pregnancy, contraceptives, specific sexual acts, and screening for sexually transmitted infections. The participants who expressed these values
also tended to exhibit relative contentment with their own bodies. Conversely, those participants who were less content in terms of body image also expressed being more apprehensive when addressing topics of a sensitive and personal nature, such as body image or sexuality. This further highlights the importance of teacher self-care and reflection to ensure a student-centered classroom, and strong teacher-student relationship. It seems, based on this study, that those teachers who are more aware of and comfortable with themselves are more comfortable addressing sensitive topics related to body image.

On top of all of the factors involved, the particular school and school division a teacher finds herself in can also impact the ease with which she navigates sensitive issues. This puts forth the need for teachers to balance the views and values of their school division in addition to their personal views and values and the views and values of their students. As body image is a very private and personal matter which can be difficult to discuss, the beliefs or views of the school or school board can play a large role in the way a teacher approaches these issues in the classroom. The various school systems afford varying opportunities and advantage with respect to addressing issues related to morals and values. One participant points out that it is only within the Catholic school system that morals education can be smoothly and organically intertwined into the classroom. However, in a formal sense, the way in which sensitive topics are addressed is often predetermined in separate (meaning primarily Catholic) school systems. While this reduces the responsibility of the teachers, it also reduces the responsibility of the students in terms of taking charge of their learning. Regardless of the stand or philosophy of each school system, teachers in each system are left to make their own decisions and try to do no harm (while attempting to instill a healthy body image for her students).
Adding to the balancing act, teachers also must deal with the perceptions of the parents as members of the larger community. Teachers are in a relatively unique profession where it often feels as though the parents and community members are free to scrutinize their values and beliefs. The values of a teacher may differ greatly from other community members. Teachers are held to a higher standard of professionalism than many other professions. As such, what is “normal” for teachers may not be what is normal for people in other professions. This is one of the reasons why teachers may disagree with parents regarding issues related to values.

In addition to balancing her own personal values and priorities with those of the students, taking into account the stance of her school or division, as well as the values of parents and community members, a teacher must also take the formal curriculum into account. The open-ended and resource-based nature of the current Health curriculum is particularly conducive to a student-centered classroom, and particularly conducive to teacher confusion. Therefore, effective delivery of this curriculum depends not on the teacher as a content expert, but instead as an expert in student-centered instruction. As the women in this study made clear, it is less important to those stakeholders concerned with a student-centered health education that the formal curriculum be honoured, and more important that the teacher be self-reflective, and that she have a close relationship with her students. In fact, the Education Act (1995) says that:

The content of any of the courses of study taken by a pupil or a group of pupils may be altered, augmented or otherwise adjusted in any manner that a teacher considers advisable in the interests of the pupil or pupils.

Further, “a teacher shall plan and organize the learning activities of the class with due regard for the individual differences and needs of the pupils” (Education Act, 1995).
A classroom that is truly student-driven alleviates much of the decision-making on the part of the teacher who has a vague curriculum, but is to determine the depth and breadth of content to be covered. While this does not address the issue of Health education being undervalued by school divisions, as indicated by the participants (including lack of in-service for Health education, pressure to forego time spent addressing Health education to meet Math, Literacy, and Treaty education goals, lack of communication about the location of the new curriculum), appropriate and effective school-wide programming and creative and ambitious cross-curricular instruction facilitate health related issues which permeate all subject areas. It is undoubtedly important that teachers are knowledgeable and are able to provide accurate information. However, knowing what information the students need (beyond what is prescribed by the curriculum), when students need it, and knowing how to best deliver that content determines which information teachers even need to be knowledgeable about.

On that point, only two of the five participants had received formal training in the delivery of Health education as a part of their Education degrees. Burrows & Wright (2004) demonstrated that minimal formalized background and content knowledge does not hinder teachers’ ability to promote healthy messages or educate about the body in either a formal or informal capacity. However, it is possible that if a teacher feels or assumes that a lack of formal education hinders her ability, then at the very least it will impact her confidence. It is likely that the confidence a teacher gains in her ability with time, experience, collaboration with colleagues, and professional development will make her more intuitive and able to be self-reflective and build close relationships with those around her, including her students. Since confidence and self-esteem are so closely
linked with body image, would it then not be helpful to address the body image of teachers? Could improving a teacher’s self-confidence boost her body image and create a cycle of self-reflection, self-discovery, happiness and productivity? It is important that a teacher is confident in her competencies, and perhaps this too could be addressed as part of the personal and professional development mentioned earlier. Perhaps contributing to a teacher’s self-confidence by assuring her that she is a competent educator, and an appreciated public servant would be more valuable than prescribing further initiatives she must incorporate into her classroom. After all, the ‘components of knowledge, beliefs, conceptions, and intuitions are inextricably intertwined’ with the practical knowledge and behaviors of the teacher (Verloop, van Driel, & Meijer, 2001), which cannot be learned solely in a few professional development sessions. Professional development is not the only factor which impacts a teacher’s ability to effectively address body image issues in the classroom. The gender or age of a teacher also influences the ease with which she can navigate issues of body image in the learning environment.

4.3 We Prefer to be Called Flight Attendants, Not Stewardesses

Two participants indicated that they feel that older female teachers are at the greatest advantage when it comes to addressing issues of the body. They felt this was partially because they perceive many of the students as viewing them as a motherly figure, which may speak to the close bond between teacher and student. It also draws into the foreground the question of whether teachers have the same influence on adolescents as parents do in terms of body image. Marilyn’s struggle to genuinely view her body in terms of function as opposed to appearance, referring to her dissatisfaction with her thighs, emphasizes the responsibility of the teacher to always appear well-dressed both
inside and outside of the classroom, denoted that whether she was conscious of it or not, appearance was at least one of her priorities. This conflict was sparked, at least in part, by comments made by her father. Laurie’s body image was also influenced by one of her parents. The criticisms she received from her mother highlighted the way in which even a grown woman can experience conflict when her contentment with and perception of her own body image is not congruent with that of her mother. This supports the research of Killeya-Jones et al. (2007) who explained that parents have a powerful influence on what their children view to be normal because of their close relationship, and these influences can extend into the adult years (Aquilino & Supple, 2001). Specifically, negative comments or criticisms about appearance or weight made by a girl’s mother are linked with increased disordered eating in daughters (Baker, Whisman, & Bronwell, 2000; Smolak, Levine, & Schermer, 1999; Vincent & McCabe, 2000; Kluck, 2010). Given that the participants perceive themselves as filling a parental role, and perceive the students as often seeing older female teachers as mother-figures, is it possible that female teachers have the potential to have a similarly profound impact on adolescent body image?

Each participant, in her own way, expressed pressure to demonstrate a wise and refined understanding of body image, which did not focus on appearance, but on the health and function of the body. This was revealed through the descriptions the participants provided, painting themselves as variously “normal;” i.e.; viewing their weight as something that was beyond their control, insisting that the drive for weight loss was entirely health-related as opposed to appearance-related, and emphasizing the refinement of their definition over time, etc. However, their inner conflict was revealed when they, for example, divulged feelings of guilt surrounding the nutritional or fitness
practices they model, or by questioning the validity of values education. With all of these pressures combined, the participants’ experience was that the profession of teaching does not allow or facilitate teachers to set an example of “health.” For example, one teacher expressed great pressure to always be a model citizen while in public, while another felt pressure to pack her lunches in a way that always modeled healthy eating. I wonder, if kids are as observant as one participant perceived them to be, will they not be able to tell when we are faking it, when we are acting professionally in public because we have caught a glimpse of them out of the corner of our eye, when we replace our fun social mask with our professional mask? Will they not intuitively see that we dress a certain way because it is expected of us, not because we feel comfortable or confident in that clothing? Won’t they see through our attempt at eating carrot sticks as a snack because they are just so darn tasty? What do they pick up on? Where should we draw the line? Should teachers feel pressure to look fit? Could we be undoing all the time and effort we have put into “be yourself,” “love your body” and “stand up for what you believe in” when we are constantly juggling all of our “shoulds?”

The pressure to exude a positive body image, be a positive role model, and to fill a motherly role exemplifies the importance for teachers to explore and reflect on their own body image. Also, there may be a difference between the comfort and awareness of a younger female teacher and an older female teacher. The youngest participant expressed a preoccupation with her weight and a constant ‘work to own’ mentality. She said that this mentality motivated her to work out. Two of the older participants expressed contentment with their bodies and attributed said contentment to perceiving themselves as being “normal,” fitting in with their same age and same sex peers, and with perceiving the
societal body ideal as unattainable due to their age. Another of the older participants, who was also content with her body, suggested that the appearance of the female body as it ages continues to be a gift that is shaped the way it is because it has accomplished many feats, including creating new life. The literature shows that other researchers have discovered similar variance across the generations. Hetherington and Burnett (1994) outlined the prevalence of body dissatisfaction across the lifespan. Hetherington and Burnett (1994) revealed that this dissatisfaction is experienced less strongly by older women than younger women, as younger women often have revealed having body size ideals that are smaller than the body size ideals of older women (Lamb, Jackson, Cassiday, & Priest, 1993). The responses of the participants in this study supported these findings. Further, women’s bodies are likely to increase in size as they age and undergo biological events such as puberty, pregnancy, and menopause, tend to induce fat storage and take them away from the thin and young ideal (Rodin et al. 1984). What each woman had in common with the other participants, regardless of age, was an inner conflict regarding at least some aspect of the definition of body image, her own personal body image, or her construction of body image in her classroom, underscoring the ‘ideal’ of young and thin. Perhaps with more self-exploration and self-discovery young female teachers will be able to experience the same advantage as older female teachers with respect to addressing body image in the classroom.

4.4 Please Don’t Hesitate to Let Us Know How We Can Serve You Better

Participants explained the tension they experience when attempting to meet the demands of the job without foregoing the time required to take care of themselves physically. The time to adequately deliver all of the curricular material in an exemplary
way; provide extra help outside of class time; provide consistent supervision at recess, in
the morning before school, and in the afternoon and after school; run extracurricular
programming; effectively and efficiently maintain paperwork; adequately meet the needs
of students with special needs; access supports and resources; and access professional
development all while balancing their personal, familial, and professional lives;
maintaining a healthy lifestyle and diet; and self-reflect just not available. It seems that
the position teachers find themselves in has put the cart before the horse. Teachers feel
they need to put self-care, which includes their physical, emotional, cognitive, and
spiritual health, on the back burner in exchange for scrambling to meet the formal
obligations of the job.

Professional development opportunities could provide teachers with the necessary
time required to address self-care. However, it is important that these opportunities do not
simply prescribe another thing for teachers to do, but also provide each teacher with the
opportunity to explore her relationship with her body as well as her own body image. In
adequately providing professional development opportunities it is necessary to consider
having a professional facilitate between four and five group sessions with 12-15 teachers
in each group, hold individual follow-up sessions, and closely document the most
efficient ways to address body image awareness with educators. Facilitating teacher
reflection upon body image is undoubtedly complicated as lack of opportunity is
obviously not the only reason teachers are not actively reflecting on body image on a
regular basis. As we become adults and gain experience, do we start to believe that body
image does not matter? Or perhaps we come to believe that a positive body image is so
out of reach that there is no sense thinking about it? Or maybe our body image just
naturally improves – but with this change, would we not notice this and therefore want to reflect on those changes? Celebrate them? Professional facilitation could help teachers explore the personal and private aspects of body image, ensure that self-exploration continues, and keep teachers focused on their own body image over the body image of others. The participants felt that if this were done effectively, Health education could be appreciated and valued appropriately. It was argued by a participant that a student could experience greater and more severe long-term suffering from poor quality health education than from poor quality algebra education. Could it not also be argued then that the suffering a student will experience due to her teacher’s lack of self-awareness is not then greater than the suffering she would experience as a result of her teacher’s lack of curriculum in-service?

The allocation of funds requires in depth review, as does the value of traditional professional development. The traditional in-service model, as discussed by the participants, is often inaccessible and is typically content driven. There are counselors and psychologists made available to teachers, but if the time is not set aside for them to seek out these professionals, this emotional self-care, just as the physical self-care, will be pushed-aside to make room to fill other expectations. Just as the participants reflected on their conflicting ideals and questioned their priorities, so too should the policy makers, school boards, and Ministry of Education reflect and question the way teachers are developed as educators.

Each woman expressed her own unique beliefs, which included her definition of body image and her own perception of her own personal body image. What had shaped those beliefs was just as unique as the beliefs themselves. However, the participants all
agree on one thing, first and foremost a classroom must be a safe place where students respect themselves and those around them, and where the learning is student-driven. However, it is unclear whether this is possible when teachers are faced with sensitive issues related to body image; the expectations of the curriculum, administration, school division, parents, and the beliefs of the students, which may all conflict with her personal beliefs and values in one way or another. How could a teacher possibly navigate these complex relationships if she has not yet even positioned herself?

4.5 For Those Catching a Connecting Flight…

The findings of this study support the rationale to study body image as it relates to educators by highlighting the impact that a teacher’s body image has on her teaching practices and the structure of her classroom. Further, the findings provide foundational understanding about the body image of teachers and the impact it may have on their students. Future research, however, should focus on the continued study of this population on a larger scale, and should focus on whether the inner conflict experienced by participants and the struggle regarding who to honour holds true in diverse populations. Expanding the population, including gender, age, ethnicity, school division, professional experience, and geographic place of residence could be very useful. Taking the opportunity to observe classrooms and interview students could allow for an additional lens as well. The findings also highlight the importance of considering whether the implementation of self-care and workshops related to the various aspects of body image education for teachers could have an impact on their teaching practices, and in turn, on the development of healthy body image among their students. It is worth
exploring whether individual or group counseling could resolve some of the conflict teachers feel with respect to issues related to body image.


Education Act, 1995, S.S., c. E-0.2 (Can. Sask.).


Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Thank the participant for volunteering her time. The interview will take between 60 and 90 mins.
Explain how confidentiality will be maintained.
Explain the purpose of the audio recorder.
Explain the purpose of obtaining informed consent.
Highlight the right to withdraw at any point, and that participants should only answer questions they are comfortable with.
Any questions before we begin?

Participant’s Name: ________________________  Assigned Pseudonym: ________________

Participant’s Age: __________

Participant’s school: ___ Elementary School  ___ High School  ___ Community School

Estimated School Enrollment: ______

Estimated Number of Teaching Staff: ______

Participant’s Years of Teaching Experience: ___________

Participant’s Years Teaching Health (or Wellness, or Life Transitions): ___________

Number of Educational Assistants present in the room during Health instructional time: ______

Role of those EAs (assigned to one or more students):

Participant’s First Teaching Area: _________________________

Participant’s Second Teaching Area: __________________________

*If neither are Health, ask how the teacher came to be teaching health.*

Participant’s Current Teaching Load:

________________________________________________________________________
Participant’s Average Class Size: ____________

Participant’s Health Classes: ____ Co-Ed    ____ Split by gender

1. Are there any other significant features about your classroom, or school, that you would like to share?
2. Can you tell me about a time that body image came up in your classroom [school]?
   a. How did you respond to that?
3. Tell me about the types of issues that come up in your classroom [school community] regarding body image.
   a. How do you handle that?
   b. What kind of messages do you think are being sent?
4. When I say body image, what comes to mind? [How do you define body image?]
5. How would you describe your own personal body image?
6. What has shaped your personal body image?
7. In what ways do you address body image in your classroom?
   a. How does your past experience as a student in a classroom impact the way you approach body image in your classroom?
   b. How has your own experience with body image changed over time?
8. Tell me about the curriculum and how it addresses body image.
   a. How do you use it?
   b. How does it inform your practice?
9. What role do you feel teachers currently play in addressing student body image in the classroom? In the school community?
10. Do you run into any challenges in addressing body image issues in the classroom? If so, what?
11. Is there anything that facilitates or allows you to better address body image in your classroom?
12. What universal structures exist that impact the ease with which teachers can impact student body image?
13. How do current expectations placed upon teachers shape the way in which you address body image in your classroom?
14. How does being a classroom teacher impact your awareness of body image (in general, or yours personally)?
15. How does a teacher's age or gender impact the way in which he or she can address body image in the classroom? In the school?
16. Are there any other significant features about your experience that you would like to share?

Conclude interview.
Explain to the participant the procedures used for verifying accuracy of transcripts and interpretation, as well as the distribution of final results of the study.
Reiterate confidentiality.
Ask participant if she has any questions.
Thank participant for volunteering her time.
Give the participant her gift card.

Jean Esson or Daniel Dumont (the STF counselors for these urban center teachers) can be reached by calling 1-800-665-5594. For those requiring it, provide them with a card containing this information.
Dear Sir or Madam:

My name is Toni Jestadt. I am currently enrolled in the Educational Psychology Master’s degree program at the University of Regina. Currently I am writing my thesis. I can be reached via email at toni.jestadt@gmail.com, or called via telephone at 551-6619. The supervisor of this research is Scott Thompson with the faculty of Education. He may be reached via telephone at 585-4678 or via email at santhony.thompson@uregina.ca.

The data collection for my thesis involves interviewing several middle years, female health teachers in the city of Regina. If you agree to participate in one of these interviews, the confidential treatment of the results is assured. Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project at any time, for any reason without explanation or penalty of any sort. Should you choose to withdraw, your data will be deleted from the research project and destroyed, at your request. It is important to note that certain disclosures such as child abuse, or the intent to harm yourself or others cannot be kept in confidence.

Through descriptive and exploratory research, I aim to understand how teachers define body image, and how they construct that understanding in their classrooms. In doing so, this will not only contribute to the current body of literature and provide direction for future research, but will inform teachers, program developers, and policy makers of the potential role that teachers may play as mitigating factors.

Participating in this interview will require approximately 90 to 120 minutes. Following the data collection, I will transcribe the audio recordings of the interviews verbatim. You will be asked to review the transcript for accuracy and will have the opportunity to add, alter, or delete information from the transcripts. The transcripts will then be analyzed using a thematic approach, by identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. You will also be asked to review this interpretation for accuracy. Transcripts and interpretations will be delivered electronically at the email address provided, unless other arrangements are made. A completed copy of the research results will also be delivered to each participant upon completion of the project. Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or your role.

The data from this research project will be published and presented; however, your identity will be kept confidential. Although direct quotations will be reported from the interview, you will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information will be removed from the report. Interviews will take place at a time and venue of your choosing, but must quiet, comfortable, and private, so as to protect confidentiality. Confidentiality
will be further ensured with the appropriate storage, use, and destruction of protocols, audio recordings and transcripts. All materials related to the study will be destroyed in a confidential and appropriate manner following a mandatory 5-year archiving period. A foreseen, yet unavoidable, issue with confidentiality is that it is possible that a coworker, former coworker, student, or former student, may make a connection to the participant based on knowledge of events shared.

Potential risks are psychological in nature due to the sensitive nature of the topic, but are minimal. These risks will be addressed with appropriate debriefing that will include an opportunity for you to ask questions, and also by providing you with appropriate resources and contact information for counseling or other services should you experience particular emotional discomfort.

In order to defray the costs of inconvenience and your time, each participant will be reimbursed in the form of a $20 gift card to a local business.

This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Regina Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee at 306-585-4775 or research.ethics@uregina.ca]. Out of town participants may call collect.

If you agree to assist me by taking part in this interview, please sign below. Your signature indicates that you understand what is being requested of you and that every effort will be made to ensure the confidentiality of all information you share.

________________________________________
Name of Participant     Signature of Participant     Date

Participant Email Address

A copy of this consent will be left with you and the researcher will take a copy.
Appendix C

Teacher Construction of Body Image in the Classroom

Recruitment Pamphlet

Toni Jestadt, of the faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Regina, and under the direction of Dr. Scott Thompson, is conducting a study to broaden understanding regarding teachers’ definitions of body image, and how they construct that understanding in their classrooms.

Volunteer research participants are needed to take part in a 60 to 90-minute interview. All interview responses will be kept confidential.

Each participant will be a middle years, grades 5 thru 9, female teacher in the city of Regina, will have at least 5 years of experience in the subject area of Health (which may include having instructed Life Transitions or Wellness), and will be currently teaching a Health class for grades 5 through 9.

As appreciation for your participation, you will be presented with a gift card to a local business. Your participation would contribute to the knowledge of the current and potential role of teachers as proponents of healthy body image, and would be greatly appreciated. Please feel free to pass this information along to any individuals you feel may be interested in taking part.

If you wish to participate or have any questions or concerns you may contact the researcher Toni Jestadt by email (toni.jestadt@gmail.com) or by telephone (551-6619). This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Regina Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee at 306-585-4775 or research.ethics@uregina.ca. Out of town participants may call collect.

Thank you,

Toni Jestadt

B.A. Psych., B.Ed., Graduate Student Educational Psychology

University of Regina
Regina, Saskatchewan
Canada, S4S 0A2
Appendix D

OFFICE OF RESEARCH SERVICES
MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 25, 2011

TO: Toni Jestadt
104 Champlain Drive
Regina, SK S4S 4Y9

FROM: Dr. David Senkow
Acting Chair, Research Ethics Board

Re: Teacher Construction of Body Image in the Classroom (File # 03S1112)

Please be advised that the University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed your proposal and found it to be:

☑ 1. APPROVED AS SUBMITTED. Only applicants with this designation have ethical approval to proceed with their research as described in their applications. For research lasting more than one year (Section 1F), ETHICAL APPROVAL MUST BE RENEWED BY SUBMITTING A BRIEF STATUS REPORT EVERY TWELVE MONTHS. Approval will be revoked unless a satisfactory status report is received. Any substantive changes in methodology or instrumentation must also be approved prior to their implementation.

☐ 2. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO MINOR CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB. **Do not submit a new application.** Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 3. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB. **Do not submit a new application.** Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 4. UNACCEPTABLE AS SUBMITTED. The proposal requires substantial additions or redesign. Please contact the Chair of the REB for advice on how the project proposal might be revised.

Dr. David Senkow, Acting Chair

cc: Dr. Scott Thompson – Faculty of Education

**supplementary memo should be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the Office of Research Services (Research and Innovation Centre, Room 109) or by e-mail to research.ethics@uregina.ca

Phone: (306) 585-4775
Fax: (306) 585-4693
www.uregina.ca/research