

BODY IMAGE IN ADOLESCENCE:

Through the Lenses of Culture, Gender, and
Positive Psychology

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Abstract

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Adolescents' body image (i.e., feelings and thoughts about their body and appearance) is central to their health and wellbeing. This thesis, which examined adolescents' body image, comprised two parts. The first part (including Studies I and II) examined adolescents' body image from a cultural perspective using questionnaires. **Study I** was a cross-cultural comparison of 874 Swedish and 358 Argentinean 13-year-old adolescents concerning their body image and body-changing behaviors. The results indicated that Swedish and Argentinean adolescents were similar in their levels of body-esteem, but that dieting and weight loss attempts were more prevalent among Argentinean adolescents, especially among girls. The findings indicate a need to further investigate Argentinean girls' dieting behavior and to determine whether the low rates of dieting among Swedish adolescents may be due to protective anti-dieting factors embedded in Swedish society. **Study II** focused on Swedish adolescents and examined the body image of 758 Swedish adolescent girls and boys aged 16 years. Specifically, Study II examined how a set of factors (i.e., BMI, body ideal internalization, pubertal timing, peers' appearance teasing, and weight loss attempts) was related to Swedish adolescents' body image. The results indicated that this set of factors predicted the adolescents' body image, in particular, girls' feelings about their weight. Body ideal internalization (i.e., the adoption of current body ideals as one's personal standard of beauty) was the strongest predictive factor. In addition, even in a society as gender egalitarian as that of Sweden, there were well-established gender differences in body image with girls being more dissatisfied than boys. These findings highlight the significance of gender in adolescents' body image and the importance of understanding the processes by which adolescents internalize media ideals.

The second part of this thesis explored adolescents' body image from a positive psychology perspective, focusing on adolescents' positive body image. Interviews were conducted with 30 Swedish 14-year-old adolescents with a positive body image recruited from a large longitudinal sample. **Study III** examined how adolescents with a positive body image reflected on their bodies, their views of exercise, and the influence of family and friends on their body image. The results revealed that the adolescents' positive body image was characterized by a functional and accepting view of the body. The vast majority of the adolescents were physically active and found exercise joyful and health-promoting. The results indicate the importance of encouraging adolescents to think of their bodies as functional, active, and useful rather than as passive, decorative objects. **Study IV** investigated how adolescents with a positive body image reflected on the subject of appearance ideals. The results indicated that the adolescents were very critical of current ideals, describing them as unnatural and unrealistic, and criticizing the media for only showing subjects consistent with these ideals and for having ulterior motives for doing so. Instead, the adolescents defined beauty widely and flexibly and stressed the importance of looking like "oneself." These findings support media literacy interventions and providing adolescents with alternative views of beauty.

To conclude, this thesis emphasizes the importance of encouraging adolescents to have functional and accepting views of their bodies, for example, through joyful exercise and media literacy. It is also suggested that the role of culture in weight loss behaviors and gender differences in body image should be further scrutinized.

Keywords: Body Image, Adolescence, Culture, Gender, Positive Psychology

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

This thesis consists of a summary and the following four papers, referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

- I. Holmqvist K., Lunde, C., & Frisén, A. (2007). Dieting behaviors, body shape perceptions, and body satisfaction: Cross-cultural differences in Argentinean and Swedish 13-year-olds. *Body Image, 4*, 191-200.
- II. Frisén, A., & Holmqvist, K. (2010). Biological, sociocultural, and behavioral factors associated with body dissatisfaction in Swedish 16-year-old boys and girls. *Sex Roles, 63*, 373-385.
- III. Frisén, A., & Holmqvist, K (2010). What characterizes early adolescents with a positive body image? A qualitative investigation of Swedish girls and boys. *Body Image, 7*, 205–212.
- IV. Holmqvist, K., & Frisén, A. (2012). "I bet they aren't that perfect in reality." Appearance ideals from the perspective of adolescents with a positive body image. *Body Image, 9*, 388-395.

SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING (Swedish summary)

Vi lever i ett samhälle som genomsyras av utseendekulturens budskap om hur man bör se ut. Under ungdomsåren blir det allt viktigare att passa in i samhällets utseendeideal och många ungdomar blir missnöjda med sin kropp. Det är till och med så att en majoritet av dagens ungdomar, framför allt flickor, är missnöjda med hur de ser ut och vill förändra sin kropp. Att ha en negativ kroppsuppfattning, det vill säga negativa tankar och känslor om den egna kroppen, har kopplats till lägre självkänsla samt lägre allmänt välbefinnande. På längre sikt kan en negativ kroppsuppfattning ha allvarliga konsekvenser för individen, såsom depression och ätstörningar. Studier av ungdomars kroppsuppfattning är därför av stor betydelse för att bättre förstå fenomenet kroppsuppfattning och i förlängningen kunna öka ungdomars hälsa och välbefinnande. Det övergripande syftet med denna avhandling är att undersöka ungdomars kroppsuppfattning. Framför allt är syftet att studera ungdomars kroppsuppfattning med synsätt som kultur, genus och positiv psykologi i åtanke.

I den första delen i denna avhandling ligger fokus på ungdomars kroppsuppfattning utifrån kulturell kontext. Den kulturella kontext som individen lever i är ett ramverk som har stort inflytande på individens kroppsuppfattning. Makrosociala faktorer såsom kulturella normer och värderingar kan på olika sätt påverka individens förhållningssätt till den egna kroppen. Trots detta är forskningen relativt kulturellt homogen, det vill säga den utförs mest i engelskspråkiga postindustriella samhällen. Samtidigt argumenterar forskare för att tvärkulturella studier är av största vikt om vi ska förstå fenomenet kroppsuppfattning och kulturens inverkan på densamma.

Studie I var en tvärkulturell kvantitativ jämförelse mellan ungdomar i två kulturella kontexter som inte har uppmärksammats mycket i tidigare forskning: den svenska och den argentinska. Syftet med Studie I var att jämföra svenska ($n = 874$) och argentinska ($n = 358$) ungdomar med avseende på kroppsuppfattning och kroppsförändrande beteenden. Det svenska samhället med fokus på jämställdhet och hälsosamt ätande är på många sätt annorlunda än det argentinska samhället som kännetecknas av en machokultur där extrem kvinnlig smalhet förespråkas. Trots kulturella skillnader fann vi att svenska och argentinska ungdomar upplevde förvånansvärt lika nivåer av kroppsmisnöje. De argentinska ungdomarna, framförallt flickorna, rapporterade dock att de bantade i mycket högre utsträckning än de svenska ungdomarna vilket kan bero

på en mer tillåtande attityd till bantning i det argentinska samhället. Den låga förekomsten av bantning bland de svenska ungdomarna kan samtidigt tolkas som att det svenska samhället innehåller skyddande faktorer mot ungdomars bantningsbeteende, till exempel att det funnits en kritisk debatt i svensk media om bantning. Alternativt är den tvärkulturella skillnaden i bantningsbeteende mellan argentinska och svenska flickor en fråga om olika tolkningar och betydelser av termen bantning som bör undersökas ytterligare.

Studie II koncentrerade sig enbart på den svenska kontexten och undersökte mer specifikt faktorer som var kopplade till svenska ungdomars kroppsuppfattning ($n = 758$). Urvalet av faktorer som undersöktes i relation till ungdomarnas kroppsuppfattning baserades på tidigare internationell forskning och innehöll faktorer av både fysisk, sociokulturell, och beteendemässig karaktär. Den specifika kombinationen av faktorer har enligt min vetskap inte testats förut; inte heller har man undersökt faktorernas koppling till *olika* dimensioner av kroppsuppfattning. De dimensioner av kroppsuppfattningen som undersöktes i Studie II var a) känslor kring vikt b) känslor kring utseende, och c) vad man tror att andra tycker om ens utseende. Resultaten visade att faktorerna tillsammans kunde förklara en signifikant del av ungdomarnas kroppsuppfattning, framför allt gällde detta flickornas kroppsuppfattning och den dimension av kroppsuppfattningen som handlar om känslor kring den egna kroppsvikten. Den faktor som var starkast relaterad till ungdomarnas kroppsuppfattning var en av de sociokulturella faktorerna, närmare bestämt internalisering av utseendeideal (som mäter till vilken grad man har gjort samhällets ideal till sitt eget). Ett annat fynd var att trots att det svenska samhället ofta uppfattas som mer jämställt än många andra, fann vi en könsskillnad som var i linje med internationella studier; svenska flickor upplevde mer kroppsmisnöje än svenska pojkar. Tillsammans talar dessa fynd för att svenska ungdomars kroppsuppfattning på många sätt liknar kroppsuppfattningen hos ungdomar i andra postindustriella samhällen. Fyndet visar också på behovet av att pojkars kroppsuppfattning och icke-viktrelaterad kroppsuppfattning studeras ytterligare.

I den andra och sista delen i denna avhandling är det återigen svenska ungdomar som är i fokus för studierna. Här var däremot inte avsikten att lyfta fram den kulturella kontexten utan istället att undersöka kroppsuppfattning utifrån de synsätt som finns inom den positiva psykologin. Flera forskare har kritiserat att kroppsuppfattningsforskningen i allmänhet har ett patologiskt, negativt fokus där forskningen koncentreras kring kroppsmisnöje och

ätstörningar. Detta har resulterat i att vi vet väldigt lite om positiv kroppsuppfattning. Enligt de tankegångar som finns inom positiva psykologin är det dock viktigt att man i prevention av negativ kroppsuppfattning också använder sig av kunskap om positiv kroppsuppfattning. Prevention som enbart baseras på kunskap om negativ kroppsuppfattning riskerar att inte nå hela vägen fram.

Inom ramen för den andra delen av avhandlingen utforskades därför ungdomars positiva kroppsuppfattning. Med hjälp av intervjuer med 30 stycken 14-åriga ungdomar med positiv kroppsuppfattning var syftet att ta reda på vad som kännetecknar positiv kroppsuppfattning. I **Studie III** studerades ungdomarnas tankar kring den egna kroppen, syn på träning, och inflytande från familj och vänner. En tematisk analys visade att ungdomarna hade en accepterande attityd gentemot den egna kroppen och dess möjliga brister. Framför allt betonade de ett funktionsperspektiv på kroppen där fokus låg på vad kroppen kunde *göra* snarare än hur den *såg ut*. Majoriteten av ungdomarna var regelbundet fysiskt aktiva och såg träning som roligt och hälsofrämjande. Några av ungdomarna hade fått negativa kommentarer om sitt utseende från familj och/eller vänner men lät inte detta påverka den egna kroppsuppfattningen negativt. Fynden betonar vikten av att uppmuntra ungdomar att tänka på sina kroppar som funktionella, aktiva, användbara och värdefulla. Att hjälpa ungdomar, framför allt flickor, att hitta en fysisk aktivitet som de tycker om och vill engagera sig i regelbundet kan vara ett steg i rätt riktning.

Studie IV baserades på samma intervjuer med 14-åriga ungdomar med positiv kroppsuppfattning men riktade in sig på ungdomarnas tankar kring ett specifikt ämnesområde: utseendeideal. Centrala frågor i Studie IV var därmed: Hur tänker ungdomar med positiv kroppsuppfattning om utseendeideal? Har ungdomar med positiv kroppsuppfattning sätt att tänka kring ideal som skyddar kroppsuppfattningen? Den tematiska analysen visade att ungdomarna var väldigt kritiska mot idealen och beskrev dem som onaturliga och orealistiska. Vidare framförde ungdomarna kritik mot media för att enbart visa personer i enlighet med idealet och för att ha underliggande intentioner bakom detta homogena urval (t.ex. att locka konsumenter till köp). Ungdomarnas egen definition av vad som var attraktivt var istället bred och flexibel där personlighet och att ”se ut som sig själv” var av större betydelse än att försöka efterlikna någon annan. Fynden ger stöd för prevention mot negativ kroppsuppfattning baserad på att lära ungdomar att blir mer medie- och informationskunniga när det gäller utseendeideal och även tillgodose ungdomar med alternativa ideal. Samtidigt är

det viktigt att prevention inte bara har individen som målgrupp utan även tillämpas på olika nivåer i samhället där utseendeideal skapas och förstärks.

Det är min förhoppning att framtida forskning fortsätter att studera ungdomars kroppsuppfattning med synsätt som kultur, genus och positiv psykologi i åtanke. Perspektiven är värdefulla för att förstå ungdomars kroppsuppfattning och hur man går tillväga för att uppmuntra ungdomar att uppskatta sin kropp, något som i förlängningen kan öka ungdomars hälsa och välbefinnande.

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Writing a thesis can resemble putting together a thousand-piece puzzle. It begins with an idea or an image of something, in the present case, the body image concept. As you may know, in the case of thousand-piece puzzles, the image is usually a rather uninspiring nature scene with mountains, water, and lots of blue sky. As you start putting the first few pieces together, there is curiosity, beginners' engagement, but also doubt: Will I ever finish this? As you continue putting the pieces together, getting a glimpse of the "whole picture," the puzzle assembly becomes increasingly stimulating, captivating, and, at times, almost addictive. Of course, problems are encountered along the way: interruptions, missing pieces, and times of hopelessness. More than anything, there are many, many pieces of blue sky—pieces that all seem superficially the same but are still different—that one must learn to distinguish. And then there are those few, essential pieces that change the whole image, which in a thesis might change just about everything you have learned up to a certain point. I am very grateful for those few pieces, and I am truly grateful for having puzzled through it all. Also, I am very grateful for the inspiration, help, and encouragement I have received throughout this journey. Certainly, it is no fun to put together a thousand-piece puzzle all on your own.

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INTRODUCTION

“Beauty is the promise of happiness.”

Edmund Burke 1727–1797

Beauty and physical attractiveness have always been highly valued human attributes, assumed to be connected with happiness, intelligence, and success (Rennels, 2012). Most of today’s postindustrial societies share this mindset, and the ongoing obsession with physical appearance might be more intense than ever. The “appearance culture” (Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, 2004), the ceaseless flow of messages regarding how we should and should not look, exerts constant pressure. That the body is “malleable,” is something that ought to be controlled and constantly improved, is evident in the abundance of opportunities to change the way we look through exercise, dieting, beauty treatments, liposuction, muscle-building supplements, anabolic androgenic steroids, plastic surgery, etc. The overall message is toxic, though clear: If you aren’t good-looking, you just haven’t tried hard enough. In this context, it is no wonder that having a negative body image (i.e., having negative thoughts and feelings about one’s body and appearance) is so common that it has been referred to as normative (Tantleff-Dunn, Barnes, & Larose, 2011).

Adolescents, who are at a stage in life in which their bodies, minds, and social lives are changing dramatically, are particularly vulnerable to the messages conveyed by appearance culture (Wertheim & Paxton, 2011). While young children may experience body image concerns (Smolak, 2011), these concerns become increasingly common in adolescence (Levine & Smolak, 2002; Lunde, Frisén, & Hwang, 2007). Previous research has shown that as many as 70% of adolescent girls and 50% of adolescent boys are dissatisfied with their bodies and want to change the way they look (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001a; Wertheim & Paxton, 2012).

The prevalence of adolescent experience of negative body image is indeed worrying. To be unable to reconcile with one’s body, to condemn it or to hate it, oppresses people in their everyday lives (Ghaderi & Parling, 2009). A negative body image is not only connected to low self-esteem (O’Dea, 2012) and decreased overall well-being (Meland, Haugland, & Breidablik, 2007), it is also related to serious long-term psychological consequences, such as depression

and eating disorders (Stice et al., 2000; Westerberg-Jacobson, Edlund, & Ghaderi, 2010). Given the significance of body image for adolescents' health and well-being, it is of utmost importance that the phenomenon be thoroughly investigated and well understood.

One of the key frameworks influencing adolescents' body image is the cultural context in which adolescents develop. However, most body image research has been restricted to adolescents in the postindustrial English-speaking world (Ricciardelli, 2012; Wertheim & Paxton, 2011). To extend our understanding of adolescents' body image as a cultural phenomenon, the first part of this thesis takes a cross-cultural approach to examining adolescents' body image. Specifically, it compares the body image of adolescents in two different cultural contexts, the Swedish and the Argentinean. Swedish culture, emphasizing gender equality, modesty, and healthy eating, is in many ways different from Argentinean culture, characterized by machismo, expressiveness, and a focus on female beauty and thinness. While both are valuable contexts for studying adolescents' body image, previous research has paid little attention to them and never before have they been compared. In addition to the cross-cultural comparison of Swedish and Argentinean adolescents, the first part of this thesis takes a particularly close look at the Swedish context, with a separate study examining a range of factors associated with Swedish girls' and boys' body image.

The second part of this thesis continues to examine Swedish adolescents' body image but does not primarily take a cultural approach, instead considering the concept of *positive* body image. The body image field has always been a pathology-driven area of research concentrating on negative body image and body image disorders, overlooking the concept of positive body image (Smolak & Cash, 2011; Tylka, 2012). It was long assumed that positive body image was simply the opposite of negative body image; however, more recent research suggests that positive body image is more complex than that (Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005; Wood-Barcalow, Tylka, & Augustus-Horvath, 2010). Hence, the second part of the present thesis comprises a qualitative effort to examine characteristics of adolescents' positive body image. Drawing on the ideas of positive psychology, it aims to identify strengths that may buffer against negative body image in order to guide future body image intervention and prevention.

The thesis begins by briefly describing the frameworks relevant to the two parts of the thesis, namely, the appearance culture, adolescent years, and

body image concept. Thereafter, I turn to the more specific topics treated in this thesis: factors related to adolescents' body image, adolescents' body image across cultures (paying special attention to Sweden and Argentina), and adolescents' positive body image. The following section presents the general aim of this thesis, a short summary of the four studies conducted within the frame of the thesis, and a general discussion of the findings. The four published papers are appended to the end of the thesis.

APPEARANCE CULTURE

Appearance culture is an essential framework for this thesis because it comprises a wide range of cultural messages and norms about the body that confront many adolescents growing up today. Appearance culture refers to the conception of a culture that values, reinforces, and models cultural ideas of beauty (Thompson et al., 1999). According to that definition, appearance culture is widespread across the globe, although pressures may be higher in postindustrial societies (Anderson-Fye, 2011). The assumption that “beauty is good” and, in contrast, “unattractiveness is bad,” permeates appearance culture and is conveyed even to young children through the media, peers, and family (Bazzini, Curtin, Joslin, Regan, & Martz, 2010; Clark & Tiggemann, 2006; Herbozo, Tantleff-Dunn, Gokee-Larose, & Thompson, 2004; Smolak, 2012). Research has shown that children as young as 3–6 years old tend to view attractive children as sociable, smart, and likeable, whereas unattractive children are assumed to be antisocial and aggressive (Dion, 1973). Over the course of their lives, people considered attractive are treated more favorably, have better chances of employment, and are perceived as healthier, smarter, happier, more successful, and socially competent, while people considered unattractive may be stigmatized and discriminated against (Rennels, 2012).

The body as a project

An essential characteristic of appearance culture is the idea of the body as something malleable that needs to be “worked on.” In many postindustrial societies, the body is increasingly viewed as a “project” that one ought to engage in, seeking control and constant improvement (Brumberg, 1998; Orbach, 2010). As such, the body is no longer seen as a functional tool to make things happen; instead, it is the body that is made. This view of the body is particularly emphasized among girls and women, who are socialized to keep their bodies at a certain size, to engage in a specific repertoire of “feminine” gestures, postures, and movements, and to display their bodies as an ornamented surface (Bartky,

1990; more about this on page 23). Indeed, gender differences are well-established in body image research, with girls and women generally experiencing more body image concerns than do boys and men (e.g., Buchanan, Bluestein, Nappa, Woods, & Depatie, 2013; Sweeting & West, 2002). Although appearance culture tends to concentrate more on the female body, societal focus on male appearance has intensified (Murnen & Don, 2012; Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005). As a consequence, boys and men, too, may increasingly come to view their bodies as projects.

The tyranny of slenderness

Another important characteristic of appearance culture that is particularly pressing for girls and women is the “tyranny of slenderness” (Bartky, 1990). Indeed, physical attractiveness and slenderness are seen as almost synonymous concepts in appearance culture, with slenderness assumed to be associated with discipline and control. Overweight, on the other hand, is seen as a sign of self-indulgence, laziness, lack of control, incompetence, and lack of will to engage in one’s body (Puhl & Peterson, 2012). Overweight people are discriminated against in various areas, including the school and work environments as well as in the search for a domestic partner (Puhl & Peterson, 2012). Correspondingly, many adolescent girls believe that being thinner is important and would make them happier, healthier, better-looking, or more successful with boys (Wertheim & Paxton, 2012). A recent longitudinal study of Swedish girls between the ages of 7 and 18 years showed that the wish to be thinner increased with age (Westerberg-Jacobson, Ghaderi, & Edlund, 2012). Among the girls’ most frequent self-described motives for wishing to be thinner were “to feel better about myself” or “to correspond to societal ideals.”

While stigma associated with overweight is pervasive, it is thought to be more prominent in cultures with individualistic values (Crandall et al., 2001). Individualistic cultures tend more often to hold individuals responsible for their own actions, and being overweight may be seen as the individual’s own failure to comply with current beauty standards. However, in collectivistic cultures such as that of rural Fiji, Becker (2005) found that family and loved ones may share the responsibility for their bodies, and attend to and nurture their bodies together to keep them strong and healthy. In addition, a person’s weight loss was

considered a sign of illness in rural Fiji, suggesting that the fear of overweight is not universal (similar interpretations of weight loss have been found in societies where food may be scarce; Anderson-Fye, 2011). However, in many societies across the globe, the “tyranny of slenderness” is ubiquitous and comprises a key component of appearance culture.

Gender–stereotypical body ideals

A third and final noteworthy characteristic of appearance culture involves the more specific physical characteristics of the ideals promoted. Overall, these characteristics tend to be gender-stereotypical, accentuating the body aspects considered typical of the two genders. Women are stereotypically portrayed with long hair, long eyelashes, a thin waist, rounded buttocks, and long legs (Murnen, 2011). In addition, appearing sexy—which entails shaving one’s legs, armpits, and genital areas—is an increasingly common ideal among young women (Murnen, 2011). Young men, on the other hand, are often portrayed as tall, lean, and muscular, with the stereotypical masculine mesomorphic body build characterized by broad shoulders and a slim waist (the so-called “v-shape”) including a “six pack” of abdominal muscles (Fawkner, 2012). Portrayals of such bodies are abundantly displayed to everyone, not least to adolescents, through television, Internet websites, magazines, video games, clothes stores, and in everyday conversations with family and peers (Tiggemann, 2011). As an example, a glimpse at the website of *Frida* (www.frida.se), a popular Swedish teen girls’ magazine, reveals that attractive celebrity girls are often featured on the cover of the magazine and articles treat topics such as “how to get the perfect skin complexion” or “how to get the looks of a model.” To my knowledge, there are no similar magazines targeting boys, but if we look into the world of video games in which 64% of Swedish adolescent boys are involved (Medierådet, 2010), the game characters are often exceedingly muscular (Barlett & Harris, 2008). A study of Australian adolescents correspondingly found that girls typically perceive media pressures to be about losing weight, whereas boys typically perceive them to be about increasing muscle tone (McCabe, Ricciardelli, & Finemore, 2002).

In sum, these characteristics (i.e., the body as a project, the tyranny of slenderness, and gender-stereotypical ideals) are some of the features of

appearance culture that shapes the body perceptions available to many of today's adolescents. These are the perceptions that they have close at hand when they enter a life stage in which their bodies, minds, and social lives are changing dramatically.

ADOLESCENCE

Because this thesis focuses on the adolescent years, I will briefly consider what characterizes this stage of life. The word adolescence comes from the Latin *adolescere*, which means “to grow into adulthood” (Lerner & Steinberg, 2009). Different researchers have defined the age range of adolescence differently. While some researchers define adolescence as synonymous with the teenage years, that is, the period between the ages of 13 and 19 years (e.g., Moshman, 2012; Nielsen, 1996), others suggest that adolescence has lengthened in the twentieth century. Due to earlier physical maturation and delayed entrance into work and marriage, some researchers claim that adolescence now extends from the ages of 10 to 20 years (Steinberg, 2011) or from 11 to 20 years (Berk, 2004). Steinberg (2011) also divides adolescence into early adolescence (ages of 10–13 years), middle adolescence (ages 14–17), and late adolescence (ages 18–21). The present thesis has as its focal point adolescents aged 13–16 years.

The transition between childhood and adulthood is often described as a time of turbulence and stress for young people. In the popular media, adolescents are frequently depicted stereotypically as tormented souls, subject to hormonal storms, who rebel against their parents, engage in dangerous risk-taking behavior, and fall in and out of love. However, most research suggests that this “storm and stress” view of adolescence is exaggerated (Conger & Galambos, 1997). Nevertheless, adolescence is a dynamic stage in life characterized by many fundamental changes—biological, psychological, and social. It is noteworthy that, although every adolescent goes through these fundamental changes, the interpretation and impact of these changes are very much dependent on the context in which the adolescent develops (Steinberg, 2011).

Biological changes

The biological changes that occur during adolescence involve the bodily changes associated with puberty. These changes consist of dramatic inner and outer transformations of the adolescent body, including developmental changes

in physical appearance and the development of the ability to conceive children (Feldman, 2006). Physical changes comprise body growth, growth of pubic and underarm hair, and increased acne. Boys experience the growth of the testes, penis, and facial hair and the deepening of the voice, whereas girls grow breasts and have their first menstruation (menarche). Perhaps one of the most visible biological changes is the height spurt and the rapid increase in bodyweight resulting from an increase in both muscle and fat (Berk, 2004). Girls, however, gain more fat tissue than do boys, and at a faster rate (Steinberg, 1999). Consequently, girls finish puberty with a muscle-to-fat ratio of about 5 to 4 and boys with a ratio of approximately 3 to 1 (Steinberg, 2011). Puberty also affects body shape, with boys' shoulders widening relative to the hips and girls' hips widening relative to the shoulders and waist (Berk, 2004). In concrete terms, these developmental changes imply that girls, as they go through puberty, move further away from the thin female body ideal, whereas boys move closer to the male muscular v-shaped ideal (McCabe et al., 2002). Girls, in particular, may interpret pubertal changes as "getting fat" or "losing control" rather than turning into a woman (Wertheim & Paxton, 2012).

Pubertal timing

The onset of puberty varies widely between individuals and by gender. Girls' puberty generally begins some time between the ages of 7 and 13 years, and boys' puberty about two years later, between the ages of 9½ and 13½ years (Steinberg, 2011). The speed of puberty may also differ greatly, with girls completing their puberty in 1–6 years, and boys in 2–5 years (Tanner, 1972). In other words, it is possible for an early-maturing, fast-maturing adolescent to complete puberty many years before a late-maturing, slow-maturing adolescent has completed puberty.

While the onset of puberty is triggered by changes in hormonal levels, the factors underlying these changes are not completely clear. Both intrinsic (i.e., genetic) and external (i.e., environmental and cultural) signals may play a role (Feldman, 2006; Ge, Natsuaki, Neiderhiser, & Reiss, 2007). Evidence for the environmental influence on girls' pubertal timing is supplied by research showing that family and social factors such as parental health, marital tension, and the presence of a stepfather may affect girls' age of menarche (Ellis & Garber, 2000; Saxbe & Repetti, 2009). On a cultural level, the mean age of menarche is later in developing countries than in economically advantaged countries, probably because girls in economically advantaged countries are

better nourished and healthier (Feldman, 2006). Perhaps the most conspicuous evidence for environmental influence on girls' pubertal timing comes from *the secular trend* observed since the 1860s whereby the mean age of menarche in postindustrial countries has declined by three years from 15–16 years to 12–13 years (Conger & Galambos, 1997). At the millennium shift, Swedish girls on average reached menarche at 12.7 years (Liu, Wikland, & Karlberg, 2000).

A large body of research has investigated the psychological effects of pubertal timing, that is, of being early-maturing or late-maturing in relation to one's peers. Early maturation has been shown to have adverse psychological effects on girls and boys. Among boys, early maturation has been associated with greater popularity, higher self-esteem, and more self-confidence, but also with more problematic behavior such as delinquency, problems at school, and substance abuse (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Steinberg, 2011). For girls, early maturation has been associated with mostly negative features such as delinquency and substance abuse as well as anxiety and depression (Alsaker, 1995; Kaltiala-Heino, Kosunen, & Rimpelä, 2003). However, these findings may differ across cultures: Skoog, Stattin, Ruiselova, and Özdemir (2013) found a strong relationship between girls' early maturation and problem behavior in Sweden, but no such relationship in Slovakia. Culture seems to mediate some of the effects of girls' early maturation. It has been suggested that the negative effects may be more prominent in countries with high tolerance for adolescent heterosexual involvement (Skoog et al., 2013).

Psychological changes

Psychological changes during adolescence involve adolescents' cognition, i.e., ways of thinking, which becomes more advanced and more similar to an adult's. Whereas young children's thinking is mostly oriented to the here and now, adolescents' thinking may concern past and future events as well as hypothetical situations or abstract concepts (Steinberg, 2011). Cognitive changes also involve metacognition, i.e., the ability to think about one's own thinking, and a well-developed theory of mind, i.e., the ability to think about other people's perspectives (Moshman, 2012). The capacity to set personal goals as well as interest in moral reasoning and the meaning of life are aspects of cognitive development that evolve starting in mid-adolescence (Sawyer et al., 2012). The

rapid intellectual advances and the ability to introspect may lead to extreme self-absorption, something that has been referred to as *adolescent egocentrism* (Schwartz, Maynard, & Uzelac, 2008). Adolescent egocentrism is characterized by a heightened self-consciousness and displays two distinct but related thinking patterns, “the imaginary audience” and “the personal fable.” The imaginary audience refers to adolescents’ tendency to think that one is always being seen and judged by others. For example, an adolescent may be worried about going to school with a blemish on his face because “everybody will notice.” The personal fable refers to the belief that the self is unique and invulnerable (Vartanian, 2000). Indeed, adolescent egocentrism turns attention to the physical self, encouraging scrutiny of one’s own body and appearance. The following quotation from a Swedish girl, published on an adolescent website, demonstrates how egocentrism and body image may be closely related: “I don’t understand why EVERYBODY stares at me when I’m downtown or at school. I don’t think I look that bad, but I feel fat and ugly anyway” (UMO, 2013, June 25).

Social changes

Finally, adolescence entails important changes in individual social position and status. Increased freedom, independence, and responsibility are important aspects of adolescents’ new social roles as they distance themselves from their parents and spend more time with peers (Sawyer et al., 2012). Indeed, it is during adolescence that young people can truly be said to live in a separate social world of their peers (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). In addition to the increased amount of time spent with peers, adolescent peer groups often function without the supervision of adults, involve more activities with the opposite sex, and turn into larger peer groups that are like “mini-cultures” (Steinberg, 2011). Through the formation of close friendships, peers may help each other cope with the universal, everyday problems and pressures of becoming adults. Along with the acquisition of new social roles, many adolescents also struggle with their sense of identity and worry about being “normal” in relation to their peers (Sawyer et al., 2012). Being accepted by peers is one of the most central concerns during adolescence (Bukowski, 2003).

Unfortunately, peer teasing and bullying are relatively common adolescent experiences. About 16% of Swedish 13-year-olds report being

bullied by their peers (Frisén & Holmqvist, 2010). Rates tend to be even higher internationally, with on average 32% of 13–15-year-olds around the globe being bullied (Due & Holstein, 2008). Being bullied has major negative implications for adolescents' health, both in their present life and later in life (Frisén & Bjarnelind, 2010; Olweus, 1992; Rigby, 2003). Peer group processes are important in maintaining bullying, which is reflected in the fact that previous bullying victims report that the victimization often stopped after school transitions when peer groups naturally changed (Frisén, Hasselblad, & Holmqvist, 2012). With the recent explosion of Internet use among adolescents, bullying has now spread to social media, with many adolescents, particularly 14–16-year-olds, reporting being cyberbullied (Tokunaga, 2010). Common to all forms of victimization (i.e., traditional bullying, cyberbullying, and peer teasing) is that they frequently concern the victim's appearance, bodyweight, body shape, or facial features (Cash, 1995; Frisén, Berne, & Lunde, in press).

In sum, as children become adolescents, peers become increasingly influential social agents in shaping adolescents' thoughts about their bodies. In combination with other social changes during adolescence, and with the biological and psychological changes previously described, adolescents are faced with the tasks of coming to terms with their “new” bodies, minds, and social lives and developing a healthy and positive view of their bodies.

BODY IMAGE

One of the pioneers of body image research, Paul Schilder (1950), defined body image as “the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say, the way in which the body appears to ourselves” (p. 11). This definition was later criticized for being too simple, and researchers have argued that the body image construct is more multifaceted than can be distinguished in this early definition (Pruzinsky & Cash, 2002). Today, one common way of thinking about body image is to divide it into two components: one perceptual, which refers to estimation of one’s size and appearance, and another attitudinal, which relates to feelings and attitudes toward one’s body (Gardner, 2011). Both of these components are included in Grogan’s (1999) definition, referring to body image as “a person’s perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about his or her body” (p. 1).

A person’s body image may be positive or negative, or anywhere in between. Body image may change depending on contextual cues and over the course of life, though it seems to be fairly stable during adolescent and adult life (Tiggemann, 2004; Wertheim & Paxton, 2012). Body image concerns may be manifested in many ways, ranging from a mild preference for other body characteristics, to pathological body image disturbances such as eating disorders or muscle dysmorphia (a pathological preoccupation with muscularity; Pope et al., 2005). In addition, body image concerns can be about the appearance of the total body (e.g., shape, muscularity, weight, or size) or, alternatively, about specific characteristics or parts of the body (e.g., facial characteristics, hair, body parts, fitness, and strength; Wertheim & Paxton, 2012).

One common way to measure a person’s body image is to measure his or her level of *body-esteem*, which can be understood as self-esteem related to the body. Mendelson, Mendelson, and White (2001) have suggested that a person’s body-esteem comprises three domains: feelings about weight (Weight), feelings about appearance (Appearance), and beliefs about how others view one’s body and appearance (Attribution). The idea is that individuals may be placed somewhere on the continuum between low body-esteem (or body dissatisfaction) and high body-esteem (or body satisfaction) on the three dimensions of body-esteem. In the studies conducted within the frame of this thesis, we used the concept of body-esteem as a measure of adolescents’ body

image (for a methodological discussion of different body image measures, see page 70).

While a person with high body-esteem can be considered to have a positive body image, there are reasons to believe that the concept of body-esteem may not capture the entire essence of positive body image. Though it is clearly the negative component of body image that is usually the focus of attention in body image research (Tylka, 2011), positive body image research has taken some initial steps. With the growth of this area of research, the concept of *body appreciation* has been introduced, a term including the appreciation, acceptance, respect, and protection of one's body (Avalos et al., 2005). As will be discussed in the section about adolescents' positive body image (see page 38), there may be positive body image characteristics that include aspects other than bodyweight and appearance as defined in the body-esteem concept.

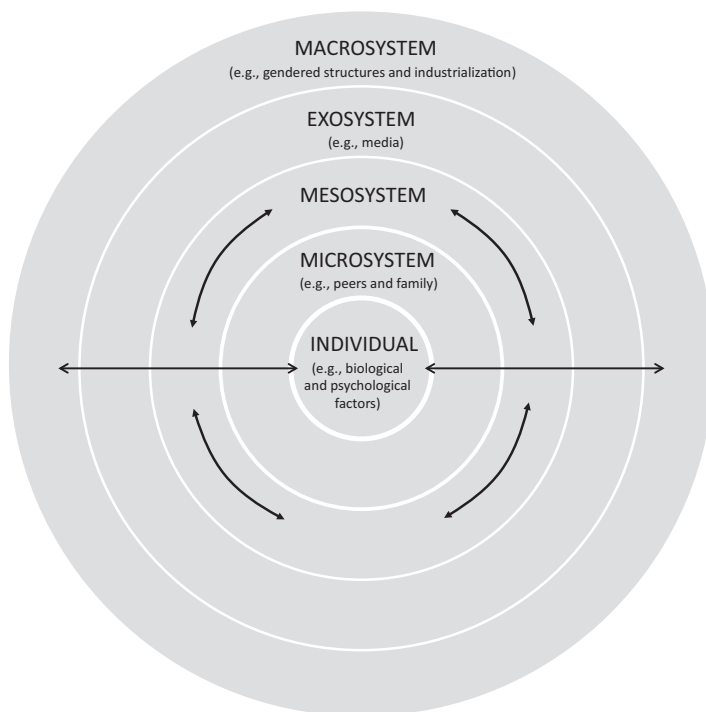
Experiences of the body can also go beyond the concept of body image. Piran and Teall (2012) suggest that, while body image entails evaluating oneself from the outside, the term *embodiment* reflects an "inside out" view of the body. Embodiment may include both negative body experiences, such as negative body image (Blood, 2006) or alexithymia (Taylor, Bagby, & Parker, 1991), and positive body experiences such as joy, self-care, attunement with the body, and functionality (Piran et al., 2002). Importantly, embodiment refers to the "experience of engagement of the body with the world" (Allan, 2005, p. 177, cited in Piran & Teall, 2012), emphasizing the connection between the embodied experiences and social contexts and structures (Piran & Teall, 2012). The developmental theory of embodiment (Piran & Teall, 2012) suggests that a range of social experiences shapes an individual's body experiences, including physical experiences, experiences of being exposed to social stereotypes, and experiences of social power structures (e.g., class and gender).

The variety of terminologies associated with the body image concept does mirror some of its complexity. However, to further address this complexity, I will now turn to the wide range of factors associated with adolescents' body image.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH ADOLESCENTS' BODY IMAGE

In attempting to better understand adolescents' body image, a great deal of research concerns identifying the factors associated with adolescents' body image development. An array of factors has been suggested, including factors related directly to the individual, factors related to the individual's close and distant environment, as well as factors related to the cultural context in which the individual lives. In an attempt to organize this array, I will use the bioecological theory of human development of Bronfenbrenner (1977; see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The layers of systems in the bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Examples of factors within layers have been adjusted to the interpretation of the model in relation to body image development.



The model suggests that human development is the result of interaction between people and their environments. Specifically, it proposes that various layers of systems influence people's development. The influence between layers is bidirectional, that is, the influence can run both toward and away from the individual. While the bioecological theory of human development is a well-known theory of human development, it has to my knowledge not previously been used to describe the factors associated with body image.

I will now briefly describe the different layers of systems comprising Bronfenbrenner's model, before providing a more in-depth description of each system and its factors associated with adolescents' body image.

At the center of the model is *the individual*. This part takes into account the individual's age, sex, and other biological or psychological characteristics. In relation to the development of body image, relevant biological factors may include an individual's body composition or pubertal timing. In addition, psychological factors may involve the individual's interpretation of appearance-related information from outside system layers of the model. The *microsystem* is the layer nearest the individual, comprising the immediate context, for example, peers, family, and school. As concerns the influence on adolescents' body image, the most frequently examined factors within the microsystem are peers and family, which will be discussed on page 20. The *mesosystem* connects the structures of the individual's microsystem, describing how, for instance, the influence of peers and family may interact. The next layer, the *exosystem*, defines the larger social system in which the individual does not directly function but that still influences the individual's development (e.g., the media and social services). For body image development, the influence of the media and their conveyance of appearance ideals is an essential agent of the exosystem. Finally, the *macrosystem* involves attitudes and ideologies of the culture in which the individual is a member. Here, I will focus on the macrostructural factors relevant to this thesis: gendered structures and the process of industrialization (for a description of other macrostructural factors, see Anderson-Fye, 2011).

Criticizing his own theory, Bronfenbrenner (1989) later claimed that his first theory may have focused too much on context and discounted the role the person plays in his or her own development. As he reviewed the theory, he paid greater attention to aspects of personal experience, skills, intelligence, and resources. He also suggested that developmental processes are likely to vary depending on the consistency of interacting events and according to the specific

historical events occurring when the developing individuals are at one age or another (the Process-Person-Context-Time Model; Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Because of the integration between various sources of influence on human development, one may also question whether such influence can be strictly categorized into the layers of systems described in Bronfenbrenner's original model (1977); however, the original model provides a valuable pedagogical frame for describing this influence, for instance, here in relation to adolescents' body image.

Below I will describe the factors associated with adolescents' body image in greater detail, organized by the different layers of systems comprising Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development (1977).

The individual: biological factors

Body composition

Corresponding to the previously described ongoing "tyranny of slenderness" prevalent in many of today's societies, there is a well-established connection between adolescents' body composition and their body-esteem. Body composition is often measured by the body mass index (BMI), calculated using the formula: weight (in kilos)/height² (in meters). Findings show that adolescents generally experience lower body-esteem the higher their BMI, a relationship found in many postindustrial countries, for example, Australia (Clark & Tiggemann, 2008; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001b), Norway (Holsen, Jones, & Birkeland, 2012), Spain (Bully & Elosua, 2011), Sweden (Lunde, Frisén, & Hwang, 2007), and the USA (Barker & Galambos, 2003; Hausenblas, Downs, Fleming, & Connaughton, 2002; Carlson Jones, 2004). However, in some non-Western countries, studies find no relationship between body-esteem and BMI, for example, in Korea (Lee, Sohn, Lee, & Lee, 2004) and Gambia (Siervo, Grey, Nyan, & Prentice, 2006).

In countries where body-esteem and BMI are related, it has been suggested that the character of this relationship may be gendered. Specifically, it has been proposed that the relationship for girls is linear (that is, girls experience lower body-esteem the heavier they are) but that the relationship for boys may be curvilinear (Kostanski, Fisher, & Gullone, 2004; Presnell, Bearman, & Stice,

2004). A curvilinear relationship indicates that boys are more likely to experience low body-esteem when they are either underweight or overweight.

Due to the stigma related to overweight, overweight adolescents are not only more likely to have a negative body image, they are also more likely to be teased and bullied by their peers (Frisén, Lunde, & Hwang, 2009; Lunde, Frisén, & Hwang, 2007). These findings show that BMI may combine with factors pertaining to the individual's microsystem (e.g., peers and family) in its association with adolescents' body image.

Pubertal timing

Puberty, not least its timing, has a major impact on adolescents' body image. In line with the previous argument claiming that girls move further away from the thin female body ideal as they go through puberty, several studies have shown that early-maturing girls tend to be at higher risk of developing low body-esteem (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004; Rauste-von Wright, 1989; Striegel-Moore et al., 2001). However, Striegel-Moore et al. (2001) suggested that pubertal timing per se has no effect on girls' body-esteem, but that this effect is due to the impact of early and late maturation on BMI.

Among boys, the relationship between pubertal timing and body image seems to be reversed in comparison with girls: in line with the previous argument claiming that puberty moves boys closer to the muscular v-shaped male body ideal, most findings suggest that early-maturing boys are more satisfied with their bodies (e.g., McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004). Boys who mature early not only move closer to the male body ideal, but they may also obtain increased social status in their peer group and be perceived as more grown-up and competent by peers and adults.

The individual: psychological factors

When interpreting Bronfenbrenner's model in relation to body image, the "individual" at the center of the model also includes psychological factors associated with adolescents' body image. As will be discussed in upcoming sections about the micro- and exosystems, peers, family, and the media are important agents influencing adolescents' body image. However, adolescents are not just "receivers" of societal messages, as they play an active role in

psychologically interpreting them. As proposed by Keery, van den Berg, and Thompson (2004), body image concerns tend to depend on the individual's degree of "body ideal internalization" and tendency to engage in "social comparisons" with peers and media images.

Body ideal internalization

Body ideal internalization refers to the process of incorporating current ideals into one's personal beliefs about what is physically attractive (Jones, 2004). For adolescent girls, body ideal internalization involves internalizing the thin female body ideal; for adolescent boys, body ideal internalization involves internalizing the lean and muscular male body ideal. Numerous studies have shown a positive link between body ideal internalization and body image concerns among adolescents (e.g., Cafri, Yamamiya, Brannick, & Thompson, 2005; Keery et al., 2004; Lawler & Nixon, 2011; Shroff & Thompson, 2006). While both girls and boys may internalize their respective body ideals and develop body image concerns, girls tend to respond with greater intensity to the ideals (Knauss, Paxton, & Alsaker, 2007).

Social comparison

Adolescents compare themselves with others to understand how and where they fit into the world (Festinger, 1954). Among the social comparisons they make are appearance comparisons (regarding, e.g., weight, shape, and facial features), a process in which girls engage more than boys (Jones, 2001). Targets of appearance comparisons may be same-sex peers, celebrities, athletes, or models (Jones, 2001). Appearance comparisons tend to be "upward" (i.e., comparing oneself to someone better off on the dimension of interest; Wheeler & Miyake, 1992), resulting in feelings of dissatisfaction. Several studies have linked appearance comparisons to adolescents' body image concerns (Jones, 2001; Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison, 2004; Stormer & Thompson, 1996), though the relationship is not completely clear among boys (Carlson Jones, 2004; Ricciardelli, McCabe, & Banfield, 2000).

Other psychological factors associated with adolescents' body image concerns, in particular among girls, are low self-esteem and high perfectionism (Wertheim & Paxton, 2012). Apart from these factors, some specific behaviors have been associated with adolescents' body image, namely, engagement in dieting and

exercise. Low body-esteem has repeatedly been linked to dieting behavior (Canpolat, Orsel, Akdemir, & Ozbay, 2005; Friestad & Rise, 2004; Neumark-Szteiner, Paxton, Hannan, Haines, & Story, 2006). However, the association between body-esteem and exercise seems to be more complex, depending, for example, on the motives for exercising, exercising for appearance reasons tending to be related to lower body-esteem (Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008; Tiggemann & Williamson, 2000).

The microsystem

As mentioned, the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) is the layer nearest the individual, comprising the individual's immediate surroundings, for example, the contexts of peers, family, and school. As concerns the influence on adolescents' body image development, the most frequently examined factors are peers and family, which will be discussed further below.

Peers

Through the many changes of peer groups during adolescence reviewed above, peers become important social agents influencing adolescents' body image. Peer appearance conversations form an everyday context for discussing, constructing, and interpreting information relevant to appearance (Jones & Crawford, 2006). Friendship groups often share similar attitudes toward the importance of appearance and similar experiences in body-changing strategies, such as dieting, disordered eating, and muscle building (Jones, 2011). For girls, so-called "fat talk" (e.g., "I am so fat") has become a normative way of repeatedly criticizing one's body size in the presence of peers (Jones, 2011; Nichter, 2000). Although the idea behind such talk may be to obtain reassuring comments from peers (e.g., "No, you're not"), it potentially normalizes a negative perception of one's body.

Comments from peers are unfortunately not always as reassuring as in the above example. Being teased by peers is a relatively common experience for many adolescents, and teasing often involves aspects related to bodyweight, body shape, and facial features (Cash, 1995). Similarly, in the case of bullying, Frisén, Holmqvist, and Oscarsson (2008) found that when 13-year-olds were

asked why they thought that some children or adolescents were bullied, the most frequent response (39%) was because of their appearance (e.g., being ugly, fat, small, wearing braces, or looking different). Both bullying and experiences of *peer appearance teasing* have been associated with lower body-esteem among adolescents (Barker & Galambos, 2003; Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, Haines, & Wall, 2006; Hayden-Wade et al., 2005; Lunde et al., 2007).

Family

Another important factor of the microsystem influencing adolescents' body image is family. Although peers play an increasingly important role in adolescents' lives as they become more independent, there is no doubt that parents too influence the body image of their children by the things they say and do (Tiggemann, 2011). Neumark-Szteiner et al. (2010) found that 45% of mid-adolescent girls reported that their mothers encouraged them to diet and 58% reported weight teasing by family members. Parental teasing and parental encouragement to diet have been associated with lower body-esteem and weight-loss attempts among both girls and boys (Keel, Heatherton, Harnden, & Hornig, 1997; Ricciardelli et al., 2000; Vincent & McCabe, 2000; Wertheim, Martin, Prior, Sanson, & Smart, 2002). Similarly, both boys and girls whose mothers engage in dieting are more likely to want to become thinner (Strong & Huon, 1998; Wertheim et al., 2002) and to attempt to lose weight (Keery, Eisenberg, Boutelle, Nuemark-Sztainer, & Story, 2006). Parents' comments on their children's appearance and their own body-related behaviors are powerful factors shaping their children's body image and behaviors.

The mesosystem

The mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) comprises the connections and relationships between the structures of the individual's microsystem. Peers and family simultaneously influence a person's body image, and appearance messages coming from these two sources may be both similar and different in character. If both peers and family (and perhaps the school environment) are putting pressure on the individual to conform to societal appearance ideals, he or she may be more likely to invest energy in doing so, and body image concerns are more likely to arise. However, if at least one of the components of the

microsystem is providing the individual with messages that promote a positive body image (e.g., a family environment critical of societal appearance ideals and supportive of the individual), the individual is more likely to develop a positive body image. However, these assumptions need to be examined further, since how peer and family influences are interrelated has not been investigated. It has been suggested, though, that peer and media influences are more important than parental influences in shaping adolescents' body image (Shroff & Thompson, 2006).

The exosystem

The exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) defines the larger social system in which the individual does not directly function but that still influences the individual's development (e.g., the media and social services). For body image development, media influence and the conveyance of appearance ideals are essential agents of the exosystem.

The Media

Media images unquestionably have a major impact on adolescents' perceptions of their bodies. Experimental and prospective studies have found increased body dissatisfaction (and diminished self-esteem) among girls and young women following exposure to photographs, magazines, and television commercials featuring women embodying the thin ideal (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004; Heinberg & Thompson, 1995). Similar studies of boys and young men exposed to images of muscular, attractive men have found smaller effects (Blond, 2008), but males are doubtless also affected by such images. Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, and Stein (1994) contend that the mass media are probably the strongest conveyer of appearance culture (including the tyranny of slenderness, the body as a project, and gender-stereotypical appearance ideals, as specified earlier). However, as mentioned above, adolescents may differ in their interpretations of the messages to which they are exposed, depending on their degree of body ideal internalization and tendency to make social comparisons.

The macrosystem

Finally, the *macrosystem* (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) involves attitudes and ideologies of the culture of which the individual is a member. Here, I will focus on the macrostructural factors relevant to this thesis: gendered structures and the process of industrialization.

Gendered structures

To this point, I have repeatedly mentioned the importance of gender for adolescents' body image. Indeed, gender is one of the core concepts in adolescents' body image, influencing many of the factors described above. On the macrostructural level, gendered structures, such as gender role norms and gendered power structures, have consequences for girls' and boys' ways of relating to their bodies. Children experience norms that define "masculinity" and "femininity" from an early age. Boys are told not to cry, not to fear, and instead to be assertive, active, and strong; girls, on the other hand, are asked not to be demanding, but to be forgiving, compliant, and "lady-like" (Unicef, 2007). Correspondingly, the male gender role is traditionally associated with activities requiring power and physical strength, whereas the female gender role is associated with caretaking, domestic chores, and beauty practices (Murnen & Don, 2012). In relation to this, the "heterosexual script," portraying males as active and dominant and females as passive and docile, emphasizes the male preoccupation with physical strength and the female preoccupation with physical beauty (Kim et al., 2007). Indeed, gender-specific body preoccupations are already evident in preschool, when girls are more likely to worry about their "fat tummy" and boys about their muscularity (Smolak, 2011).

Gendered structures not only contribute to gender differences in the *nature* of body image concerns experienced by males and females, they also explain why girls and women are more susceptible to body image concerns than are boys and men. Bartky (1990) suggests that women engage in a range of disciplinary practices to be considered "feminine." As mentioned earlier, such disciplinary practices may involve keeping their bodies at a certain size (i.e., being slender), engaging in a specific repertoire of "feminine" gestures, postures, and movements (e.g., acting sexy), and displaying their bodies as an ornamented surface (e.g., having soft skin and plucked eyebrows; Bartky, 1990). For adolescent girls, who are actively trying to determine what it means to be women, these are perceptions of femininity that they will learn to associate with

female status and success, and that they will try to emulate (Smolak & Murnen, 2011). In this way, cultural ideas about femininity on a macrosystematic level may influence girls in particular to engage in shaping their bodies and appearance.

In addition, reflecting gendered power structures on a macrosystemic level, there is in many of today's societies a pervasive view of the female body as passive, objectified, and sexualized. This view is promoted by various sources, including the media and the clothing industry, as well as in girls' and women's direct experiences of being sexually gazed at, having their bodies evaluated and commented on, and, in the worst cases, being sexually harassed or raped (American Psychological Association, 2010; Smolak & Murnen, 2011). Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) posits that a wide range of objectifying and sexualizing societal messages leads girls and women into objectifying and sexualizing themselves—a process referred to as self-objectification. In self-objectification, girls and women internalize an observer's view of their physical self and learn to think about their bodies as objects of others' desires (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Several studies have documented the presence of self-objectification in females more than in males (e.g., McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Slater & Tiggemann, 2011), and girls as young as 11 may engage in self-objectification (Grabe, Hyde, & Lindberg, 2007). Viewing their bodies through the lens of self-objectification, girls engage in self-surveillance (i.e., constant monitoring of their bodies' attractiveness), try to control their bodies, and feel ashamed of their bodies when they do not measure up to appearance standards—a process rendering them more vulnerable to body image problems (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). The concept of objectification is a valuable example of how the macrosystem layer of Bronfenbrenner's model may influence girls' body image development.

With time, gendered structures are changing in many parts of the world and traditional gender roles have changed substantially in recent decades. However, while women now have access to many domains typically considered “masculine,” there does not seem to be less emphasis on women's appearance, but the opposite. Murnen and Don (2012) argue, in line with feminist theory, that this emphasis on appearance might have increased “as a type of ‘backlash’ to women's accomplishments. If women need to focus on appearance to a great degree, it captures strength and energy that could be used for other pursuits” (p. 131). For example, the “tyranny of slenderness” so pronounced among today's women could be interpreted as a way to prohibit women from taking up space,

physically as well as in terms of power, and to encourage women to concentrate on staying thin rather than using their energy for other more empowering pursuits (Bartky, 1990). Similarly, it has been suggested that women who occupy subordinate feminine roles in society might manipulate their bodies either to conform to feminine norms or to try to gain “control” (Murnen & Don, 2012).

On a cultural level, one wonders how gendered structures may influence the body image of adolescents living in societies with differing views of gender. For instance, what characterizes the body image of boys and girls growing up in a society characterized by gender equality? Are they in fact more similar in their body image? Does their body image differ from the body image of boys and girls growing up in a more patriarchal culture?

Industrialization

Another factor associated with adolescents’ body image and applicable to the macrosystem layer of Bronfenbrenner’s model (1977) is the process of industrialization. Anderson-Fye (2011) describes how industrialization can influence a society’s members to change how they view their bodies. Industrialization often accompanies economic growth in developing countries and tends to introduce social change and globalization. This, in turn, results in greater interaction with images and ideas of beauty from postindustrial countries, putting increased pressure on the developing society’s members to conform to these ideals (Anderson-Fye, 2011). Industrialization can also influence body image through its tendency to change gender roles and promote greater individualization. Indeed, notions of individualism can transform body image from something perceived as collectively shared and stable into something perceived as personal and malleable. Once the body becomes an object of individual “work,” body dissatisfaction is more likely to arise (Anderson-Fye, 2011; Holmqvist Gattario, Frisén, & Anderson-Fye, 2014). The famous work of Becker (2004, 2005) among girls in rural Fiji only 18 months after the introduction of television broadcasting Western programming showed that the girls had moved from thinking of their bodies as unchangeable and supported by a dense social network to thinking of them as malleable by themselves as individuals. In contrast, Anderson-Fye (2004) suggested that a society’s interaction with Western values does not necessarily imply more body dissatisfaction. Specifically, she found that adolescent girls in Belize, a rapidly developing nation in Latin America and highly dependent on US tourism,

actually rejected typical Western body ideals and demonstrated very low levels of disordered behaviors. Body shape was more important than body size among the Belizean girls, who idealized being curvaceously shaped like a “Coca-Cola” bottle. Those who did not naturally possess this particular shape could improve their looks by wearing the right clothes. The findings from Fiji and Belize reflect how industrialization and related macrostructural changes can have varying effects on adolescents’ body image.

Summary of factors associated with adolescents’ body image

Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory of human development (1977) serves as a valuable framework for organizing the factors associated with adolescents’ body image. It provides an overview of the distinct layers of influence linked to how adolescents relate to their bodies.

As regards individual factors associated with adolescents’ body image, there are some inconsistencies in previous research as to the independent contribution of each factor. Surely, many of the factors (e.g., BMI, pubertal timing, peer appearance teasing, and body ideal internalization) are closely related and may combine with each other. If we are to understand these relationships more fully, we need to examine several of the factors simultaneously while controlling for each one. In addition, different factors may be important for different dimensions of body-esteem. Since previous research has mainly used a single total measure of body-esteem or body satisfaction, the matter of which factors may relate to which body-esteem dimensions has not been thoroughly investigated.

Furthermore, the importance of macrostructural factors, including industrialization, individualization, and gendered structures, suggests a need to extend the research to include adolescents’ body image outside the English-speaking postindustrial world. While body image is important among adolescents in these countries, it is important that research be geographically extended to include other parts of the world.

ADOLESCENTS' BODY IMAGE ACROSS CULTURES

The term “culture,” said to be one of the most complex words in the English language, is defined in many ways (Eagleton, 2000). Heine (2008) defines culture as a group of people who exist within a shared context defined by everything from language, religion, and social habits to cuisine, music, and arts. Cultures may change over time, influenced by economic and political forces, climatic and geographic changes, and the importation of ideas. The very notion of the concept of culture may dynamically change over time due to ongoing human interaction (Baldwin, Faulkner, & Hecht, 2006).

In cross-cultural body image research, it is common to think of countries as representing different “cultures.” Though cultural boundaries are not always as clear-cut as are the borders between countries (Heine, 2008), the underlying rationale of such research is that people living in the same country may have similar socio-culturally and macro-structurally influenced ideas and experiences related to body and appearance. In a chapter discussing future challenges facing body image research, Cash and Pruzinsky (2002) stated that “comparative cross-cultural studies of body image are crucial to enhance our understanding of the diversity of body images and the influence of culture on body image development, dysfunction, and change” (p. 513). In addition, cross-cultural studies can be a good way to discover factors potentially protecting against negative body image (Smolak & Cash, 2011) as well as to identify cultural groups that are struggling with body image problems more than others (Smolak & Striegel-Moore, 2001).

The old saying “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” applies well to the variety of ideas about attractiveness across cultures. The appearance ideals described thus far in this thesis, depicting thin, sexy women and muscular men, are indeed widespread but far from universal. With reference to appearance ideals in non-Western societies, Edmonds (2012) cites examples of how the Japanese, for instance, admire “nape beauties,” the Tiv of Nigeria appreciate curvaceous male calves, and the West African Woodabee prize a high forehead. These are conceptions of beauty that are rather different from those in most postindustrial countries. However, as the world becomes increasingly globalized, Western beauty practices have spread rapidly in many parts of Asia, Latin America, and Africa (Edmonds, 2012).

Cross-cultural differences in body image

As appearance ideals vary across cultures, so do people's body image. In attempting to elucidate such variety, most previous research has focused on the body image of young adults, with fewer studies of adolescents (however, see, e.g., Mellor et al., 2013; Rubin, Gluck, Knoll, Lorence, & Geliebter, 2008; Williams, Ricciardelli, McCabe, Waqa, & Bavadra, 2006). These studies have mostly compared the body image of people (young women, in particular) in countries referred to as "Western" (e.g., the USA, the UK, and Australia) with that of people in countries referred to as "non-Western" (e.g., Japan, Korea, Malaysia, and Fiji). The overall findings of this body of research indicate that body image concerns tend to be related to greater affluence and Western lifestyle (Holmqvist & Frisén, 2010; Jaeger et al., 2002; Soh, Touyz, & Surgenor, 2006; Swami et al., 2010). For instance, Jaeger et al.'s (2002) large-scale comparison of 1751 young women in 12 countries showed that women in typically Western societies (e.g., Sweden, Germany, Spain, France, Italy, and the UK) were more dissatisfied with their bodies than were women in non-Western societies (e.g., Ghana, India, and Gabon). Similarly, Swami et al. (2010) examined 7434 females across 26 countries in 10 world regions and found that subjects in more affluent contexts were more dissatisfied with their bodies than were their counterparts in less affluent contexts, even within countries.

It has been popular to speak of the process of modernization, "westernization" (i.e., the adoption of a Western lifestyle), or the acculturation of Western ideals and values as causes of increased body image problems and eating disorders among women in the non-Western world (Rieger, Touyz, Swain, & Beumont, 2001). Indeed, many non-Western societies did not traditionally greatly value thinness but instead valued plumpness and, as mentioned above, the societal shift from collectivistic values (common in non-Western countries) to individualistic values (common in Western countries) may increase the likelihood of body image problems (Anderson-Fye, 2011). In addition, the process of modernization and westernization may imply greater access to body-centered information, higher social pressures to conform to appearance ideals, increased economic resources to invest in one's appearance, as well as changes in gender roles and the status of women. It has been suggested that when there is gender role change in a society, people tend to

become more dissatisfied with their bodies because of pressures associated with the new roles, and because of role confusion (Anderson-Fye, 2011).

Bearing these aspects in mind, research has shown that women in East Asian countries such as Korea and Japan with rapidly growing economies and high levels of westernization seem to be particularly susceptible to body image concerns (Holmqvist & Frisé, 2010). In addition, Korean and Japanese women may not only internalize Western-oriented beauty ideals, but also experience conflict from being exposed to Caucasian body ideals and being Asian. This conflict is reflected in the high prevalence of plastic surgery to create double eyelids or a narrower or pointier nose in these countries (Kawamura, 2002; Kowner, 2002). Importantly, however, theorists argue that discussions of the increase in body image concerns in many parts of the world should go beyond the concepts of westernization (since it maintains a dichotomous “West versus East” approach to culture), acculturation to Western lifestyle (since we know that Western lifestyle is continually changing), and modernization (since this could undermine non-biomedical perspectives; Nasser, Katzman, & Gordon, 2001). In the case of Korean and Japanese women, the high prevalence of body image concerns does not necessarily depend only on westernization, but may also originate in traditional Asian values, such as conformity to social norms and an emphasis on modesty (Kawamura, 2002; Matsumoto, as cited in Mukai et al., 1998). Edmonds (2012) argues that imported concepts of beauty “often interact with local values and meanings, yielding new, hybrid body practices and distinct health challenges” (p. 238). In accordance with this, it can be argued that, in research, the body image and body practices among people in a particular culture need to be interpreted in their own cultural context, according to a range of aspects, including cultural values and norms, cultural transitions, economic and political forces, and gendered structures.

Due to the complexity of the relationship between culture and body image, it is unfortunate that previous body image research has been geographically limited. In particular, there is a paucity of body image research from Latin America, and the Scandinavian countries have rarely been the subject of such research. Accordingly, the present thesis focuses on two cultural contexts that have received little attention in previous body image research: the Swedish and the Argentinean. To set the stage for this cross-cultural comparison, I will review some of the characteristics of each cultural context that may be important for how adolescents in Sweden and Argentina come to relate to their bodies. As suggested by Holmqvist and Frisé (2010), it is

essential that cross-cultural body image studies be preceded by detailed cultural descriptions of the cultural contexts to be investigated.

The Swedish context

Individualism and modesty

Sweden can be considered a postindustrial country and is situated in Scandinavia. Trost (2012) describes Sweden as an individualistic culture in which personal autonomy is highly valued and conformity is common. Verbal passivity is associated with positive traits such as reflection and modesty, and gesticulating intensively and speaking loudly may be regarded as excessive. Indeed, Swedes often refer to the “Jante Law” (originally described by the Danish–Norwegian author, Aksel Sandemose), which holds that one should not think that one is better than anybody else. The Swedish term *lagom*, meaning “not too little, not too much” is frequently used by Swedes, and Sweden is sometimes humorously referred to as “the country of *lagom*.” Other important virtues in Swedish culture are promptness (Swedes tend to be on time), honesty, fairness, and equality (Trost, 2012). The Swedish mentality as portrayed by a Swedish ethnologist (Daun, 1996) comprises four distinct parts: conformity, conflict avoidance, modernity, and equality. Although these qualities may apply to other nationalities, they are highly valued by Swedes and may be more common in Sweden than in other countries (Trost, 2012).

Gender equality

Sweden is considered one of the most gender equal-countries in the world (Guiso, Monte, Sapienza, & Zingales, 2008). What one may call the dual-breadwinner norm—where both parents work and care for the family—is well-established in Swedish culture (Somme stad, 1997). In 2003, 79% of women aged 20–64 were in the workforce, and the corresponding proportion of men was 84% (Statistics Sweden, 2004). Young people in Sweden associate successful careers and employment not only with men but also with women (Trost, 2012). Furthermore, the Swedish parental leave system is designed so that both men and women should be able to combine work and parenthood (Haas & Hwang, 2000). Swedish men take more parental leave than do any of

their Nordic counterparts, with the exception of Icelandic men (Statistics Sweden, 2009), although Swedish women still take much more parental leave than do Swedish men (Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees, 2013). The importance of gender equality is similarly expressed in the school environment, where teachers are by law obliged to ensure that male and female students are treated the same way and are given equal opportunities to learn (Swedish Delegation for Gender Equality in School, 2009). Altogether, these facts suggest that gendered structures may be less rigid and traditional in Swedish society than elsewhere.

Thinness and healthy eating

As in most postindustrial countries, physical attractiveness and slenderness are highly valued in Sweden. Popular television shows include modeling competitions and programs encouraging weight loss and healthy eating. Appearance ideals are narrow, depicting thin young women and muscular young men. Frequently visible examples of the body ideals typically desired by adolescent Swedes are conveyed in the advertising of the popular Swedish clothes retailer H&M (www.hm.com). The company has repeatedly been criticized for using unrealistically thin, and dangerously tanned, female models in their advertisements (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2012, May 20; *MåBra*, 2010, April 3).

The subjects of healthy food and healthy eating habits are often discussed in Swedish media and society. The consumption of vegetables and fruits in the adult population has increased by more than 20% over the last two decades (Livsmedelsverket, 2012). Many adolescents take extra care about what they eat, and approximately 25% of Swedish adolescents are vegetarians, vegans, or food exclusive in some way (Larsson, Klock, Aström, Haugejorden, & Johansson, 2001). In addition, Edlund, Halvarsson, Gebre-Medhin, and Sjöden (1999) demonstrated that many Swedish adolescent girls try to lose weight (age 13 years: 51%; age 17 years: 66%). Significantly lower rates of weight loss attempts were found among boys (age 13 years: 18%; age 17 years: 17%). About 14% of adolescent girls and 19% of adolescent boys in Sweden are overweight or obese (Sjöberg et al., 2012), a figure much lower than the approximately one third of US children and adolescents who are overweight or obese (American Heart Association, 2013).

Body image research on Swedish adolescents

Since the millennium shift, increased research attention has been paid to Swedish adolescents' body image. Overall, this research has concentrated on adolescents' overweight (e.g., Askelöf, Stenlid, & Edlund, 2007; Erling & Hwang, 2004a; Hayden-Wade et al., 2005; Ivarsson, Svalander, Litlere, & Nevenon, 2006; Magnusson, Hulthén, & Kjellgren, 2005; Sjöberg et al., 2012), body perceptions (e.g., Bergström, Stenlund, & Svedjehäll, 2000), dieting (e.g., Edlund et al., 1999), peer victimization (e.g., Frisén et al., 2009; Lunde et al., 2007; Lunde et al., 2006), eating disorders (Ghaderi, Mårtensson, & Schwan, 2005; Gustafsson, Edlund, Kjellin, & Norring, 2008; Thurfjell et al., 2004; Westerberg-Jacobson et al., 2010), physical activity (e.g., Lindwall & Lindgren, 2005; Raustorp, Mattsson, Svensson, & Ståhle, 2006; Seigel & Hetta, 2001), and body image intervention (Ghaderi et al., 2005, Lindvall & Lindgren, 2005). Briefly stated, the results of these studies suggest that the psychological effects of overweight found among Swedish adolescents are very similar to those found internationally, i.e., overweight young Swedes tend to experience lower body-esteem and more anxiety, depression, and disturbed eating behavior than do their normal-weight peers (Askelöf et al., 2007; Erling & Hwang, 2004a; Ivarsson et al., 2006). Obese boys tend to experience even lower body-esteem and more psychological ill-being and suicidal attempts and thoughts than do normal-weight boys (Berg, Simonsson, & Ringqvist, 2005). Peer victimization in the form of bullying and appearance teasing has been strongly linked to Swedish adolescents' body image, with both girls and boys suffering long-term consequences (Lunde et al., 2007). As regards eating disorders, findings have shown that Swedish adolescent girls who wish to be thinner not only diet more often, but are also four times more likely to develop disturbed eating attitudes over a five-year period (Westerberg-Jacobson et al., 2010). Body image intervention programs for Swedish adolescents have had varying results, and one study found that exercise sessions and discussions about healthy lifestyles positively affected adolescents' body image (Lindwall & Lindgren, 2005). On the other hand, another study showed that an intervention program focusing on enhancing self-esteem, increasing the acceptance of self and others, and critically reviewing stereotypes did not affect adolescents' body image (Ghaderi et al., 2005). Combined with findings showing that the frequency of dieting and disordered eating in Swedish adolescent girls is increasing (Halvarsson, Lunner, Westerberg, Anteson, & Sjöden, 2002), one can argue that Sweden is a country in which more adolescent body image research is urgently needed.

The well-established gender difference in body image, with girls experiencing more body dissatisfaction than do boys, seems to apply to Swedish adolescents as well (Frisén, Lunde, Kleiberg, 2013; Ivarsson et al., 2006; Sjöberg et al., 2012).

Cross-cultural comparisons with Swedish adolescents. I have been able to find only one study that included Sweden in a cross-cultural comparison of adolescents' body image (Lunner et al., 2000). In that study, 14-year-old Swedish adolescent girls were compared with 13- and 14-year-old Australian girls in terms of BMI, dieting, weight loss attempts, appearance teasing, body dissatisfaction, and miscellaneous eating disorder symptoms. Results showed that 14-year-old Australian girls were the most likely to have dieted (59%), followed by 14-year-old Swedish girls (48%) and 13-year-old Australian girls (38%). The 14-year-old Australian girls experienced more eating disturbances and bulimic tendencies than did the Swedish girls. However, in terms of body dissatisfaction, Australian and Swedish girls of the same age experienced similar levels, with younger Australian girls experiencing lower levels. These findings suggest that Swedish adolescents' body image may be similar to that of adolescents in other industrialized parts of the world, although Swedes may be less likely to engage in disordered eating. The findings also suggest that the use of age-specific samples is important for validity in cross-cultural comparisons.

The Argentinean context

Collectivism and expressiveness

Though Argentina is defined as a developing country (International Statistical Institute, 2013), it is one of the largest economies in South America and has achieved record national industrial growth in recent years (World Bank, 2013). Argentinean culture is both similar to and different from Swedish culture. Located in southern South America, Argentina is geographically almost as far away from Sweden as one could get. Still, the enormous wave of immigration in the nineteenth century, consisting mainly of Italians and Spaniards, made Argentina one of the most Europeanized countries in Latin America (Facio & Resett, 2012). It has been suggested that Argentineans see themselves as

different from people in neighboring countries, and emphasize these differences through what Meehan and Katzman (2001) describe as “over-identification” with Europe.

Like Swedish culture, Argentinean culture is characterized by a high level of individualism, but differs from Swedish culture in that it also has a high level of collectivism (Facio & Resett, 2012). The family is greatly emphasized in Argentinean society, and Argentinean adolescents see their families as much more important than friends, political ideas, or religion. As opposed to the modesty and culture of *lagom* in Swedish society, Argentineans are highly influenced by the Italian personal style, which is typically portrayed as passionate, emotional, and expressive.

Machismo men and small women

Machismo culture, i.e., the notion of men’s supremacy over women, is often stereotypically applied to Latin American culture. Indeed, Argentinean men are under pressure to assert their masculinity by being successful and psychologically and physically strong, even though the social and economic constraints of today’s Argentinean society may hinder them (Meehan & Katzman, 2001). Argentinean women, on the other hand, experience constant pressure to be thin (Forman & Morello, 2003), and female thinness is constantly associated with success and power (Rivarola, 2003). As both a cause and a consequence of this exaggerated thin ideal among women, Argentina has long had a very restricted range of sizes available in women’s clothing (Forbes et al., 2012). In 2005, the difficulty of finding teen clothing in sizes larger than 38 (US size 8) resulted in governmental initiatives requiring that stores should stock teen clothes in sizes 38–48 (US sizes 8–18), which provoked criticism from Argentinean fashion designers (*Argentina Independent*, 2011, November 23). Among Argentinean girls, the importance of physical appearance and thinness is demonstrated by the fact that 55% of adolescent girls agree with the statement “You don’t exist if you can’t get people’s attention by having a nice, perfect figure” (Romer, 1996, as cited by Meehan & Katzman, 2001). In addition, Argentina’s capital Buenos Aires has been referred to as the capital of cosmetic surgery (*The Week*, 2007, January 23) and the epicenter of an “epidemic of eating disorders” (Gordon, 2001).

Body image research on Argentinean adolescents

Few studies examine Argentinean adolescents' body image; in fact, I have found only five studies of Argentinean adolescents' body image (Blarrina, Gutiérrez-Martínez, Fachinnelli, & López, 2007; Casullo, González, Sifre, & Martorell, 2000; Forman & Morello, 2003; McArthur, Holbert, & Peña, 2005; Rutzstein et al., 2010). Forman and Morello (2003) examined weight concerns and perceived difficulty of quitting smoking among 14- and 17-year-old Argentinean adolescents. In terms of weight concerns, they demonstrated that perceived fatness, drive for thinness, and frequent dieting were more common among Argentinean girls than boys, congruent with well-established sex differences identified in international studies. Similarly, Blarrina et al. (2007) found that 15–18-year-old Argentinean boys generally had a more positive body image and were happier and less anxious than were their female counterparts. Rutzstein et al. (2010) examined eating disorder characteristics (including body dissatisfaction) among Argentinean adolescents who were dance students, high school students, or patients with an eating disorder. Their results showed that, in levels of body dissatisfaction, dance students were more similar to patients with an eating disorder than to high school students, indicating the severity of body image concerns among Argentinean dance students.

Cross-cultural comparisons with Argentinean adolescents. The other two studies on Argentinean adolescents' body image are cross-cultural. Casullo et al. (2000) investigated drive for thinness, body dissatisfaction, and perfectionism among 13–19-year-old boys and girls in Argentina and Spain. Their results showed that younger adolescents were more likely to experience drive for thinness, body dissatisfaction, and perfectionism than were older adolescents, and that Spanish adolescents were more likely to experience these concerns than were Argentinean adolescents. Finally, McArthur et al. (2005) examined attitudinal and perceptual body image among 1272 adolescents (aged 12–19 years) from six cities in Latin America (i.e., Buenos Aires in Argentina, Santiago in Chile, Guatemala City in Guatemala, Havana in Cuba, Lima in Peru, and Panama City in Panama). Almost 40% of the normal-weight adolescents from all these cities indicated a preference to be thinner, although a large proportion of the normal-weight adolescents already perceived themselves as thin. Congruent with the findings of Forman and Morello (2003) and Blarrina et al. (2007) on sex differences, females in all cities except Havana had stronger desires to be thinner than did boys. This sex difference was most obvious in

Buenos Aires, Argentina, where 62% of the females, but only 28% of the males, would prefer to be thinner. In addition, the preference for being thinner was apparent in those of both lower and higher socio-economic status (SES) in Buenos Aires, whereas it was typically evident only among those of higher SES in the other examined cities. These findings confirm that bodily concern and dissatisfaction may be fairly widespread problems among young Argentines, especially among girls, though, as mentioned above, there is a paucity of research from and into this area of the world.

Summary of adolescents' body image across cultures: The Swedish and Argentinean contexts

Several features of the Swedish and Argentinean cultures make them valuable contexts for research on adolescents' body image. Swedish society, which is postindustrial and individualistic with a focus on thinness and attractiveness, seems to include many features related to adolescents' body image concerns. However, Swedish society is different because of its valuing of modesty and conformity, and for being considered one of the most gender-equal countries in the world. If we consider gender differences in body image as reflecting gendered power structures, might adolescents, girls in particular, growing up in a relatively gender-equal society be less likely to experience body image concerns?

Argentinean society, in contrast, with its machismo men and petite women, might imply more rigid gendered structures, perhaps increasing the likelihood of gender differences in body image. Previous research seems to support this view (Blarrina et al., 2007; Forman & Morello; McArthur et al., 2005). Argentinean society's focus on female thinness and beauty further emphasizes that Argentinean adolescents, girls in particular, may be at great risk of experiencing body image concerns. However, the collectivistic values of Argentinean society may offer protection against such concerns.

It is unclear whether the cultural differences between Swedish and Argentinean society may affect the body image of adolescents in the two contexts. To my knowledge, these societies have never before been the subject of cross-cultural comparison.

After having introduced the cultural approach to adolescents' body image, I will now consider another approach to adolescents' body image: positive psychology and adolescents' positive body image.

ADOLESCENTS' POSITIVE BODY IMAGE

So far, this thesis has focused mainly on negative body image and low body-esteem. Likewise, in the field of body image research, most research, theorizing, and thought is pathology focused, emphasizing the concept of negative body image (Smolak & Cash, 2011; Tylka, 2012). In many ways, this focus does make sense. As discussed above, having a negative body image is so common that it is sadly considered the most standard way to relate to one's body. In addition, the negative consequences of low body-esteem are many and serious, so further research in the area is important in order to guide future intervention and prevention.

Still, it must be acknowledged that there are people out there who are *not* dissatisfied with their bodies, people who relate to their bodies in various ways that may not be considered “standard,” people who might even be happy with the way they look. Most importantly, according to the ideas of positive psychology, we might not be able to provide the best interventions and preventative measures until we know how *they*—people with a positive body image—relate to their bodies.

Positive psychology

Positive psychology is an area in the science of psychology that has flourished during the last decade. The field has emerged in response to the imbalance in today's psychology, which focuses mainly on the negative aspects of human psychological existence. Unlike most of today's psychology research, which is preoccupied with people's ill-being, weaknesses, and suffering, positive psychology concentrates on people's well-being, strengths, and happiness (Gudmundsdottir, 2011). According to Seligman (2003), the best-known proponent of the field, the science of positive psychology is mainly about three aspects: 1) people's positive experiences in the past, present, and future, 2) the characteristics of people's strengths and virtues, and 3) positive institutions and positive communities. The current aims of positive psychology are in line with

these three aspects and involve assessment (e.g., how to measure strengths and virtues), intervention (e.g., how to build on these strengths and virtues), and life-span development (how people's strengths and virtues change over the course of life; Seligman, 2003). The overall idea of positive psychology is not only to foster a more complete and balanced scientific understanding of the human experience, which concerns more than just pathology; it is also about understanding what makes people feel good and helps other people feel good. As Keyes and Haidt (2003) put it, "positive psychology aims to help people live and flourish rather than merely exist" (p. 3).

An important observation of positive psychology is the problematic fact that psychological interventions are based mostly on pathology-focused research and are intended to prevent "bad things" from happening rather than enabling "good things" to happen. Indeed, it has been argued that "psychology remains today ill-equipped to help individuals to live healthier and more meaningful lives. It has a box full of tools to work on stress, disease, and dysfunction, but preventing the worst from happening does not equal promoting the best in people" (Keyes & Haidt, 2003, p. 5). Similarly, Seligman (2003) stresses that if we base our interventions solely on pathology-focused research, the best result that even an optimally successful intervention program can achieve is to attain "zero" pathology. Simply removing negative/maladaptive characteristics but not teaching positive/adaptive ones will likely result in languishing (Tylka, 2012). This is an intermediate state of mental health characterized by a lack of psychopathology but an absence of vitality, meaning that people who are languishing do not fully experience the joys of life or have superior well-being (Tylka, 2012).

To improve psychological interventions, we first need to identify human strengths and virtues, and then amplify and concentrate these in people at risk (Seligman, 2002).

Positive psychology in the body image field

Unfortunately, the ideas of positive psychology have so far had little effect on the body image field. As mentioned previously, body image research is almost exclusively pathology focused, centering on the negative aspects of body image (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Tylka, 2011). While such research has produced a

rich understanding of negative body image, our understanding of positive body image is still very poor. In fact, it was long assumed that positive body image was simply the opposite of negative body image, and that the concept therefore needed no further investigation.

Body appreciation

Striegel-Moore and Cachelin (1999) were among the first researchers to start thinking of positive body image as something more than just the opposite of negative body image. Some years later, Avalos et al. (2005) developed the Body Appreciation Scale (BAS) to measure an aspect of positive body image referred to as “body appreciation.” They defined body appreciation as comprising several positive body image qualities: a) favorable opinions of the body regardless of actual physical appearance, b) acceptance of the body despite its weight, shape, and imperfections, c) respect for the body by attending to its needs and engaging in healthy behaviors, and d) protection of the body by rejecting unrealistic body images portrayed in the media. Since the development of the BAS, several studies have examined body appreciation, mainly in adult samples. Body appreciation has been associated with higher self-esteem (Swami, Airs, Chouhan, Leon, & Towell, 2009; Swami, Stieger, Haubner, & Voracek, 2008), greater psychological well-being, less body shame and body preoccupation, and fewer eating disorder symptoms (Avalos et al., 2005). Furthermore, body appreciation has been associated with lower BMI (Swami, 2009, Swami & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2008; Swami, Hadji-Michael, & Furnham, 2008), intuitive eating (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011), adaptive perfectionism (Iannantuono & Tylka, 2012), and less traditional femininity ideology (Swami & Abbasnejad, 2010).

To my knowledge, only two studies have examined body appreciation among adolescents. Lunde (2013) investigated body appreciation, attitudes to cosmetic surgery, body ideal internalization, and the frequency of fashion blog reading in a sample of 110 Swedish adolescents aged 16–18 years. The results showed no relationship between body appreciation, body ideal internalization, and attitudes to cosmetic surgery, perhaps due to the small sample size or because the factors studied are simply more related to negative aspects of adolescents’ body image. Lobera and Rios (2011) examined a sample of 312 Spanish adolescents and found that body appreciation was related to lower BMI, less stress and social withdrawal, and higher self-esteem and adaptive coping. In line with what one might expect considering the gender differences found in

research on negative body image, girls in both the aforementioned studies experienced lower body appreciation than did boys. Among adults, only three studies of body appreciation have included men (Swami, Hadji-Michael et al., 2008; Swami & Jaafar, 2012; Swami, Stieger et al., 2008). Interestingly, these studies have found inconsistent results in terms of gender differences in body appreciation. While Indonesian men had higher body appreciation than did their female counterparts (Swami & Jaafar, 2012), there were no gender differences in body appreciation among British adults (Swami, Hadji-Michael et al., 2008), and only a small gender difference among German adults (Swami, Stieger et al., 2008).

In-depth research on positive body image

While quantitative studies on positive body image and body appreciation are important in order to elucidate the factors associated with positive body image, in-depth studies are essential in order to identify additional characteristics of positive body image. To investigate characteristics of positive body image, Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010) interviewed five body image experts and a group of 15 college women (aged 18–21 years) classified as having a positive body image. The researchers were able to identify a range of positive body image characteristics, including appreciation of the unique beauty and functionality of one's body, a broad definition of beauty, and an emphasis on the body's assets while minimizing perceived imperfections. The participating women also felt that the inner positivity that they experienced influenced their outer demeanor, and that their family, friends, and partners unconditionally accepted them as they were. Some of the women also spoke about how their religion/spirituality helped them preserve their positive body image, in that they believed that a higher power had designed them to be special and that they therefore should honor their bodies. In relation to the processes by which these women interpreted and internalized information about their bodies, Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010) proposed a model illustrating how the women created a "filter" to block out images and messages that could endanger their positive body image while internalizing information that preserved their positive body image. However, as noted by the authors, it is unknown whether these findings can be extended to other samples of different ages or from different cultures or geographical locations. Furthermore, it is unknown whether the characteristics

of men's positive body image are the same as those of women's (Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010).

GENERAL AIMS

This thesis has two general aims. First, the thesis aims to examine adolescents' body image using a cultural approach. By focusing on two cultural contexts, the Swedish and the Argentinean, this thesis investigates how adolescents growing up in these distinct, though not dissimilar cultures come to view their own bodies. The thesis also takes a particularly close look at the Swedish context, examining a range of factors associated with Swedish girls' and boys' body image.

Second, this thesis aims to extend our understanding of the almost unexplored concept of positive body image. Being the first to qualitatively study positive body image characteristics among adolescent boys and girls, it aims to elucidate characteristics of adolescents' positive body image in terms of how adolescents relate to their own bodies, appearance ideals, views of exercise, and influence of family and friends.

SUMMARY OF THE STUDIES

The constituent papers of this thesis are based on an ongoing Swedish longitudinal study, the MOS project, details of which will be outlined below.

The MOS project

“MOS” refers to the Swedish “Mobbing och Skola,” meaning “bullying and school.” Despite its name, the MOS project has investigated both bullying and body image from the start, although body image has been more emphasized as the participants have grown older. The project was initiated in the year 2000 in Gothenburg, Sweden’s second largest city. Participants were recruited among fourth-grade students (10-year-olds) in 53 public schools situated in different socio-economic areas of the city (Erling & Hwang, 2004a, 2004b). The sample at the first measuring point in the MOS project consisted of 960 participants (515 girls, 445 boys). Since then, the project has collected data using questionnaires at five time points, at ages 10, 13, 16, 18, and 21 years, and once, at age 14 years, using interviews with a small sample recruited from the large longitudinal sample. This thesis is based on the questionnaire data collected at ages 13 and 16, and on the qualitative data collected at age 14 (see Table 1). For the cross-cultural comparison with Argentinean adolescents at age 13, data were collected separately in Argentina. Further details on the data collection are described in the individual studies.

Table 1. Age of participants in each study.

Age	Study I	Study II	Study III	Study IV
13 years	●			
14 years			●	●
16 years		●		

Study I

Given the impact of culture on body image, cross-cultural comparisons of adolescents' body image are valuable in order to fully understand the body image phenomenon. Two cultural contexts that have never before been compared are the Swedish and the Argentinean. Both cultures greatly value physical attractiveness, but differ in cultural norms and values concerning, for example, modesty/expressiveness, individualism/collectivism, and gender equality/machismo. It is uncertain, however, whether cultural differences such as these project onto the body image beliefs and body-changing strategies of Swedish and Argentinean adolescents.

Aim

Study I aimed to cross-culturally examine differences in body-esteem, perceived body shape, dieting, and weight loss attempts among 13-year-old Argentinean and Swedish adolescents.

Participants

The Swedish participants were from the second wave of the longitudinal MOS project and comprised 874 adolescents (474 girls, 400 boys; mean age 13.6 years, $SD = 0.6$). The Argentinean participants were 358 adolescents (193 girls, 165 boys; mean age 13.3 years, $SD = 0.8$) from the city of Villa Maria in the heart of Argentina. At least one class from each of the 11 secondary schools in the city took part in the Argentinean study.

Procedure

The Swedish participants' questionnaires were completed either in the school setting during regular classes ($n = 626$) or by participants at home, who then mailed them to the research team ($n = 248$). The different data collection procedures were used because not all participants from the first wave could be located by visiting the school they attended during the first wave.

In Argentina, personal contact was established with one of the school principals in Villa Maria, who was very familiar with other school staff in the city. This principal contacted the principals of all secondary schools in Villa Maria, asking them to participate in the study, to which they all agreed.

Information letters and questionnaires were sent to teachers in the schools and were then distributed in class. Participants were assured of confidentiality before being handed the questionnaire.

Measures

Body image was measured by the Body-Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA), designed by Mendelson et al. (2001). The BESAA covers three dimensions of body-esteem: Weight (e.g., “I really like what I weigh”), Appearance (e.g., “I like what I see when I look in the mirror”), and Attribution (e.g., “People my own age like my looks”). Participants indicate their level of agreement with 24 such statements on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (“never”) to 4 (“always”). The subscales have high internal consistency (Weight $\alpha = .92$, Appearance $\alpha = .92$, and Attribution $\alpha = .81$) and high 3-month test-retest reliability (Weight $r = .92$, $p < .001$, Appearance $r = .89$, $p < .001$, and Attribution $r = .83$, $p < .001$; Mendelson et al., 2001).

BMI was calculated based on self-reported height and weight.

Previous dieting and ongoing weight loss attempts were measured by the questions “Have you dieted?” and “Are you currently trying to lose weight?” with the response options “yes” or “no.”

Body shape perception was measured by a question obtained from Marklund (1997): “Do you think you are too skinny or too fat?” The response options were: “Far too skinny,” “a little too skinny,” “just right,” “a little too fat,” and “far too fat.”

Results

A main finding was that Argentinean and Swedish adolescents did not differ in their levels of body-esteem, but that girls in both countries displayed lower body-esteem than did boys. Dieting and weight loss attempts were more prevalent among the Argentinean adolescents, girls in particular, with 33% of Argentinean girls reporting having dieted and 40% reporting current attempts to lose weight (among Swedish girls, 13% reported having dieted and 28% reported current weight loss attempts). Importantly, Argentinean girls’ dieting and weight loss attempts did not appear to depend on overweight or perception of body shape. The samples also differed in their perceptions of body shape and the effects those perceptions had on their body-esteem, with Swedish adolescents suffering more from negative body shape perceptions.

Conclusions

Argentinean and Swedish adolescents do seem to battle with body image concerns to a similar extent. However, the high rates of dieting and weight loss attempts among Argentinean girls are alarming and merit further examination. Future research may scrutinize these behaviors to judge whether Argentinean girls' dieting is part of a social phenomenon that simply entails keeping an eye on one's physical shape, or whether it is manifested in restricted eating or food deprivation that may lead to more severe physical (e.g., malnutrition) and clinical (i.e., eating disorders) conditions. Investigations of cultural differences in connection with the term dieting would be valuable for the interpretation of future results.

Study II

Previous research has identified a range of factors (physical/biological, psychological, socio-cultural, and behavioral) associated with adolescents' body image. However, the independent contribution of each factor in association with body-esteem is unclear. In addition, previous research has used rather homogeneous samples in terms of gender and culture (i.e., mostly girls, and from the USA) and has not considered the multiple dimensions of body-esteem.

Aims

The second study in this thesis aimed to examine a set of physical (i.e., BMI and pubertal timing), sociocultural (i.e., body ideal internalization and peer appearance teasing), and behavioral (i.e., weight loss attempts) factors in relation to three dimensions of Swedish adolescent girls' and boys' body-esteem. The body-esteem dimensions examined were weight-based body-esteem (Weight), appearance-based body-esteem (Appearance), and beliefs about how others view one's body and appearance (Attribution). An overarching purpose of Study II was to examine whether the state of gender equality in Swedish society is mirrored in the body image concerns of Swedish adolescents.

Participants

Participants were drawn from the third examination point in the MOS project. The total number of participants was 758 Swedish 16-year-olds (426 girls and 332 boys), mean age 16.18 years ($SD = .46$).

Procedure

An invitation to the study, questionnaire, and prepaid return envelope (used to submit the questionnaire) were mailed to the 874 participants who had participated in the first two waves of the MOS project. A movie ticket was offered as compensation once the questionnaire had been returned.

Measures

Body-esteem was measured by the BESAA (Mendelson et al., 2001) and BMI was calculated based on self-reported height and weight.

Pubertal timing was measured by the question “In comparison to your peers, how was your pubertal development?” (Berg-Kelly & Erdes, 1997). Response alternatives were “I am/was much later,” “I am/was a little later,” “Same as my peers,” “I am/was a little earlier,” and “I am/was much earlier.”

Body ideal internalization was measured by the Internalization subscale of the Socio-cultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire—Revised (SATAQ-R; Cusumano & Thompson, 1997). Participants indicated their level of agreement with 11 statements (e.g., “I wish I looked like the underwear models in magazines,” “I often find myself comparing my physique to that of athletes pictured in magazines”) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “definitely disagree” to (5) “definitely agree.” The internalization subscale has shown high internal consistency ($\alpha = .89$) in a sample of adult women (age 18–49 years; $n = 175$ [Cusumano & Thompson, 1997]) and moderate to high internal consistency ($\alpha = .77-.85$) in samples of adolescent girls and boys (age 12–15 years; $n = 304$, although for a somewhat modified version [Carlson Jones, 2004]).

Peer appearance teasing was assessed by the question “Have you ever been teased about your appearance?” which is one of five items in the “Victim Scale” of Rigby (1999). The response alternatives were “never,” “sometimes,” and “always.”

Finally, weight loss attempts were assessed by two questions: “Have you tried to lose weight at any time before your first year of upper secondary

school?” and “Have you tried to lose weight during your first year of upper secondary school?” The response alternatives were “yes” and “no.”

Results

The results showed that girls had lower body-esteem than did boys for the dimensions weight-based and appearance-based body-esteem. There were no gender differences in beliefs about how others view one’s body and appearance (the Attribution dimension of body-esteem). Furthermore, the importance of the examined factors in explaining variety in body-esteem depended on gender and body-esteem dimension. Whereas most of the factors examined were related to the Weight dimension, fewer were related to the Appearance dimension, and almost none was related to the Attribution dimension of adolescents’ body-esteem. Furthermore, the factors examined were able to explain a much larger amount of variance in the girls’ body-esteem dimensions (6–42%) than in the boys’ body-esteem dimensions (2–19%).

Body ideal internalization was the strongest factor across all body-esteem dimensions, independently predicting girls’ body-esteem on all dimensions and boys’ weight- and appearance-based body-esteem. The independent contribution of BMI was also significant, predicting girls’ and boys’ weight-based body-esteem and girls’ beliefs about how others view their body and appearance. Weight loss attempts were independently associated with girls’ and boys’ weight-based body-esteem and with boys’ appearance-based body-esteem. Furthermore, we found that peer appearance teasing predicted girls’ appearance-based body-esteem and boys’ weight-based body-esteem. Pubertal timing, however, only played a role in boys’ weight-based body-esteem.

Conclusions

While several of the factors examined were important for both boys’ and girls’ body-esteem, there were large differences in the amount of variance that they were able to explain (with higher amounts of explained variance for girls). Furthermore, as one might expect for adolescents in societies with less gender equality, the girls demonstrated lower body-esteem than did the boys in terms of both weight and appearance. Even in more egalitarian societies such as that of Sweden, low body-esteem does not seem to be an equal-opportunity phenomenon for boys and girls, as girls still report lower overall body-esteem.

Future research investigating Swedish adolescents could include body image measures particularly relevant to boys' body image and more in-depth questions about adolescents' weight loss strategies and peer appearance teasing.

Study III

Body image research has always been a pathology-focused field, with positive body image aspects being overlooked. While the concept of body appreciation has been added to the literature, there is still a need for more qualitative investigations of the characteristics of adolescents' positive body image. Study III was, to our knowledge, the first attempt to qualitatively examine adolescents' positive body image.

Aim

The aim of Study III was to investigate the characteristics of adolescents with a positive body image.

Participants

Participants were recruited from the MOS project based on participants' level of body esteem in the first two waves of the project (when they were aged 10 and 13 years), as measured by the BESAA (Mendelson et al., 2001). The participants in the longitudinal sample ($n = 874$) who demonstrated the highest level of body esteem in both waves were chosen as the target group for this study. We had a predefined goal of including 30 participants in the study with a 50/50 gender split, so we created a descending-order list of the most satisfied participants at ages 10 and 13 years. The participants with the highest level of body esteem were contacted first; only if someone declined participation (3 girls and 3 boys did so) did we contact the next person on the list. The final sample consisted of 15 girls (mean age = 13.93 years, $SD = 0.26$) and 15 boys (mean age = 14.07 years, $SD = 0.26$).

Procedure

Subjects were invited to participate in the study by a letter, containing information about the study, mailed to their parents or other caregivers. In the

following weeks, a trained research assistant called the parents, enabling them to ask questions about the interview and to grant active parental consent. Once parents had consented (only two did not), the research assistant spoke to the proposed interviewees. They were informed of the purpose of the interview (i.e., to examine adolescents' thoughts about various body image topics) and asked whether they agreed to take part. As an incentive, participants were offered a movie ticket once their interview had been completed.

Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interview guide was formulated in accordance with Smith and Osborn's (2003) guidelines. Based on the existing adolescent body image literature (e.g., Furham & Calnan, 1998; Grogan, 1999; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001a; Ricciardelli et al., 2000; Tiggemann & Williamson, 2000), we chose the following topics for the interview: satisfaction with one's appearance, views of exercise, and influence of family and friends. A pilot interview was conducted to discern any potential concerns with the interview guide and to allow the three interviewers to discuss their biases. Participants were individually interviewed at the Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, in a setting that was made as comfortable as possible for them. Challenging, clarifying, and probing questions were asked along with the main questions as necessary. Interviews lasted no more than 1 hour, and were audio recorded from the outset.

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using an inductive thematic approach, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Interview transcripts were read repeatedly and interesting features were assigned initial codes closely related to the data. Codes associated with similar content were combined into potential themes. A review of the potential themes resulted in eight final themes characterizing the adolescents' positive body image in terms of their satisfaction with their own appearance (three themes), views of exercise (two themes), and influence of family and friends (three themes).

Results

The results indicated that the adolescents reflected on their own appearance rather modestly, characteristically viewing themselves as average looking and accepting their self-perceived bodily imperfections. A functional view of the body was prominent among the adolescents, in that several of them focused on what their body could do rather than on how it looked. The vast majority of the

adolescents were physically active and found exercise joyful and health-promoting. Finally, as concerns the influence of family and friends on the adolescents' body image, they reported that family and peer conversations tended not to center on bodily matters; however, they still "had a feeling" that family and peers liked their appearance. While some of the adolescents had received negative comments about their appearance from family and friends, such comments were not accorded any importance.

Conclusions

To help increase the extent of positive body image among adolescents, it may be valuable to target their thinking patterns. For instance, teachers and parents could encourage adolescents to think of their bodies in functional terms and to accept their bodies despite perceived imperfections. The present study also suggests that adolescents should be encouraged to engage in physical activity on a regular basis, especially in activities that they find joyful. Accordingly, it might be helpful to give adolescents the opportunity to try various activities, for example, during physical education classes at school, so that they can find one or more that they enjoy.

Study IV

It has become popular to blame the media for conveying unattainable appearance ideals, thus contributing to adolescents' body image concerns. Accordingly, whereas Study III investigated how adolescents with a positive body image reflected on a number of topics, Study IV was a more detailed investigation of how the adolescents reflected on appearance ideals.

Aim

The aim of Study IV was to investigate how adolescents with a positive body image reflected on appearance ideals. Specifically, the purpose was to examine whether they might have specific ways of processing such information that might protect, or perhaps even improve, their body image. Also, drawing on the ideas of positive psychology, if adolescents with a positive body image do have body-image-protective ways of thinking about appearance ideals, how could

these ways of thinking be incorporated into interventions targeting those at risk of developing a negative body image?

Participants, procedure, and semi-structured interviews

Study IV was based on the same semi-structured interviews performed for Study III. The semi-structured interview guide used in Study III included questions about the participants' view of current appearance ideals and their perceptions of beauty. Data were analyzed thematically in accordance with the procedure used in Study III. This process resulted in two main themes and seven sub-themes.

Results

The results showed that the studied adolescents were very critical of current ideals (first main theme). Girls in particular described the appearance ideals as unnatural and unrealistic; they criticized the media for only showing those consistent with the ideals and for having ulterior motives in doing so (e.g., to entice consumers into buying products). In contrast to current societal ideals, the adolescents had adopted an alternative view of beauty and attractiveness (second main theme). Specifically, the adolescents defined beauty widely and flexibly, stressed the importance of looking like “oneself,” and conveyed the idea that personality outweighed looks. The perception of beauty as subjective and culturally dependent was also prominent, especially among the boys.

Conclusions

These results may be helpful when formulating preventative measures targeting those at risk of developing negative body image, supporting such measures based on media literacy and feminist theory. Based on our findings, such measures need to encourage adolescents to be critical of current ideals and to refrain from connecting their self-worth with their physical appearance. In addition, we stress the significance of providing adolescents with alternative ways of thinking about ideals, beauty, and attractiveness.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This thesis treated adolescents' body image and comprised two parts. The first part examined adolescents' body image using a cultural approach, comparing Swedish and Argentinean adolescents' body image and body-changing behaviors (Study I) and examining a range of factors associated with Swedish adolescents' body image (Study II). The second part of this thesis explored adolescents' body image from a positive psychology perspective, examining how adolescents with a positive body image reflected on their bodies, their views of exercise, and the influence of family and friends on their body image (Study III). Study IV focused on how adolescents with a positive body image reflected on appearance ideals.

Body image among Swedish and Argentinean adolescents

Specifically, Study I was a cross-cultural examination of differences in body-esteem, perceived body shape, dieting practices, and weight loss attempts between Swedish and Argentinean adolescents. Although the Swedish and Argentinean cultures differ in many ways, the results showed that the adolescents in the two cultures experienced similar levels of body-esteem. However, dieting and weight loss attempts were more common among Argentinean adolescents, especially among girls, and did not appear to depend on overweight or body shape perceptions. The samples also differed in their body shape perceptions and the effects of those perceptions on body satisfaction, with Swedish adolescents suffering more from negative body shape perceptions.

Swedish and Argentinean adolescents' similar levels of body-esteem

Given the many differences between Swedish and Argentinean society (e.g., postindustrial vs. preindustrial, gender equality vs. machismo culture, modesty vs. expressiveness), one might expect to find cross-cultural differences in Swedish and Argentinean adolescents' body image. However, one should also acknowledge the similarities between the two societies: both greatly value

physical attractiveness, both value female thinness, and both have access to Western media. Perhaps these similarities are more important in determining adolescents' body image than are the differences in cultural norms and values. Indeed, Argentina has been referred to as the most Europeanized country in Latin America, and Argentinean culture is not only collectivistic but also highly individualistic (Facio & Resett, 2012). In addition, the high rates of plastic surgery in Argentina signal a view of the body as malleable, which is typical of the appearance culture of many postindustrial countries, such as Sweden.

It is worth noting that, although Study I showed that *levels* of body image concerns were similar between Swedish and Argentinean adolescents, it did not show whether the factors possibly predicting these levels were similar across cultures. For instance, does family have a greater impact on adolescents' body image in a culture with collectivistic values, such as that of Argentina, where family is more important? How do Swedish cultural norms of modesty affect Swedish adolescents' ways of relating to their bodies? Questions such as these indicate that the findings of Study I may represent only the tip of the iceberg, with many more interesting aspects remaining hidden. Importantly, the role of gendered structures, including gender roles, in determining adolescents' body image could be investigated further in different cultural contexts. It has been suggested that when gender roles change in a society, people tend to become more dissatisfied with their bodies because of pressures associated with the new roles, and because of role confusion (Anderson-Fye, 2011). As the machismo culture in Argentinean society changes, young Argentinean men and women may be at increased risk of body image concerns. Future research needs to further investigate Argentinean adolescents' body image, and should include older adolescents as well. One could also examine how phenomena related to gendered power structures, such as girls' self-objectification (McKinley & Hyde, 1996) or experiences of sexual harassment, are related to Swedish and Argentinean adolescents' body image. Piran (2001) argues that in-depth qualitative studies investigating body image and embodied experiences in Argentinean adolescents would enhance our understanding of how Argentinean society, history, and cultural norms may be embedded in the ways young Argentineans experience their bodies.

Argentinean and Swedish girls' dieting

The finding that weight loss attempts and dieting were much more common among Argentinean than Swedish girls merits further consideration. While 13%

of the Swedish girls reported having dieted, the proportion was more than double, 33%, among the Argentinean girls. Similarly, 28% of the Swedish girls and 40% of the Argentinean girls reported currently trying to lose weight. The finding is worrying, considering that dieting may be a gateway to eating disorders (Johnson & Wardle, 2005). In addition, one can assume that many of the girls in Study I were in the midst of puberty, when food restrictions and weight loss attempts may threaten health and inhibit physical development and growth.

Remarkably, in contrast to the Swedish girls, Argentinean girls' dieting and weight loss attempts did not seem related to being overweight or even perceiving themselves as such. This finding may reflect cultural differences in dieting behavior, with Argentines having more permissive attitudes toward dieting, especially toward females' dieting. As suggested previously, Argentinean women experience great pressure to be thin (Forman & Morello, 2003), and restricted clothes sizes have long encouraged Argentinean girls and women to stay petite (*Argentina Independent*, 2011, November 23). While being slender is important in Sweden, contemporary Swedish debate on the dangers of dieting may prevent some adolescents from engaging in restricted eating or food deprivation. Instead of dieting, adolescents are encouraged to "eat healthy" and exercise. Swedish adolescents may be taught to take care of their bodies to stay in shape rather than dieting to keep thin. The fact that more Swedish girls were currently engaged in current weight loss attempts (which may involve exercising) than in dieting supports this view. Similarly, in the cross-cultural study of Swedish and Australian girls, the two samples experienced similar levels of body dissatisfaction, but fewer eating disturbances and bulimic tendencies were evident in the Swedish sample (Lunner et al., 2000).

An important aspect to consider when it comes to the matter of dieting is that the term "dieting" had to be translated into both Swedish and Spanish for the purpose of the study. The Swedish equivalent to "dieting" is "*banta*," a term likely related to the name of the formerly obese English undertaker William Banting who, in the nineteenth century, was the first to popularize a carbohydrate-limited weight loss diet. Today, *banta* is widely used in Sweden to refer to a temporary and systematically changed diet in an attempt to lose weight. With current critical debate about dieting in the Swedish media, the term has recently acquired negative connotations, possibly resulting in research biases (e.g., social desirability), in that the Swedish study sample may have underreported dieting behavior. The Argentinean equivalent to "dieting" is

“*hacer dieta*,” which literally means “to make diet.” From my own experience with Argentinean culture, and having spoken with native Argentinean adolescents, the term does not have the negative connotations in Argentinean culture that *banta* does in Swedish culture.

Roberts, Maxwell, Bagnall, and Bilton (2001) examined the interpretation of the English word “dieting” among 12–13-year-old girls in the UK. They found that dieting could be defined as both eating less food and eating healthy food. In addition, Johansson, Ghaderi, and Andersson (2005) have shown that food- and body-related words tend to produce more emotionality in females with an eating disorder. Their finding reflects the way that words may be interpreted differently depending on individual experience. One way to overcome problems with the interpretation or connotations of the term dieting would be to use a definition of the term rather than the term itself. Another way would be to conduct a pilot study examining attitudes and interpretations of key concepts in the cultures to be compared.

Argentinean and Swedish adolescents’ dieting rates in relation to adolescents in other cultures

The finding also raises the question of how the prevalence of dieting among Swedish (13%) and Argentinean (33%) girls relates to the prevalence found among girls in other countries. International research suggests that the rate of Argentinean girls’ dieting is similar, or slightly below, the rates found among early-mid-adolescent girls in postindustrial countries, including England (35%; Roberts, McGuinness, Bilton, & Maxwell, 1999), Norway (35%; Lau & Alsaker, 2001), Australia (43%; Huon & Lim, 2000), and the USA (46%; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2012). This comparison suggests that dieting is as integral to Argentinean girls’ lives as it is to the lives of many girls in the postindustrial world.

In addition, the comparison suggests that dieting may be less prevalent among Swedish girls than one might have expected, suggesting that dieting may be less of a problem among Swedish girls than among girls in other postindustrial countries. It is worth noting that earlier studies examining dieting prevalence among Swedish girls have found higher dieting rates than the 13% found in Study I. Among the 14-year-old Swedish girls examined by Lunner et al. (2000), 38% had dieted, and among the 13-year-old Swedish girls examined by Edlund et al. (1999), 51% had engaged in weight loss attempts (the prevalence of current weight loss attempts found in Study I was much less,

28%). These findings may indicate that the act of dieting is decreasing among Swedish adolescent girls. Alternatively, Swedish girls may increasingly be refraining from reporting dieting behavior because of its negative connotations in Swedish society, as discussed above.

Factors related to Swedish adolescents' body image

Study II concentrated on Swedish adolescents. Specifically, its aim was to examine how a set of physical, sociocultural, and behavioral factors was related to three dimensions of Swedish adolescent girls' and boys' body-esteem: weight-based body-esteem (Weight), appearance-based body-esteem (Appearance), and beliefs about how others view one's body and appearance (Attribution).

Is it all about girls and weight?

Overall, the results showed that the factors examined (i.e., BMI, weight loss attempts, pubertal timing, body ideal internalization, and peer appearance teasing) were relevant to Swedish adolescents' body-esteem, particularly to girls' weight-based body-esteem. The fact that they were related mostly to the Weight dimension may not be completely surprising, considering that at least two of the factors examined are directly weight-related (i.e., BMI and weight loss attempts), while the other factors examined (i.e., pubertal timing, body ideal internalization, and peer appearance teasing) are indirectly weight-related. Indeed, the beginning of puberty entails an increase in bodyweight, body ideal internalization involves the adoption of a slender body ideal, and exposure to peer appearance teasing is more likely when overweight. In contrast to the Weight dimension, the Appearance and Attribution dimensions of body-esteem may involve feelings about weight *and* other aspects of one's appearance, and may therefore be related to a wider range of factors than is the Weight dimension. Still, the relatively high correlations between the Weight and Appearance dimensions for both girls and boys indicate that adolescents' evaluation of their weight is essential to their evaluation about their appearance.

The fact that the examined factors are related mostly to girls' body-esteem also deserves further attention. This finding suggests that body image research is generally more on the right track when it comes to distinguishing the

factors associated with girls' than with boys' body-esteem. Indeed, boys' body image has not been investigated to the same extent as has girls', and more research is urgently needed in order to understand how boys relate to their bodies. Ricciardelli and McCabe (2011) suggest that boys tend to value other aspects of their bodies than do girls, including those associated with enhanced sports performance, such as height, speed, strength, fitness, and endurance. Boys' normative preoccupation with "lean muscularity" (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2011) indicates that research on boys' body image needs to include not only aspects related to weight, appearance, and dieting, but also aspects related to leanness, muscularity, and exercise. It has been suggested that gendered experiences, such as conformity to masculine norms and masculine gender role stress, may put young men at risk of developing body image concerns (Blashill, 2011). However, according to recent findings, the relationship between young men's conformity to masculine norms and their body image concerns seems to vary across cultures (Franko et al., 2013).

The independent contribution of the factors examined

Across genders and body-esteem dimensions, body ideal internalization was the factor most strongly associated with adolescents' body-esteem. It predicted girls' body-esteem on all dimensions and boys' weight-based and appearance-based body-esteem. Importantly, this relationship also existed regardless of the adolescents' BMI, pubertal timing, experiences of peer appearance teasing, or weight loss attempts, a finding that strengthens the suggested importance of body ideal internalization for adolescents' body image. Several studies have found body ideal internalization to be related to adolescents' body-esteem, including longitudinal studies that are important for establishing causality (Cafri et al., 2005; Keery et al., 2004; Lawler & Nixon, 2011; Shroff & Thompson, 2006). The present findings suggest that body ideal internalization is as crucial to Swedish adolescents' body image as it is to many other adolescents in postindustrial countries. They also imply that the societal focus on physical attractiveness in Sweden may be internalized by Swedish adolescents, constituting the benchmark by which they judge their own body and appearance.

In line with previous research suggesting that overweight is stigmatized in Swedish society (e.g., Frisé et al., 2009; Lunde et al., 2007), Study II showed that both BMI and weight loss attempts were independently associated with Swedish adolescents' body-esteem. Interestingly, we found that BMI seemed to better predict girls' body-esteem (Weight and Attribution), while weight loss

attempts seemed to better predict boys' body-esteem (Weight and Appearance). This indicates that BMI is not as related to boys' body-esteem as it is to girls' body-esteem, not even when the curvilinear relationship is considered, as it is here. The finding may be because BMI cannot convey body composition information (i.e., the fat/muscle ratio), which is particularly relevant to boys' body image, as well as because being large (i.e., having a high BMI) is more synonymous with masculinity than with femininity. Questions about boys' actual weight loss attempts may provide better predictions of boys' body-esteem, because such attempts are more directly associated with boys' dissatisfaction. However, using body image measures that consider boys' preoccupation with leanness and muscularity may be more useful when trying to identify factors associated with boys' body-esteem.

Only among boys did pubertal timing play a significant role in the adolescents' body-esteem. Consistent with previous findings (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004), we found that early-maturing boys had lower body-esteem than did their peers (but only on the Weight subscale). At age 16, some of the boys examined in Study II might still be in the process of pubertal development and may feel discontent as their early-maturing peers have become taller, more muscular, and more ideally v-shaped, whereas they are still in the process of becoming so. In contrast, since girls' puberty generally begins two years earlier than does boys' (Steinberg, 2011), most 16-year-old girls have already finished their pubertal development. Therefore, pubertal timing may no longer play as important a role in body-esteem among girls at this age, as it appears to do among boys. The finding can also be seen as supporting Striegel-Moore et al.'s (2001) suggestion that it is not pubertal timing per se that influences girls' body-esteem, but rather the effect of early vs. late maturation on BMI.

Gender differences in a society known for its gender equality

The overarching aim of Study II was to examine whether the state of gender equality in Swedish society translates into the body image concerns of Swedish adolescents. The overall picture, however, suggests that the internationally well-established gender difference in body image, with girls being more dissatisfied than boys, exists among Swedish adolescents too. Only in the Attribution dimension of body-esteem did Swedish boys and girls experience the same level of body-esteem, indicating that they were similar in how they thought others viewed their body and appearance. However, Swedish girls' and boys' similarity

on the Attribution dimension is not specific to Swedish society; Mendelson et al. (2001) found similar results in their sample of 12–25-year-olds in Canada, and in Study I of this thesis, Argentinean girls and boys also scored similarly on the Attribution dimension (for a discussion of the Attribution dimension of body-esteem, see page 71).

Why is it that Swedish boys and girls, who grow up in one of the most gender-equal societies in the world, are not more similar in their body image concerns? An important factor is that, although considered one of the most gender-equal countries in the world, Sweden is far from having achieved complete gender equality. In the Swedish labor market, more women than men work temporarily or part-time, and women are generally paid less than men for the same number of working hours (Trost, 2012). Furthermore, Swedish politicians and the CEOs of large companies in Sweden are more often men than women (UMO, 2013, August 7). In addition, more women than men are afraid of being maltreated or abused, and more women than men in Sweden are sexually harassed (UMO, 2013, August 7). Accordingly, a study of Swedish 12-year-old girls demonstrated that many girls reported having been called sexually harassing terms such as “cunt” (38%) or “whore” (46%; Rembeck, Möller, & Gunnarsson, 2006). When a daily newspaper recently asked Swedes whether they thought that Sweden was a gender-equal country, eight out of ten responded “no,” indicating that they did not think so (*Metro*, 2012, March 8). Compared with other countries, and according to measures of reproductive health, schooling, and gender representation in parliament (UNDP, 2012), Sweden may be considered one of the most gender-equal countries in the world; however, in everyday life, there are still power differentials between Swedish men and women. As a result, Swedish girls and boys live in a society in which power inequities between the genders do exist (although they might be smaller than in other countries); in line with the ideas of objectification theory described above, these inequalities are mirrored in differing levels of body image concerns between the sexes. One might also question the stress experienced by Swedish adolescent girls living in a society assumed to be gender equal, while still possibly facing gender injustices.

Summarizing reflections on factors associated with Swedish adolescents' body-esteem

Study II demonstrated that the factors examined generally displayed a good fit with the adolescents' body image, particularly among girls and on the Weight dimension of body-esteem. Still, the finding raises questions about what other important factors might also have explained the adolescents' body-esteem. If we return to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) bioecological theory of human development, which was described above in relation to body image, there are many layers of systems that may constitute such important factors. Some factors that might be able to further explain adolescents' body-esteem may be self-esteem, self-objectification, perfectionism, engagement in appearance comparisons or "fat talk" with peers, experience of bullying, and parents' appearance-related comments and behaviors.

The importance of body ideal internalization to both boys' and girls' body-esteem implies that measures to prevent negative body image should target this aspect (e.g., through the media literacy approach, which will be discussed on page 67), though they are definitely not an all-encompassing solution to adolescents' body image concerns. This importance, however, suggests that research should further examine the processes by which adolescents internalize appearance ideals. Study IV of this thesis, investigating how adolescents with a positive body image relate to appearance ideals, is a useful example of such research.

While Study II was a group-level investigation, it should also be noted that there might be large individual differences in how the identified factors relate to adolescents' body-esteem. Individual differences may, for instance, stem from the importance the individual ascribes to a certain factor (e.g., if family is central to the individual, family may be more influential to his or her body image), and from the individual's personal interpretation of a studied event (e.g., if a person exposed to peer appearance teasing interpreted this event very negatively, it may be more influential).

Finally, I would argue that future studies on adolescents' body image would benefit from embracing more of a positive psychology perspective, to study not only the risk factors for adolescents' negative body image (which is mostly the case today), but also the protective factors and factors promoting a positive body image among adolescents.

Characteristics of adolescents with a positive body image

Studies III and IV examined positive body image in adolescence. Together, these two studies strengthen the idea of positive body image as something more than merely the opposite of negative body image. In line with previous conceptualizations of positive body image and body appreciation (Avalos et al., 2005; Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010), Study III showed that the adolescents had an accepting attitude to their bodies and were tolerant of perceived bodily imperfections. They also emphasized a functional view of the body, focusing on what their bodies could do rather than what their bodies looked like. A functional perspective was similarly found among the women studied by Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010) and has been emphasized in the concept of embodiment (Piran & Teall, 2012). Furthermore, in line with Wood-Barcalow et al.'s (2010) findings, Study IV showed that the adolescents were very critical of appearance ideals and had an alternative view of beauty that was flexible, based on personality more than looks, and emphasized the importance of looking like oneself. Although our participants were Swedish 14-year-old girls and boys and Wood-Barcalow et al.'s (2010) participants were 18–21-year-old US college women, our findings are remarkably similar. However, one difference between the findings merits further discussion, a difference possibly attributable to sample differences in age or culture.

Body acceptance versus body love

Unlike the women studied by Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010), who described loving their bodies, the adolescents we studied were much more modest in their descriptions. They perceived themselves as “average-looking” and accepted their bodies but did not express the kind of “love” for their bodies that the women did in Wood-Barcalow et al.'s (2010) study. This may be an indication of an age difference in positive body image, with adolescents' positive body image being about body acceptance but not body love, as found among the college women. Indeed, the adolescent years are characterized by fundamental physical, psychological, and social changes, and going through these changes with an accepting attitude to one's body is perhaps “as good as it gets” at that stage in life. Once through these changes, it may be easier to develop a loving relationship with one's body.

However, the fact that the adolescents we studied did not express body love may also depend on cultural factors. The modesty and Jante Law (Trost, 2012) typical of Swedish culture may well restrain people from expressing love for their bodies. It is possible that this way of describing one's body, as average-looking, is more pronounced among Swedes. Another noteworthy consideration in relation to culture is that, contrary to the findings of Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010), none of the adolescents we interviewed referred to religion or spirituality when speaking positively about their bodies, probably reflecting the more secular nature of Swedish society. These examples suggest that, although positive body image characteristics seem to be similar in US and Swedish samples, some aspects of positive body image may vary across cultures (and/or age groups).

Gender differences in adolescents' positive body image

Due to the lack of research on positive body image among males, it is worth noting that the positive body image characteristics found in Studies III and IV were very similar in girls and boys. It is an interesting finding considering that body image has been described as a gendered phenomenon, and the present results indicate that the positive aspect of body image may be less gendered. This idea is also supported by studies showing no gender differences (Swami, Hadji-Michael et al., 2008) or only a small gender difference (Swami, Stieger et al., 2008) in body appreciation. Taken together, these findings suggest that when the body image is positive and focused on functionality, appreciation, acceptance, and protection of the body, it may be more equal between both genders. This makes sense, since objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) suggests that gender differences in body image are a result of girls and women being socialized into self-objectification and to connect their self-worth with their appearance. When girls and women are able to appreciate, accept, and protect their bodies, and to view their bodies as functional tools rather than passive objects, their body image becomes less vulnerable and perhaps less gendered. Interestingly, in Study III, when we asked girls and boys with a positive body image about the aspects of their bodies that they were less satisfied with, almost none of them mentioned the aspects of typical concern for girls (e.g., the stomach or buttocks) and boys (e.g., muscularity). This finding suggests that positive body image may indeed be less gender-stereotypical than is negative body image.

Although positive body image characteristics were generally similar in the participating girls and boys, there was a gender difference in how they expressed their criticism of the ideals. Girls were generally much more elaborate and detailed than were the boys in their criticism and referred more often to unnatural and unrealistic ideals and to the media's ulterior motives in exploiting appearance ideals. Indeed, girls may be exposed to a greater volume of images conveying appearance ideals and may experience greater pressure to conform to body ideals than boys (Wykes & Gunter, 2005). Furthermore, the adolescents suggested that girls' appearance ideals were more unrealistic than boys' and therefore deserved stronger criticism. Ambjörnsson (2004) suggests that, since the 1990s, there has been ongoing debate in Sweden about young women, appearance, and societal influences that has made Swedish girls very aware of these issues. She also argues that discussing unrealistic ideals has become almost obligatory among Swedish girls, so these discussions may no longer have any major implications for their body image. This is worth considering, for instance, if interventions based on media literacy are to be used in Sweden.

Encouraging others to develop a positive body image

Drawing on the ideas of positive psychology, an important purpose of investigating positive body image is to identify strengths that may buffer against negative body image. If we are able to reinforce these strengths in people at risk, we are well on the road to more effective prevention. What strengths were identified among the adolescents with a positive body image, and how can we encourage others to cultivate these strengths?

Encouraging an accepting and functional view of the body

The findings of this thesis suggest that an important way to encourage others to be more positive toward their bodies is to encourage them to have an accepting and functional view of the body. I believe that these two perspectives often work together and may reinforce each other—a functional view may facilitate an accepting view and vice versa. The functional view (and thus also the accepting view) of the body may be promoted by exercise. The great majority of the adolescents participating in Studies III and IV were highly physically active and perceived exercise as a natural and joyful part of life. Previous research has found that exercise generally positively affects body image (Burgess, Grogan, & Burwitz, 2006; Hausenblas & Fallon, 2006), but that the effect may be negative

if exercise is engaged in for appearance reasons (e.g., weight control; Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008; Tiggemann & Williamson, 2000). These findings suggest that adolescents should be encouraged to engage in physical activity on a regular basis, especially in activities that they find joyful. It might be helpful to give adolescents the opportunity to try various activities, for example, in physical education classes at school, so that they can find one or more that they enjoy. It may be particularly important to encourage girls to participate in physical activity and sports. A study of a large sample ($n = 1002$) of 13–18-year-old Australian adolescent girls found that girls who participated in sports had a more functional view of their body, regardless of the type of sport (Abbott & Barber, 2011). Physical and mental “corseting,” as described by the developmental theory of embodiment (Piran & Teall, 2012), may hinder girls from engaging in sports and from viewing their bodies from a functional perspective; this corseting is mediated by sexualizing clothing that restricts girls’ ability to move and by discourses of femininity claiming that “pretty girls should not sweat” (Piran & Teall, 2012). However, it has been suggested that girls’ participation in sports provides them with a sense of empowerment, physical competence, and freedom to take up space (Daley & Hunter, 2001; Theberge, 2003). Developing a critical view of social expectations concerning gender and physical activity may be just as important as encouraging girls to be physically active.

A somewhat different way to foster a functional and accepting view of the body is through exercises to change one’s thinking patterns. Swedish psychologists and researchers Ghaderi and Parling’s (2009) book *Lev med din kropp: om acceptans och självkänsla* (Live with your body: about acceptance and self-esteem) applies a mindfulness and cognitive behavioral therapy approach to help people get to know, accept, and use their bodies. A functional view of the body is highlighted, for example, by exercises intended to develop an awareness of the body through sensory experiences of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting in everyday life. Other researchers suggest that activities such as dance, yoga, and massage may encourage a functional view of the body (Rabinor & Bilich, 2011).

From an environmental perspective (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006), a functional and accepting view of the body needs to be promoted among adolescents through their many social contexts. Parents, peers, the school, the media, cultural attitudes, and gendered structures simultaneously shape adolescents’ body image and reflect how all the system layers of

Bronfenbrenner's model (1977), as described above, need to be targeted by negative body image prevention and intervention measures.

Encouraging media literacy and alternative views of beauty

The findings of this thesis suggest that another way of encouraging others to develop a more positive body image is to promote criticism of current ideals and to provide alternative views of beauty. An approach used in previous prevention efforts, referred to as the media literacy approach, involves teaching young people about advertising and its tactics (McVey et al., 2010; Neumark-Sztainer, Sherwood, Collier, & Hannan, 2000; Richardson, Shanel, Paxton, & Thomson, 2009; Wade, Davidson, & O'Dea, 2003). This approach raises many of the observations reported in Study IV, including lessons about the airbrushing of photographs, the homogeneity of body types shown in the media, and why advertisers might want us to be unhappy with the way we look (e.g., Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2000). The media literacy approach has proven useful in reducing weight concerns and appearance ideal internalization after intervention. However, one of its limitations is that its positive effect on body image aspects has sometimes been short in duration (e.g., Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2000). Piran and Mafri (2012) argue that a problem with such interventions is that they focus solely on individual factors (i.e., preventing body ideal internalization) and do not consider the wider social context in which the adolescents live. These researchers stress the importance of ecological and activism interventions targeting various aspects of the social and cultural context in order to foster change. Accordingly, in the case of media literacy, it is important to target the organizations that promote the unrealistic appearance ideals instead of focusing solely on changing the adolescents' way of relating to the ideals. Piran and Mafri (2012) cite examples of how ecological and activism approaches in the fashion industry have led to mandatory bans of extremely thin models in Spain and Italy, and how some countries are developing recommendations to foster healthier environments for models. On a macrostructural level, it is also important to change societal norms and gendered structures that shape how men and women are portrayed in the media.

Summarizing reflections on adolescents' positive body image

Research on positive body image is just beginning and the field will need time to be explored. Even though some of the first body image studies were conducted

many decades ago and research has since focused mainly on negative body image, many questions still remain regarding the negative aspects of body image. The concept of body appreciation has extended our knowledge of positive body image and has made it possible to measure positive body image beyond the concepts of body-esteem or body satisfaction. However, future qualitative in-depth studies of positive body image are essential in order to identify additional characteristics of positive body image and to more fully understand the factors associated with positive body image. An important task for future research is to implement our knowledge of positive body image in negative body image intervention and preventative measures. Such efforts should be wide-ranging, intervening at the individual, community, and macro levels.

In addition, it is my hope that future discussions of body image will not only be about preventing negative body image, but also about promoting positive body image. Prevention is based on the idea that most adolescents could develop a negative body image; in contrast, I believe that every adolescent has the potential to develop a positive body image. We just need to find out how.

Methodological discussion

Some methodological issues connected with this thesis merit discussion. First, the data collected for this thesis were from the longitudinal MOS project. In longitudinal data, there is always the risk of participants dropping off as the study moves along, making it difficult to know whether the sample at later measuring points is representative of the initial study population. However, the drop-off rate in the MOS project has been very low across measuring points, with 91% of the original sample participating at the second measuring point (at age 13) and 87% at the third measuring point (at age 16). Similarly, in the qualitative interview study of 14-year-old subjects, using a smaller sample recruited from the longitudinal sample ($n = 30$), only 2 parents, 3 boys, and 3 girls declined participation.

While the MOS project is a longitudinal project, longitudinal data were not used in this thesis. This may seem unfortunate considering that longitudinal data are essential in order to establish causality and would have made a valuable contribution to Study II. However, it should be noted that some of the variables included in Study II were not part of the questionnaire conducted at the age of 13 years and could therefore not have been examined longitudinally at the age of 16. For instance, body ideal internalization, which turned out to be the factor most strongly associated with 16-year-old adolescents' body-esteem, was not treated by the questionnaire conducted at age 13. It is worth mentioning that previous longitudinal research has established causal relationships between several of the factors examined in Study II and adolescents' body-esteem (Cattarin & Thompson, 1994; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004; Stice, 2001; Thompson, Covert et al., 1995). However, the contribution of Study II was that it examined this set of factors *simultaneously* to elucidate their independent association with adolescents' body-esteem dimensions.

Another aspect worth discussing involves the fact that some of the instruments used in Studies I and II were fairly simply structured, comprising only one-item questions (e.g., dieting, weight loss attempts, and peer appearance teasing). More comprehensive measures could have revealed useful information about the variables. Dieting behavior, for instance, could have been investigated in greater depth by questions about dieting frequency, motives, and definitions (for a discussion of dieting definitions, see page 56). By doing so, we might have been able to better understand the dieting behavior of Swedish and Argentinean girls in Study I. Also, when asking participants about their weight

loss attempts, it might have been useful to know how they had tried to lose weight (e.g., by dieting or exercising), making it possible to distinguish between different weight loss strategies. Likewise, participants' appearance teasing history, examined in Study II, could have been determined in more detail, for instance, by using the Perception of Teasing Scale (POTS; Thompson, Cattarin et al., 1995), which distinguishes between different types of teasing and also measures the degree to which participants perceive that the teasing has affected them. However, while such comprehensive measures could have revealed important information, we had to weigh the benefits of including them against the disadvantages of a questionnaire that would be excessively long and time-consuming for the participants to complete (since it also included a section about bullying). Excessively long and time-consuming questionnaires can tire out the participants as they complete them, likely resulting in many missing values. In addition, psychology researchers have suggested that single-question items can sometimes capture a construct of interest as well as a multi-item scale can, especially when the construct is relatively narrow and unambiguous to the respondents (Ranieri, Klimidis, & Rosenthal, 1994; Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997).

The quantitative body image measure used in all four studies was the Body-Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA; Mendelson et al., 2001). The BESAA is a global measure of body image that considers three dimensions of body-esteem: feelings about weight, feelings about appearance, and beliefs about how others view one's body and appearance.

Other often-used measures of adolescents' global body image are figural rating scales (e.g., Thompson & Altabe, 1991) or more site-specific measures, such as the Body Dissatisfaction Scale of the Eating Disorder Inventory (EDI-BD; Garner, Olmstead, & Polivy, 1983). Figural rating scales typically entail the use of a range of different-sized silhouettes, in order to calculate a discrepancy score for participants' current vs. ideal body size. Like the BESAA, it is a measure that is comprehensible, easily administered, and suitable for adolescents or even younger subjects (Hill, 2011). Figural rating scales are among the most commonly used measures of body image, and several researchers have adjusted them to be applicable across ages, genders, and cultures (e.g., Jaeger et al., 2002). However, figural rating scales have also been criticized for their scale coarseness, restriction of response alternatives, method of presentation, etc. (Gardner, Friedman, & Jackson, 1998). The other often-used measure of adolescents' body image, the EDI-BD, measures participants'

degree of agreement that various body parts are too large (e.g., thighs, hips, stomach, and body shape). Like figural rating scales, the EDI-BD has been validated for use among adolescents (Hill, 2011). Moreover, an advantage of the EDI-BD is that it takes into consideration that adolescents may feel differently about different parts of their bodies. A disadvantage of using the EDI-BD in the context of body image (and not disordered eating) research is that it focuses solely on the perception of body parts being too large; perceptions of body parts being too small and non-size-related issues with one's body are disregarded. One may also criticize the use of the EDI-BD among adolescent boys due to its concentration on aspects most typical of girls' concerns (e.g., thighs and hips), not capturing the aspects most typical of boys' concerns (e.g., muscularity). As a way to overcome this problem, some researchers using the EDI-BD have extended the scale to include aspects of the body more relevant to boys' body image (e.g., chest and bicep size; Jones & Crawford, 2005).

As concerns the BESAA, the lack of attention to muscularity is similarly a concern. This might be particularly true when used among slightly older boys who may have internalized the muscular ideal to a greater extent. Accordingly, when investigating 16-year-old boys in Study II, we could have combined the BESAA with some measure of satisfaction with muscularity (e.g., the Drive for Muscularity Scale [DMS], McCreary & Sasse, 2000). In addition, the Behavior subscale of the DMS would have made a valuable complement to the weight loss behavior measured in Study II, enabling an investigation of boys' weight-lifting behaviors as well as their use of muscle-building substances. Still, I would argue that the global nature of BESAA and its focus on both weight and appearance probably captures a large share of boys' body image concerns. A boy who is dissatisfied with his muscularity will likely also admit to being dissatisfied with his appearance and/or weight. Also, considering the longitudinal character of the MOS project, the BESAA has proven to be a valuable measure adapting well to a large age range (so far, 10–21 years) and the extended project duration (so far, 2000–2011).

Another aspect of the BESAA worth discussing is the body-esteem dimension of Attribution, referring to beliefs about how others view one's body and appearance. There are several indications throughout this thesis that the Attribution dimension may function slightly differently from the other two subscales, Weight and Appearance. First, in the examination of factors associated with adolescents' body-esteem in Study II, there was much lower explained variance on the Attribution dimension (2–6%) than on the other two

dimensions (Weight 19–42%, Appearance 13–31%). Second, in that same study, we found no gender differences in attributional body-esteem, whereas there were clear gender differences on the other two dimensions. Third, in both Studies I and II, the Cronbach's alphas measuring reliability on the Attribution dimension were consistently lower (ranging from $\alpha = .64$ to $\alpha = .80$) than on the other two dimensions (lower Cronbach's alphas on the Attribution scale were similarly found when the BESAA was originally developed; Mendelson et al., 2001). Altogether, these findings suggest that the Attribution dimension of body-esteem functions slightly differently from the other two dimensions, and one may question why this is the case. Indeed, the Attribution dimension differs in an important way from the other two dimensions: whereas the Weight and Appearance dimensions measure the individual's *own* perspective of his/her body, the Attribution dimension measures the individual's perspective of how *others* may perceive his or her body. The Attribution dimension involves taking the perspective of others and therefore by definition already differs from the other two dimensions. As concerns the non-existence of gender differences on the Attribution dimension, a close look at the girls' and boys' mean scores on the body-esteem dimensions reported in Studies I and II shows that girls' scores are fairly similar on all three body-esteem dimensions, but that boys have lower scores on the Attribution dimension than on the other two dimensions. This may indicate that boys are more insecure about their bodies in the eyes of others, whereas their own perceptions of their bodies are not necessarily negative. In addition, my experience from MOS pilot studies, in which participants were asked about how they experienced the questions, is that adolescents often have difficulties answering questions about what other people think about how they look (asking, e.g., "How should I know what they think?"), especially among younger adolescents. Interestingly, research using the BESAA with adult samples has found higher Cronbach's alphas on the Attribution dimension, comparable with those on the other two dimensions (Jung & Forbes, 2006). The low Cronbach's alphas found in Studies I and II may thus be a consequence of the participants' relative youth. Still, the attributional aspect of body-esteem should not be discounted, because how people assume they look to others is critical to helping them form opinions about themselves. Instead, one should make sure that questions about the attributional aspect of body-esteem are age (and culturally) relevant and easily comprehensible.

Another methodological issue is that the BESAA was used in recruiting participants with a positive body image for Studies III and IV. Specifically,

participants were recruited based on their high body-esteem scores on the BESAA at ages 10 and 13 years. It is worth considering whether the recruited sample of thirty adolescents would have been different had we used a different body image measure. Focusing on the aspects of bodyweight and body appearance, one might argue that the BESAA does not capture some of the essence of positive body image, including the acceptance, appreciation, respect, and protection of the body. What thirty adolescents would have been sampled and what positive body image characteristics would we have found if we had recruited our participants using, for instance, the Body Appreciation Scale (BAS; Avalos et al., 2005), developed to measure positive body image? Obviously, the retrospective nature of the question makes it impossible to answer. In addition, the BAS was yet to be developed at the time when the longitudinal MOS project began in the year 2000. It should be emphasized, however, that our results were similar to those of a comparable study of college women with a positive body image (Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010), suggesting that our recruitment did not bias the results significantly. It is reasonable to assume that the global nature of BESAA (considering appearance, weight, and attribution) made it an appropriate measure for recruiting participants who regarded their bodies in generally positive terms.

Conclusions

This thesis investigated adolescents' body image and comprised two parts. The first part applied a cultural approach to adolescents' body image, comparing Swedish and Argentinean adolescents' body image and body-changing behaviors (Study I) as well as examining a set of factors associated with Swedish adolescents' body image (Study II). The second part of this thesis approached adolescents' body image from a positive psychology perspective, examining how adolescents with a positive body image reflected on their bodies, their views of exercise, and the influence of family and friends on their body image (Study III). Study IV focused on how adolescents with a positive body image reflected on appearance ideals.

While there are many cultural differences between Swedish and Argentinean society, Swedish and Argentinean adolescents were surprisingly similar in their levels of body-esteem. This finding indicates that Swedish and Argentinean adolescents, though geographically far from each other, may experience similar pressures to conform to cultural ideals about attractiveness. However, the high rates of dieting and weight loss attempts among Argentinean girls are alarming and merit further attention. In contrast, the remarkably low rate of dieting among Swedish girls is noteworthy. In its most hopeful interpretation, this finding may indicate that factors protective against girls' dieting are embedded in Swedish society, such as the occurrence of societal debates about the dangers of dieting. Future research, however, could also scrutinize dieting and weight loss behaviors to evaluate their meanings and connotations for Argentinean and Swedish girls, as well as these girls' motives for engaging in them.

The factors examined in association with Swedish adolescents' body-esteem generally displayed a good fit with the adolescents' body-esteem, in particular with girls' weight-based body-esteem. The finding reflects the body image fields' orientation toward girls and the issue of weight, and emphasizes the importance of also understanding boys' body image and non-weight-related body image. The results showed, however, that body ideal internalization was the examined factor that most strongly predicted both girls' (on all dimensions) and boys' (weight-based and appearance-based) body-esteem. The adoption of societal appearance ideals is clearly crucial to Swedish adolescent boys' and girls' body image, as it is to adolescents in many other parts of the world. In

addition, well-established gender differences in body-esteem, with girls experiencing lower body-esteem than do boys, were found among Swedish adolescents too. Thus, while Sweden is assumed to be one of the most gender-equal societies in the world, with similar opportunities for girls and boys, Swedish girls still experience more body image concerns than do boys. This finding sadly reflects the subtlety of the factors influencing girls to view their bodies negatively.

Interestingly, however, gender differences were less prominent when we focused on adolescents with a positive body image. Both girls and boys with a positive body image had an accepting attitude to their bodies and imperfections. Importantly, they emphasized a functional view of their bodies, focusing on what their bodies could do rather than how they looked. The vast majority of the adolescents were physically active and found exercise joyful and health-promoting. The results reflect the importance of encouraging adolescents to think of their bodies as functional, active, and useful rather than as passive, decorative objects. Based on our findings, girls, especially, should be encouraged to engage in physical activity and sports that they enjoy, in order to provide them with a sense of empowerment and freedom to take up space.

The perception of appearance ideals among adolescents with a positive body image was critical. These adolescents, girls in particular, described the appearance ideals as unnatural and unrealistic, and criticized the media for only showing those consistent with the ideals and for having ulterior motives in doing so. Instead, these adolescents defined beauty widely and flexibly, stressed the importance of looking like “oneself,” and conveyed the idea that personality outweighed looks. The perception of beauty as subjective was especially prominent among the boys. The findings suggest that media literacy interventions and providing adolescents with alternative views of beauty may be helpful in promoting positive body image among adolescents. Future qualitative in-depth studies of positive body image are essential in order to identify additional positive body image characteristics and to better understand the factors associated with positive body image. An important task for future research is to implement our knowledge of positive body image in negative body image intervention and prevention measures. Such efforts should be wide-ranging, intervening at the individual, community, and macro levels.

Finally, I hope that adolescents’ body image will be continually investigated through the lenses of culture, gender, and positive psychology. These perspectives are essential if we wish to understand adolescents’ body

image and to discover how adolescents can be encouraged to appreciate their bodies.

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APPENDIX

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