

## Introduction

Weight concerns and dissatisfactions with one's body size and physical appearance are prominent issues for today's adolescents. While in adolescence, both boys and girls have profound alterations in physical, psychological, emotional, and cognitive functioning and in social behavior (Lerner, 1987). The changes have been implicated as triggers for body image problems in both boys and girls, causing them to become preoccupied with and sensitive about their body size (shape) and physical appearance.

Modern consumer oriented cultures strongly express a drive for "the body beautiful", where an ever increasing value is placed on the possession of a healthy, slim body. As consequence of social pressure at a very early age has been the appearance of extreme concern regarding weight. Even before the onset of puberty, girls as young as 9-years-old express concern about being or becoming overweight (Thelen, Powell, Lawrence, & Kuhnert, 1992). Adolescent girls assimilate the current cultural standards of attractiveness and desire the prepubescent look (Phelps et al., 1993). Therefore, body figure (body image) is very important among teenagers in modern societies (Cuadrado, Carbajal, & Moreias, 2000).

Some literatures indicate that adolescent body image perception is affected by cultural ideals and values, present and prior experiences, self-comparison to others, expectations of society, and needs (Fowler, 1989; Wright & Whitehead, 1987). However, body image may be more a cultural reflection than a response to one's actual physical dimensions, an adolescent judged to be of normal weight may well hold a distorted body image (Guinn, Semper, Jorgensen, & Skaggs, 1997). Researchers have consistently shown



a high prevalence of dissatisfaction with body weight or shape among male and female adolescents (Desmond, Price, Gray, & O'Connell, 1986; Fabian & Thompson, 1989; Greenfield, Quinlan, Harding, Glass, & Bliss, 1987; Moore, 1988, 1990). Cultural ideals for female thinness and male muscularity appear to be well incorporated into adolescent mores (Attie, Brooks-Gunn, & Petersen, 1987; Paxton, Wertheim, Gibbons, & Szmukler, 1991; Phelps & Bajorek, 1991). Research indicates that young girls are more likely to report dissatisfaction with their weight than boys (Greenfield et al., 1987; Richards, Casper, & Larson, 1990). Concerns with weight and shape are also common among preadolescent girls (Casper & Offer, 1990; Chandarana, Helmes, & Benson, 1988; Crowther, Post, & Zaynor, 1985; Desmond et al., 1986; Moses, Baniliviy, & Lifshitz, 1989). Likewise, post adolescent research has suggested that females prefer a slim figure for themselves, whereas males personally favor a medium muscular physique for themselves (Collins & Plahn, 1988).

In contrast with current Western cultural values concerning body image, in the traditional Chinese concept of body image "fatness symbolizes prosperity and longevity: Chinese gods are always portrayed as fat" (Lee, 1999). Therefore, Chinese (including Taiwanese) have preferred fatness or plumpness. This concept of body image has recently been changing in response to media presentations of popular international culture. In the last two decades, there have been rapid changes in the economy of Taiwan accompanied by increasing exposure to the cultural values of other countries through the media and popular culture. This exposure, combined with an enhanced popularity of ethnic foods and increased awareness of obesity as a problem, may have served to promote and/or intensify a cultural preference