EATING PATTERNS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH BODY IMAGE AMONG DUTCH TEENAGERS

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Summary

Eating is a cultural and symbolic activity and eating patterns go beyond just giving nutrients to the organism. Eating is not only an organic need but also a psychological and cultural one, what is normal, and abnormal cannot be easily measured. Eating practices are closely related to the image of the body because the shape of the body depends to a great extent on the quality and quantity of food that is ingested.

In the current times there is an increasing interest in body image and eating patterns in teenagers. That interest lays in messages that are transmitted by medical discourse and mass media. These messages include the fear of being obese or suffering from eating disorders. These double messages make it very difficult for the adolescent population to know how to eat properly.

This study aims to explore the question of how adolescent girls and boys in the Netherlands actually eat and the relationship between eating and their perception of their body. The study was carried out among two groups of teenagers in a Lyceum in Amsterdam. Data was collected using focus group discussions and I had individual interviews with six girls and three boys. The main topics discussed were eating patterns, the body ideal in the Netherlands and the relationship that peers, parents and the mass media play in the perception of the body.

I contrasted these findings with my previous study of body perception among girls in Medellín (Colombia) and it led to interesting conclusions. Although the Netherlands and Colombia are Western countries in their way of eating, the perception and they way teenagers handle their body in the two cultures is very different.
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Chapter One
Introduction

We all have an emotional and culturally-shaped relationship to food: We sometimes eat foods we love for comfort and sometimes stay away from certain foods out of health or aesthetic concerns. We sort through masses of information, sometimes contradictory and often confounding, about which foods promote and which foods diminish health. We contend with and try to make sense of advertising, a major force in our culture, which extols the abstemious physique while simultaneously enticing us to indulge in treats.¹

The quotation above encompasses the most important issues I will discuss in this thesis. This introductory paragraph (above) is an extract from an information sheet of a counseling center, and it subsequently approaches the body and food in a very medicalized way, another aspect I will attend to in this study. What struck me was how the topic of the body and its relationship to eating was at once similar in many countries, while also showing a great deal of variety.

In spite of the globalization, different cultural communities maintain ideals and notions about the body, its weight, beauty, health and how to achieve it by, e.g. eating, or not eating, etc. These ideas and practices have repercussions for the expectations that adolescents have concerning their bodies. Such expectations give meaning to the way they eat, the perception of their bodies, and other practices related to their body.

In 2000 I conducted a study in Medellin, Colombia about the body perception among female adolescent. What I found there increased my interest in the way teenagers in different cultural settings perceive their bodies and give meaning to the messages they receive from parents, peers and media.

What I found in Medellin was striking, because even while Colombia is considered a third world country and the attention given to the teenagers is more oriented to prevent malnutrition, there was a preoccupation with the body. The eating patterns of many girls were extreme; sometimes girls

¹ [http://www.barnard.edu/counsel/brochures/eating.html](http://www.barnard.edu/counsel/brochures/eating.html) - Furman Counseling Center
received silicone to enlarge their breasts on their 15th birthday (very special birthday in Colombian culture)

My aim in my previous research was to observe girls that were not considered anorexic or bulimic from a medical or psychological perspective. I had interviews with eight girls in a medium class school and I found out that all of them presented what they or their parents considered unhealthy eating patterns. The girls argued that their reasons for eating in an inappropriate way were to obtain a body that is considered beautiful in Colombia. However, during the interviews I discovered that there were deeper reasons that were related to gender and political forces.

The previous research made me think two things: Firstly, the borders between what is considered normal and abnormal eating are not clear and are sometimes confused with each other. Secondly, that mass media promote very similar ideals almost everywhere in the Western world but the way in which adolescents understand and give weight to these messages, and the way in which they influence young people, may differ in various cultural settings. We are frequently told in Colombia that one of the reasons why our teenagers want to be extremely skinny is because they want to fit into American and European beauty patterns. It influenced my interest in how European girls perceive their bodies and how they deal with the ideal body image in the Western.

1.1 Background: The body in Western society

On October 11, 2004, a Dutch TV discussion program “Jongerenlagerhuis” presented the results of a study done by TNO (de Nederlandse Organisatie voor toegepast-natuurwetenschappelijk onderzoek). The research involved 1188 participants and showed that that 80% of the girls between the ages of 13 – 18 years old had been dieting. About 50% of these youngsters were dieting in an unhealthy way. The results of this research were presented on October 5 and 6th 2004 at the “Landelijk Congres Eetstoornissen” in Rotterdam. This indicates that in the Netherlands, as in the most of the
Western world, eating patterns of teenaged girls are viewed as a source of concern.

Not much research has been done on how boys feel about their bodies. According to Cohn and Pope (2001) “Recent studies, however, have shown that men may also suffer from body image preoccupations”, so it is becoming clear that body image and eating, and effects to influence the shape of the body, might be a cause of distress among boys too.

In my undergraduate studies as a Nutritionist I was taught about “normal” and “abnormal” eating behaviour. The first involves taking in the amount of energy and nutrients that the body needs. Eating too little might cause malnutrition and therefore the body loses weight and might lack nutrients such as proteins or vitamins. Eating more than needed, causes an excess of energy which is stored in the body as fat. This results in a thickening of the body, popularly known as “being fat”. There are also pathologies related to the excess of calories and fat, for example, cardiovascular disease. In conclusion, as far as nutritionists and doctors are concerned, the lack or the excess of calories and nutrients in the body implies ‘abnormality’ because it goes against the equilibrium of the organism and causes diseases. Eating too little or too much can be called abnormal or inadequate eating behaviour; it might cause an undesirable weight for the height and the age. The latter is catalogued in Nutrition sciences as malnutrition if the weight is under the recommended and overweight or obesity if the weight is over the recommended one. Even though there are ranges for the recommended weight, people that weights more or less than these standards is catalogued like presenting malnutrition, overweight or obesity depending on the weight.

Later, in my postgraduate studies in clinical psychology, the terms normality and abnormality were not so clear anymore. Eating is not just about providing energy and nutrients to the body as organism, and is not only a physiological activity but a psychological and cultural one as well. We can say that for humans, eating has never been a ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ activity. Eating is an activity that is related to the body, and as Baudrillard (1998) points out, all the contradictions of the consumer society converge in
the body. Manner of eating are ways in which people embody and experience these contradictions. For example, there are some diets that claim to help a person lose weight but they are unbalanced and frequently contain a higher percentage of fat than recommended. Many people, even when aware of this continue dieting and eating in a way that could be considered ‘abnormal’. Another example of ‘abnormal’ eating behaviour is people who eat too much because of factors like anxiety or hyperthyroidism. The same can be said about people who eat too little because they fear being fat. We can say that one side of the coin is obesity and the other side of the coin is anorexia. Although medical and psychological discourses try to normalize eating behaviour by telling people how to eat and what to eat it is impossible to normalize something that is shaped by cultural, emotional, and social factors. Eating patterns differ between cultures, between individuals, and between moments for individuals within each culture. Thus, it is impossible and counterproductive to speak of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ eating.

The interest in teenager’s perceptions of the body is due, among other things, to the importance given to eating disorders, which are considered abnormal due to medicalization in the Western. One example of that is a case of an eight year old Colombian girl who refused to eat for a short time and threw up just once. She was remitted by the physician to a psychiatrist who labelled her as bulimic and put her in on pharmacological treatment. These kinds of assumptions occur not only in medical and social sciences, but also in the mass media and in the public domain. An example of that are magazines providing self tests where girls can self diagnose if they are anorexic or bulimics.

Currently, there are social reactions of fear towards getting fat that are endorsed by public health and educational messages to prevent obesity. At the same time, something very similar occurs with extreme thinness and the perception of an increase in anorexia or bulimia. People are in a difficult position, they cannot eat too much because they fear obesity, but eating less is perceived as a danger to becoming anorexic. It can be said that eating patterns have been medicalized and “in relation to young women, it may be
that the perception of ‘normal’ and/or the possibility of this, is becoming painfully small” (Frost, 2005: 79)

I focus this study on the perception of teenagers, girls and boys towards their eating patterns and bodies. In this proposal I include the topic of anorexia because as argued by van Dongen (2000), anorexic and bulimic behaviour get their meaning “in the context of `normal’ behaviour”, and “the way in which people deal with food and our bodies is continued in anorexia in a strengthened way” (Van Dongen, 2000: 62), meaning that anorexia and bulimia are only an extreme example of what other people do in the rest of the society in a less patent way. That makes us consider anorexic or bulimic behaviours cannot be seen as an isolated or abnormal behaviour but thus as actions that find their explanation in the way the rest of the society is dealing with eating patterns.

1.2 Problem statement

A preoccupation with the body as well as the medicalization of eating in the Western makes it interesting to find out how eating patterns among adolescent girls are and how is the perception of their bodies related to their way of consuming or not consuming food.

During the transition from childhood to adulthood (adolescence) the body of an adolescent is a field of power and resistance because puberty implies the assumption of a changing body, not only because of physiological changes that follow puberty but also because the cultural issues that converge in the adolescent’s body. As van Dongen points out in Western society “The body is a central focus in the adolescent-culture. It is the main vehicle for identity” (van Dongen, 2000: 73). I refer here to identity in the way Sökefeld (2001) does as representations and strategies of actors who try to find their plural and intersecting identifications within the cultural, social and historical context. The Western ideal of being beautiful and thin, for girls, or muscled for boys has repercussions in the formation of identity. That does not mean that every teenager wants to be like the ideal but the choice of accepting or rejecting the established ideal reflects something important in
culture. The notion of an ideal body permeates into the society through medical and psychological discourses under the apparently innocuous banner of health and by the mass media and beauty industry that promotes its own ideal as reference for normality and attractiveness.

Besides the influence of the mass media and medical and psychological discourses, there are other issues that have an effect on eating patterns in adolescent girls and boys. These include social norms, the influence of the family, peers, and other social relationships including boyfriends and girlfriends. Perceptions of health and illness are other factors that affect on the way teenagers eat because some of them might consume food in a certain way to be healthy, and avoid others for being considered unhealthy. Another issue that is important to contemplate is, as explained before, the medicalization of eating patterns, which converts behaviour that is supposedly ‘natural’ into a medical concern and even pathology and thus to be ‘treated’. The meaning given to food, eating, and the body are also important issues that need to be considered when studying the way teenagers eat.

1.3 Literature Review

Having worked with the topic of the body and food in my previous research it is clear that there is an increasing preoccupation among adolescent’s concerning their own bodies. In my previous research about teenage girls’ perception of the body in Medellín (Colombia) in 2000, I found out that even in a population with ‘normal’ weight, most of the teenager’s stories focused on the anguish and difficulty of finding ways to maintain their weight or having what they considered as ‘normal’ eating behaviour. Girls were aware of the importance of having a well-shaped body and they feared fatness almost in the same way as being “sick of anorexia”. Girls as well as their families were concerned about their bodies, either because they did not accomplish the beauty ideal or because the girls were considered by themselves or told by their parents that they were unhealthy eaters. Another issue that emerged was that the bodies as represented in education and
health and mass media sent out confusing messages about the perfect body and the proper way of eating. On the one hand, being fat is something ‘bad’ because it is considered unhealthy and ugly and on the other hand, eating disorders are feared. Both share the label of being “unhealthy” and abnormal. That is why eating patterns of teenagers bring light to the understanding of how teenagers are embodying this cultural contradiction.

To facilitate the understanding of eating patterns and their relationship to the perception of the body, it is necessary to consider what the body is and what the activity of eating implies. In this literature review I will cover these issues as well as how the medicalization of eating patterns and the messages the consumer society transmits (about eating and the ideal shape of the body), makes ‘eating normal’ or ‘eating healthy’ a concept that becomes more and more complicated for teenagers. This is particularly clear in the case of Colombian girls. Additionally, I will show how ‘abnormal’ eating behaviour have been present in history and have been frequent in every period. I will present a brief summary of what was considered ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ through history to emphasize that eating ‘disorders’ are not exclusive to current times.

1.3.1 Constructions of the body:

The human body is not just an organism with a physical presence; it also has a social component. As Helman C. wrote: “In every society, the human body has a social as well as a physical reality”. (Helman, 2000: 12). The body represents our psyche and consciousness and is the means by which we communicate with other people. Therefore, the body is more than merely a physical object. Janzen writes: “In critical medical anthropology, all topics and issues come together in the body, a site of experience, control, resistance, articulation, and identity” (Janzen, 2002: 44). The body is a physical reality but is equally a social symbol, and a space where relationships of power and control take place.

The body is the first thing other people see if they look at us, whether we want it or not. The individual constructs an image of his/her body, but a
social reference is needed to make that construction possible. In other words, the individual constructs the body within the ambit of a specific culture, which influences the self-perception of his/her own body and other people’s bodies. Cultural norms and values influence perceptions of whether a body is healthy, beautiful or not, clean, ‘abnormal’, or dirty. We can say that body image is a bio-psycho-cultural construction:

The body image, then, is something acquired by every individual as part of growing up in a particular family, culture, or society – although there are, of course, individual variations in body image within any of these groups (Helman, 2000: 12).

The image of the body is not static. Emotional and physiological states can change the perception of the body. Puberty implies the assumption of a different body, because the individual has to recognize and interiorise the new changes that her/his body is presenting. It is caused not only because of the growth and biological changes of the body and what it entails for the boy or girl, but also because the social environment, the expectations of every culture and patterns that every society has about the body image play an important role in the perception and experience of the changing body.

Concluding, the body is not an objective construction that can be measured. The way people manage their bodies cannot always be explained in a rational, physiological way. Eating is a good example of this.

**1.3.2 Eating, body and medicalization:**

Eating is not only a biological and mechanical activity. As Mintz and Du Bois point out:

Like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships, food serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart. (...) food functions in social allocation, in terms of ethnicity, race, nationality, class, and (less precisely) individuality and gender. (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002: 109).

Therefore, eating is not only a physiological need but a symbol of cultural and individual values. Eating is not a natural and normal activity because
food and eating are more than the supply of nutrients to the human body. In that perspective, eating behaviour acquires a meaning, moreover, when it is viewed as 'abnormal' or considered as pathological. As van Dongen (2001) shows in her discussion on anorexia, what is considered a deviant eating pattern’s representative of behaviour happening in a less extreme way in the rest of the cultural setting they are presented in. A historical review of what is considered as abnormal eating patterns is interesting because it illustrates how eating has never been a ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ activity.

Conflicting eating behaviour are not a new phenomenon. It is unusual compared to what is considered normal, in a defined historical moment. During the middle ages, it was very common to find martyrs and saints that fasted for a long time, and had problems with ‘normal’ eating behaviour during that time. One example of these saints is Saint Catherine of Siena\(^2\) (1347-80) who was canonized in 1461 and now is recognized because fasting in a way that remembers the actual anorexia. Many young girls followed the example of the saints who starved themselves to be physically and spiritually ‘pure’ and to reach the eternal life in heaven.

In the 19th century, there was what was viewed as an epidemic of anorexia in Morzine in France. Fendrik (1997) shows in her book “Holy Anorexia” that in Morzine, many young and older women and some men presented anorexic symptoms. In that time it was believed to be the result of demonic possession but after that it resulted to be more a reaction to a political oppression.

Osamu Kanamori, in his article, “Cultural Morphology of Eating Disorders” explains how Susie Orback in her book “Hunger Strike” tells how anorexia is linked to gender and power forces. Ways of eating and the shape of the body are not only related to the ideal body but is also a form of power and control:

With sustained fasting, anorexic patients lose their curvilinear bodies and menses, in order to de-womanize themselves. That means that they refuse in their way to obey to the predominant social norms, by alienating from expected femininity. At the same time, Orback doesn’t adopt a purely accusatorial stance because she admits that sometimes women take advantage of the same imposed

What now we consider ‘abnormal’ was not always considered strange or unusual. This shows that the label ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ is something cultural that tells us something about the society where these patterns are presented and represented.

Bulimic behaviour was ‘normal’ among people during the Roman Empire. It was quite acceptable to vomit after orgiastic fests. It was so common that Romans had vomitoriums specifically made for that purpose. Another example of something accepted in the past but rejected nowadays is being fat it was not always a synonym of impeding chronic disease. It was considered a status:

“In the renaissance period, the paintings and sculptures of well-padded females by Botticelli, Da Vinci and Raphael or the curvaceous nudes of Rubens all suggest that a certain degree of obesity was admired. In the 18th century, the possession of a bulging paunch was not regarded as exceptional or as a matter of shame”. (Carmichael, 1999: 7)

These facts show that conflicting behaviour related to eating is not new, but it was seen differently. The fact that biomedical and psychological discourses are so focused on eating disorders nowadays is not because they are new, but because they have political, economical and social connotations. “By transforming them into medical diseases they can be controlled and limited so that the social order will not be threatened” (van Dongen, 2000: 59). Deviant eating behaviour represents a danger to what is considered healthy and normal for the society. In many Western countries medical and psychological discourses are the new arbiters of healthiness and disease, normal and abnormal and of morality and immorality. Thus labelling certain behaviour as “eating disorders” in a “new pandemic lends it the power to ‘normalize’ and control.

Some people perceive abnormal eating patterns as “contagious” in the sense that they can be spread from one individual to another. During my period as a teacher at the University of Antioquia, Colombia some of my students were worried about contracting ‘the disease’ of anorexia or bulimia.
On the other hand, it is well known that being overweight is something that teenagers avoid in Western society. Nichter and Vuckovic show how “fat talk and dissatisfaction with weight are a result of several factors, including social comparison with other girls, a desire to be popular with boys and media and family influences” (Nichter and Vuckovic, 1994: 120) Obesity is seen not only as a physiological disease but as a mental one, when the person that eats more than needed, is perceived as having an anxiety disorder, low self-esteem, or lack of self-control or will power.

Biomedicine and some of the psychological discourses often approach eating patterns in the same way they approach organic diseases. The most common view is that there are both biological and psychological predispositions that are important in the aetiology of deviant eating behaviours. Cultural facts are often seen as only involving the influence of the mass media. This narrow assumption makes it important to provide a critical analysis of the role that mass media plays in the perception of the body of teenagers.

1.3.3 Body image and mass media:

Even if conflicting eating patterns are not a new phenomenon, they are treated as such and they raise a lot of interest because in Western society, there is an increasing preoccupation with the body. It can be seen on TV, in magazines, and in the proliferation of places specialized in aesthetics. Even medical discourses are concerned with beauty. Health is often linked with beauty. Physical appearance is the new established social order and has to be followed in order to be accepted.

The question that should be raised is why being thin is the beauty ideal that is encouraged and accepted nowadays, instead of assuming, as biomedical and psychological discourses do, that girls become thin and ‘anorexic’ and eat in the way they do just because it will help them to acquire a slim figure, in order to look like thin models or because they have low self esteem. It is necessary to look more into the political and gendered reasons underneath the thinness movement. In a campaign to include not very thin
models in publicity in Colombia a designer says: “being overweight is not aesthetical, the parameter comes from Europe and we would look like provincial people if we modify it”[Los kilos de más rompen con la estética. Los parámetros de belleza vienen de Europa y quedariamos como provincianos si los modificamos] Thus notions of backwardness and modernity is also attached to particular body shapes.

Bernárdez (2000) says the manipulation of the bodies is something typical of our consumer society. People struggle ‘against’ the body because the mechanistic model of the body is now so common that it increases the belief that it is possible to surpass the limits of the one’s body. These limits are not outside the body, as in the Middle Ages (for example with the prohibitions about avoiding corporal appetites). It can be said that nowadays the limits are inside the one’s body and to stop eating or showing extreme behaviours related to the body is one of the way of controlling and comodifying the body.

... hablar de publicidad, es hablar de un discurso inscrito dentro de la sociedad de masas; es un producto cultural inserto en una industria específica, en lo que se ha denominado “sociedad de masas”. La publicidad es un mecanismo para crear imágenes, y por lo tanto, una actividad significativa, donde los sujetos se inscriben y se representan dentro de una ideología.

[...to talk about publicity is to talk about a discourse that is inscribed inside of the consumption society, is a cultural product of a specific industry which has been named as “culture of the masses”. Publicity is a mechanism to create images and therefore, a meaningful activity where the subjects inscribe and represent themselves in an ideology] (Bernárdez, 2000: 70)

We can say that the body ideal is a social construction and in conforming to models of beauty, there are no victims or culprits. To some extent models of beauty are created by people themselves, yet it equally involves relations of power, e.g. when women's bodies are objectified and commodified. It means that models of beauty are accepted, perpetuated, sustained and replicated by the mass media and consumer society. Frost (2005) quotes Goffman’s analysis of society saying that “women are both the products and the producers of social meanings.” (Frost, 2005: 66). Not all the people that follows the beauty ideal and not all of them adhere to it. They are often considered “out of the norm” and frequently seen as ‘out of fashion’ be
labelled as ‘fat’, ‘anorexic’ or ‘bulimic’. In Medellín, Colombia, since there was a campaign against extreme thinness, there is a generalized assumption that most models are anorexic because they are extremely thin, and they have to maintain low weight to be accepted by modelling agencies, thus the mass media are seen as in large part responsible for the increase in amount of eating disorders among the girls in the city. On the other hand, someone who is overweight is labelled as fat and should go on a diet. Thus, there is an ideal sustained and perpetuated by consumer society and the mass media. People, and especially women, who do not fit into this model of beauty or of normality easily become labelled as deviant in some way.

The ideal of beauty, and health, is perpetuated because it has a regulating function. As Scheper-Hughes and Lock say: “In addition to controlling bodies in time of a crisis, societies regularly reproduce and socialize the kind of bodies they need” (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1998: 363). In that perspective, ‘abnormal’ or ‘deviant’ eating patterns are rather mirrors of what happens in the larger society. The medicalization of the body is supported by the mass media as they both create a model of body and give parameters of behaviour to follow. The ideas of a healthy and beautiful body is related to issues like power and gender. As Seppä points out:

Seen through these real historical experiences, the new freedom women are often claimed to have over their bodies in the era of body building, plastic surgery and personal training programs, seems to be just another historical expression of the normalizing power that has not simply increased their freedom, but has also tended to make them more docile in new ways. (Seppä, 2003: 38)

Nevertheless, mass media plays a role and needs to be considered when studying eating disorders. Mass media forms a discourse that is part of Western society. What has to be stressed is that the beauty and thinness ideal is not the only factor related to eating disorders, because we cannot forget that mass media are the product of economical, political and gender forces. What is seen as beautiful is nevertheless not the same in every culture. The manifestation of conflicts with the body is present almost everywhere, but they may differ depending on the cultural setting.
1.3.4 Body Perception and Eating Practices in the Netherlands:

In reviewing English literature about perceptions and eating patterns among young girls in the Netherlands, I found some quantitative data that shows that as in the rest of Western Society, the body is a place where contradictions and conflicts are presented and represented.

In 1997, McElhone et al. did a study on body image in the European Union. They studied the relationship between the perception of the body concerning recent weight changes and strategies for weight loss in a nationally representative sample in the European Union. The research involved in 15239 subjects aged 15 years and upwards. The conclusion of the study was that only 39% of the people interviewed, were pleased with their body image. The highest percentage of people satisfied with their body image was among females that were underweight (58%) and males that were of normal weight (66%). Dieting was the strategy used the most to lose weight among females. In comparison, males used more exercising for the same purpose. The conclusions of that study are that both geographical and sociodemographical influences on body image perception are evident in European Union. There were significant differences in relation to gender. These differences show how women, more than men, want to be thinner while underweight females are most satisfied with their body image. In the Netherlands, 1010 people answered the questionnaire, 45% perceived their ideal weight as lighter than the one they had, 10% perceived the ideal weight considerably lighter than the one they had; 38% of the population were content with their weight and only 7% wanted to be heavier.

The figures in the Netherlands are very similar than the ones presented in the fifteen countries in the European Union. The study showed that 44% of the people wanted to be lighter, 10% considerably lighter, 39% were satisfied with their weight and 7% wanted to be heavier as the table below illustrates.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Heavier</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Lighter</th>
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<td>The Netherlands</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU average*</td>
<td>15239</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Weighted according to population size.

Another study done in 1998, among 257 high school girls in Belgium, showed that a positive relation between being overweight, body dissatisfaction and a negative body image in adolescence, might have their roots in the experience of being overweight in childhood.

In the Netherlands a study was conducted by Noordenbos et al. It analysed 369 letters written by former patients of the Dutch Foundation of Anorexia and Bulimia Nervosa from 1979 to 1995. Patients with eating disorders for more than 10 years experienced more negative experiences with treatment, especially behavioural therapy, tube feeding, and admission to the hospital. Most of these women lost faith in any further treatment. The study also showed that one woman, who had had anorexia for 50 years, nevertheless recovered. One of the conclusions of the study is that even in the case of long-lasting eating disorders, recovery is possible, and the term “chronic” eating disorders should be not used because of the stigma it implies.

Another study conducted by Jansen et al (2005) in the Netherlands, was related to the perception of the parts of the body that are more problematic for women. They studied eye movement registration (electroculotherapy). Eating symptomatic and normal control participants were exposed to pictures of their own body and as well as control bodies. The data showed a decreased focus on their own 'beautiful' body parts in highly symptomatic participants. In contrast, they presented an increasing focus on their ‘ugly’ parts. In the normal control group, the opposite occurred, these participants focused more on their 'beautiful' body parts rather than on...
their ‘ugly’ body parts. When viewing other bodies, high symptom participants allocated their attention to the beautiful parts of other bodies, whereas normal controls concentrated on the ugly parts of the other bodies.

These studies illustrate the current interest in studying the body. However, few qualitative studies have been done on how adolescent girls perceive the body. One of the few articles covering this topic, was by Els van Dongen (2000), who she examined the medicalization of anorexia and found that is a way to discourage the threat of the social order. She showed how for girls, anorexia may be a way of resistance, power, control, getting a kick, and joy against the institutionalised order of the capitalist society in which they live.

It is important to study the lived experience of teenagers about their eating patterns because, even if many studies report a ‘dieting epidemic’ among adolescent females, research has barely “given voice to those afflicted. Specifically, the meaning of weight control to adolescent females has not been explored from the perspective of their lived experience” (Nichter and Vuckovic, 1994: 110) My study uses the ethnographic perspective that allows the teenagers to express the reasons they have to eat or not in a certain way and how is it related to the perception of their bodies.
Chapter Two
Methodology

This study regarding eating patterns related to the image of the body among teenagers in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, was conducted in a Lyceum in Amsterdam. I included boys and girls, the latter more opened to talk about the topics of body and food. The research was conducted during six weeks from the last week of May until the first week of July of 2005.

2.1 Research Themes:

Factors influencing eating patterns among teenagers:
- Perception of the body
- Health and illness beliefs and perceptions
- Family influence
- Peers influence
- Relationships influence
- Mass media influence
- Cultural norms and the way they influence the eating patterns

2.2 Research Questions:

- What is the meaning of the food among Dutch adolescent teenagers?
- Which are the factors influencing their eating patterns?
- How is the perception of their bodies?
- Which kind of relationship is there between eating patterns and perception of the body?

To achieve this, I interviewed Dutch teenagers, girls and boys and I used the methodology of focus group discussions and then, I realised more in depth interviews with the participants that were interested who were 3 boys and 6 girls.
2.3 **Study Type and Design:**

The study I conducted is a descriptive – analytical study. While there exists a great deal of research about the topic of eating patterns and perceptions of the body, however, I did not find a study that focuses on how girls in the Netherlands experience and perceive eating and body image. Additionally, I wanted to explore for the relationship that exists between eating patterns, body image, medicalization, and the factors of resistance and control that I found in the literature review.

The study involved adolescent girls and boys that were willing to talk about their eating patterns, first in focus groups and then in individual interviews. The data was collected by using the methodology of ethnographic interviewing and participant observation.

2.4 **Data Collection Techniques:**

Data was collected in two cycles:

**Cycle 1**

I used the focus group discussions about eating patterns and the perception of the body. I used questions like:
- How are a breakfast, lunch and dinner?
- What is considered a snack and a complete meal?
- What are considered the foods that make you fat and the ones that help you to be slim?
- Which kinds of diets are followed?
- How are a beautiful and an ugly body?
- Do they feel comfortable with the shape of their body?
- And other questions that come up with the discussions.
Cycle 2
The second cycle was done with the girls and boys that wanted to be interviewed more in-depth and the data was collected through unstructured interviews.

2.5 Sample:
Participants were Dutch adolescent females and males between the ages of 15 and 16 that reside in or around Amsterdam. I got in touch with them first contacting the director of one Lyceum who contacted me with two teachers that were in charge of the English courses. The focus group discussions and the interviews were done in the course hours.

2.6 Ethical Considerations:
The participants were interviewed without any obligations and with respect. All data collected was treated as confidential. I used pseudonyms instead of the real name of the participants.
Chapter Three
Eating patterns

In the following chapters I am going to look at my Dutch findings related to food, eating and the body against the background of the findings of my previous research among girls in Colombia because I want to highlight the cultural aspect of eating and the body.

In this chapter I will analyse the image of the body and eating patterns that are closely related and are shaped by culture. In the analysis of this data the main topics are eating patterns, how the body is perceived among teenagers, and how social relationships shape the image of the body. Concerning social relationships - the greatest influence was ascribed to peers, parents, and mass media. Other issues that are included are how teenagers perceive and experience activities related to the body such as tattoos and piercing, the consumption of alcohol and soft drugs and plastic surgeries or changes made to the body.

3.1 Eating patterns: The morality of eating well among Dutch teenagers

Eating patterns are an issue that is connected with many other topics such as, food as part of identity, food as a vehicle of health, food that reflects status, food related to the shape of the body, etc.

Dutch girls who participated in the study claimed that being thin is the ideal and that, depending on how you eat you will be thin or not. They are aware which foods are ‘healthy’ and ‘unhealthy’ (see Annexes) and which ones are considered to cause weight increase. However, they do not diet and they said that dieting in the puberty is not healthy because the body is growing up. Nevertheless, when interviewed individually, they referred to other girls, that did not belong to the group who dieted and even ‘do’ (as one of them said) anorexia or bulimia. The topic of anorexia and bulimia came up several times without being introduced by me, and the girls were very aware of the danger of becoming anorexic or bulimic as opposed to being healthy. I
found out that talking about dieting is an issue that causes concern because of the perceived risk of having anorexia, as one of the interviewed says; some “crazy people” don’t eat anything:

“T: Not many people that I know do any diet, but I know enough people not like the class I am in, the English class I don’t think many of those people, I think the classes we are in are kind of exceptions, like there are another classes I know crazy people, who don’t eat anything on the pass some people eat just plain bread on the pass but plain bread without anything on it. A lot of times they do it because they feel fat” (Dutch girl)

The action of dieting is not something established and clear, a lot of girls admit that they reduce or control the amount of food they eat but they don’t call it dieting.

G: I know someone that doesn’t eat dinner and breakfast. She skips. (Dutch girl)

G: Well I think people of my age they do not follow proper diets but they shorten what they eat. (Dutch girl)

T: I never had diet, at some point for a week I ate less meat, and then also before I tried to eat a little bit more because when I was younger I was really really skinny is amazing. (Dutch girl)

P: I tried to eat healthy and not with too much sugar, but that is. (Dutch girl)

It seems teenagers associated dieting with very little or no food intake, illness or anorexia and bulimia or with something that is ‘not good’ because teenagers are growing:

J: But I do have with myself if I spend like a day eating unhealthy food I eat lesser of the rest the rest of the day because I don’t want to gain weight, but is not like I am throwing up is just that if eat a lot the next meal will be smaller. (Dutch girl)

S: When you are growing, your body is changing and it can affect your growth and if you diet when you are growing and you have that growing point and if you have a diet it is wrong. (Dutch girl)
G: (Girl) I know a girl that stopped eating and she were too ill to study, she is still too ill. (Dutch girl)

Teenagers had very clear ideas about what a healthy way of eating involves. The general perception is that the Dutch way of eating is healthy. They compared the way Dutch people eat with other nationalities, mostly the United States:

G: Dutch people eat vegetables with meat and potatoes I think in general Dutch people don’t eat a lot, like American people, they eat quite normal
J: I think in Holland, if we compare it with the rest of the world we eat healthier and we are not so focused on the ideal but I think we are moving more towards that. (Dutch girl)

G: I think in general Dutch people don’t eat a lot, like American people, they eat quite normal. (Dutch girl)

G: some people eat at mc Donald’s but I don’t think is like the majority like in America eat after day, me, myself I don’t eat a lot in mc Donald’s only in some occasions. (Dutch girl)

Js: I think you have to eat from everything a little bit and vegetables a bit more. (Dutch girl)

G: I eat vegetables, sometimes in mc Donald's, but most of the time I eat healthy. (Dutch girl)

Healthy eating patterns include a particular way of eating that suggests some norms for the teenagers:

G: I have to eat healthy because I play tennis so I drink a lot of water and everyday vegetables and fruits. (Dutch girl)

J: Now that I am growing up, I am learning to appreciate things like sushi coz when I was younger I never ate sushi but now I am more healthy. (Dutch girl)

When asked if they dieted or knew someone that dieted they brought up the topic of anorexia and bulimia. There seemed to be strong association with dieting and eating disorders, maybe because mass media and medical
institutions send messages about the danger of a diet that goes out of control:

J: Of course, there are girls that do extreme girls like anorexia or bulimia but that is not common. (Dutch girl)

J: I do think we eat healthy we have that thing for chocolates but I don’t think any of my friends go like anorexia or like throwing up, i had that friend and she was seriously considering to take this fat (belly) out of her but that is not common. (Dutch girl)

G: Some people have Anorexia, eating nothing. (Dutch girl)

G: We know about anorexia because the Magazines. (Dutch girl)

Girls explained the causes of eating disorders:

G: it happens more in girls than in boys because the model and movie stars... (Dutch girl)

G: Girls are anorexic because they want to be thin and beautiful. (Dutch girl)

G: They think they are too fat. (Dutch girl)

It can be argued that health is something “that oscillates precariously between bodily control and corporeal ‘transgression’” (Williams, 1998: 449). On the one hand, being fat is unhealthy:

M: “People don’t like being fat because it is unhealthy”. (Dutch girl)

On the other hand, dieting is also potentially bad for health and is associated with illness. Being healthy is a demand that parents make on their children and in that sense, eating well means being a good girl or a boy and it takes on a moral meaning. However, a supervised diet by a nutritionist is not something common among teenagers, they say:

J: I think when you get in a very unhealthy state like when your weight is really endangered your life like for your heart or something then you go to a nutritionist, but for example when you walk in the band thing it shows you how many calories you burn.
In conclusion, the word ‘diet’ is associated with negative behavior by Dutch teenagers, mostly the girls. Being healthy is eating well and it will lead to an attractive / healthy body shape. Being fat or too thin is unhealthy and seen as undesirable.

In my results in Colombia, I found that teenagers have a very different view of dieting. I will describe how it is perceived there in the following paragraphs.

3.2 The other side of the coin: Health as an excuse among Colombian teenagers

In contrast to the Dutch teenagers, the Colombian girls in my previous study referred to dieting a great deal and they accepted that they were dieting all the time. They even explained in detail how they diet:

Thin girls of the classroom go to the gym and diet. They don’t eat sweets or fat or starch. Some of them diet without professional guidance. They drink a lot of water. (Colombian girl)

They eat dietetic things. (Colombian girl)

I don’t use sugar, I use sabro (sweeten product), honey and dietetic marmalade. (Colombian girl)

I got thinner making a diet where I don’t eat sweets; my breakfast is juice, one arepa (corn cake) and chocolate or whatever. I bring to school a fruit and water and the days I stay on school I bring a sandwich. If I eat lunch at home I eat whatever they cooked but with moderation. In the night I drink just an orange juice. When I go out with my friends I can eat ice cream or other things but with moderation. (Colombian girl) 3

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3 Las niñas flacas del salón van al gimnasio y hacen dietas. No comen dulces ni grasas ni harinas, algunas hacen dietas que no son orientadas. Toman mucha agua. (A)
Comen cosas dietéticas (A)

No consumo azúcar, consumo sabro, miel y mermelada dietética. (B)

Me adelgaze haciendo una dieta de no comer dulces; yo desayuno un jugo, una arepa, chocolate, lo que haya. Para el colegio me traigo una fruta y agua y los días que me quedo traigo además un sánduche. Si voy a mi casa a almorzar como lo que haya, pero moderado y por la noche sólo me tomo un jugo de naranja... Cuando salgo con mis amigos como helado o lo que sea, pero moderado (D)
The reason they gave for doing so, was related to social acceptance and also to gender relations and increasing sexual awareness:

We diet although we are in age of growth, because one feels better. Being the stage of the growth also it is the stage in which we are more sociable, is the stage of the boyfriends... (Colombian girl)

“If this was a society of fat people I would eat normal, but it is a society of skinny people, then I must eat less. (Colombian girl)4

Nevertheless, some teenagers preferred to be rather healthy than being obsessed with their figures:

I think that extremes are excessive and if you know how to follow a diet that is not very excessive then it has not to bring problems for your health. (Colombian girl)

I do not diet, but I take care of to my shape. (Colombian girl)

A balanced way of eating is more important than to dieting. (Colombian girl)5

Among Colombian teenagers, following a supervised diet is not something strange. Moreover, it is done habitually and considered healthy.

I diet and exercise. I have a supervised diet by a nutritionist. (Colombian girl)

A friend of my mother that is nutritionist was going to put me on a diet to me, but she has not called, I think I will follow the diet she sends me or I will continue with the one I am doing now. (Colombian girl)

I haven’t gone to the nutritionist, but I already asked to the doctor to sent to me to one but if she or he puts to me to eat more than what I do, I don’t believe that I will follow the diet. (Colombian girl)6

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4 Hacemos dieta aunque estemos en edad de crecimiento, porque uno se siente mejor. Por ser la etapa del crecimiento también es la etapa en que somos más sociables, es la etapa del novio... (J)
Si esta fuera una sociedad de gordos yo comería normal, pero es una sociedad de flacos, entonces tengo que comer menos. (E)

5 Yo pienso que todo extremo es excesivo y si uno sabe hacer una dieta que no sea muy excesiva no tiene porque traer problemas. (J)
No hago dieta, pero me cuido. (I)
Es más importante una alimentación balanceada que hacer dieta. (J)

6 Yo hago dieta y ejercicio. Tengo dieta dirigida, la controla una nutricionista. (B)
Una amiga de mi mamá que es nutricionista iba a hacerme una dieta, pero no me ha llamado, y pienso hacer la dieta que me manden o sí no, seguir con la que estoy (F)
It seems for the adolescent girls in Colombia being healthy involves dieting, but as long as the diet is supervised by a professional. This makes eating a very medicalized issue in Colombian culture. Unlike Dutch girls, Colombian teenagers do not see dieting as something bad or associated with ill health. It is accepted as something necessary since it enables a girl to have a thin body. Being fat is seen as something ugly and as an obstacle to having a relationship with a male. Girls accordingly seem to learn quite early that their bodies are objects to be remade in a way that will attract males, relationships and status.

3.3 “I am fat”

Despite the apparent abhorrence of dieting (which is associated with unhealthy and very little eating) Dutch girls nevertheless complained to friends about themselves being fat. Nichter and Vuckovic (1994) investigated similar behavior among teenagers in the United States. It can be said that in United States as in the Netherlands:

“The food is abundant and diverse, weight is a reference point for conventionalized statements about the way people feel about themselves and events in their lives. Such statements may not reflect actual behavior, but rather index important personal and cultural concerns. The issue of weight also promotes ritual exchanges which serve multiple purposes in conversation”
(Nichter and Vuckovic, 1994: 109)

“Fat talk” is a way of establishing social relationships. It plays a role among teenagers in the “negotiation of self and peer group interaction among adolescent teenagers” (Nichter and Vuckovic, 1994: 110). The Dutch interviewees indicated that when they say, “I am fat” it is not always, because they mean it:

T: Specially in my first year here, there were girls doing gym and when these girls were getting the gym clothes on they were saying like “I am fat, I don’t like how I look I am really fat” and they were
totally not fat at all and everybody in the gym were saying you are not fat you are not fat!!!. (Dutch girl)

J: Actually I do it myself, (saying “I am too fat”) because is just like we tell each other no you are not fat it is just, you know maybe you just want to hear that people tell you that you are not fat, that you are ok. (Dutch girl)

The girls explain why fat talk happens:

T: I think they probably say it because they actually think they are fat but I think other people do it because they want to hear they want an approval from other people and they want to hear that they are not fat. And they look fine so is sort a kind of attention. (Dutch girl)

Js: when girls say “I am fat” I think some girls really mean it but I think they also want to feel “no you are not” to feel confident. (Dutch girl)

As Nichter and Vuckovic (1994) point out the statement: “I’m so fat’ is not just an observation about one’s weight. It is a call for support from one’s peers, for affirmation that one is in fact not fat” (Nichter and Vuckovic, 1994: 113).

Among Colombian teenagers, the statement “I am fat” was also found but in a subtler way:

I asked to a friend: tell me the truth am I fat?” and she said "you are not fat but thinner would be better" that means that I am fat. (Colombian girl)

My friends say to me that I am not fat. (Colombian girl)

They want to be skinny. The most frequent complaint is that they are fat. (Colombian girl)7

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7 A una amiga le pregunte “dígame la verdad estoy gorda” y ella me dijo “gorda no, pero más delgada sería mejor” o sea que sí estoy gorda. (E) Mis amigos me dicen que no estoy gorda (E) Quieren ser flacas. La queja más frecuente es que están gordas (A)
Fat talk brings cohesion in the group. It is a way teenagers use to try to control their bodies and to form social relationships. Some of the Colombian girls told me that they were trying to start a diet together:

I want to lose weight, more or less 10 kilograms, that is why I diet. Once I was making a diet with a friend. It consisted in eating only fruits. A woman told us that it was dangerous and then now we stopped making that diet but now we don’t eat sugar. (Colombian girl)

It can be said, that in Colombia girls diet more and the “I’m fat” statement is followed more often with dieting. Among Dutch girls the statement “I am fat” is possibly a way to avoid the dieting or of relieving the stress of feeling a loss of control. For Colombian girls to say “I am fat” is more a way of sharing actions, it supports the dieting they already are doing together.

Concluding, for Dutch girls and Colombian girls as well, eating and the body are moral issues because being fat is something considered something to avoid and the fear of being anorexic and bulimic is seen as something ‘bad’. Even though for Dutch girls eating might be seen as the way of having a beauty ideal, it is not the way of getting relationships with males. Girls in both cultures are concerned about their bodies but for Dutch girls, dieting is something unhealthy, while for the Colombian girls dieting it is quite common and accepted. Dutch and Colombian girls share their worries with their peers and search for approbation by saying “I am so fat” but this statement seems to be more used among Dutch girls who, do not diet as often as Colombian girls do. However, for Colombian girls, saying “I am fat” is a way of sharing their diets and getting approbation as well.

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8 Quiero bajar de peso, por ahí 10 kilos. Hago dietas, la otra semana estaba haciendo una dieta de frutas con una amiga, pero una señora nos dijo que eso era malo, entonces dejamos de hacerla. Ahora no comemos azúcar. (F)
Chapter Four

Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is the most beautiful of all?

In this section, I will discuss what I called in that study satisfaction with the body. This category is strongly related to what girls think is the ideal of a girl (mostly in body shape and appearance) for boys, mass media and other peers.

The girls in Colombia and in the Netherlands agree that they are concerned about their bodies. The main reasons given are that in adolescence it is very important to be beautiful because it brings acceptance.

Js: I think at this age we are really insecure and I think a lot of children want to be skinny because everybody that is skinny is thought to be beautiful. (Dutch girl)

It is important to lose weight so you can have a beautiful body, because on this age it is very important what other people say about you. (Colombian girl)

In puberty, because, the way teenagers feel they are perceived by others because, “To most adolescents, an important boundary (or symbolic skin) of their sense of self is that of their peer group, and thus exclusion of it can be very traumatic for them” (Helman, 2001: 16). Being beautiful and popular is seen as a way to acquire acceptance.

Another aspect, related to the satisfaction with the body concerns what boys think and what they consider a beautiful girl to be. Nevertheless, it seems that Dutch girls are more influenced by the mass media than by peers:

T: I don’t think is probably not because what boys think of them because we personally have a hard time to getting that kind of appreciation from guys (Dutch girl)

Js: everywhere in the magazines, TV, models, they are skinny. They say boys only want to be with skinny girls but I think that is bullshit is more that girls think that it is like that. (Dutch girl)

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9 Es importante bajar de peso para tener un cuerpo bonito, porque a esta edad importa mucho lo que digan de uno. (J)
The desire to be thin seems to be more related to an image that is broadcast by mass media:

T: (dissatisfaction with the body) I think is more because TV and what guys on TV say about girls and how girls on TV look like and what it implies. (Dutch girl)

The points of reference for the girls are pop stars rather than models. Pop stars are shown in video clips:

J: I don’t know why (the fashion is having big boobs) because models have small you know petite boobs, but maybe boys thing is sexy or something like you have a little shirt and you have big boobs. Also I think because models they have small breasts but girls in video clips they have big breasts like they were little bikinis, and you can see the silicones coz they are round nobody has boobs like that and they just you know like the guys see eminem like idols so they see the videos and they say that is the perfect girl for me. (Dutch girl)

J: On the American shows, they show how skinny girls are becoming the next American top models. And like all that kind of shows and video clips it make you very insecure because they show impossible bodies, because I think the media they are pushing us more and more towards the American situation. (Dutch girl)

Even though, models were not a point of reference for Dutch girls, some of them want to be models and endeavor to lose weight in order to fit in the patterns established by modeling agencies:

J: The modeling agencies were not so many before but now it is really growing, so that is why... and a lot of my friends have tried to be a model, one has succeeded but she was already very thin and she says she eats a lot but I cant see that someone that you can see the bones here (belly) how she can eat a lot but she is a model and a friend of mine that wasn’t really that thin to be a model she is really like trying to lose weight like eating a lot of fruits, water and eating less, you know like standing on the weighting scale all the time. (Dutch girl)

J: I think a lot of girls have the secret of becoming a model or just have the body of the model and that is what they are working towards, because years ago it was like you have to look healthy and slim but you didn't have to look like a model (Dutch girl)
T: I think lots of people in the modeling context are required to be 34 or 36 and I know some friends of mine that try to lose weight to get in that size range. (Dutch girl)

T: Normally they ask that you have to be between the size 34 and 36, normally models have to be the minimum size like 170 and in other places 175. I am relatively short 168 or something but they still took me on me because I was very photogenic they said so that is the reason why I am an exception. (Dutch girl)

Among Colombian girls, the desire of becoming a model was not pronounced, although girls tried to look like models. They were frustrated, because the kind of model that is broadcast in Colombia is blonde, tall, with light eyes, not the ‘real’ prototype of the Colombian woman. As a result of their ancestry origin, Colombian women are dark haired, brown eyed, with shorter length than European women are. It is important to say that the modeling industry in Medellín is strong as it produces most of the fabrics of the country. Hence, the fashion industry is very important there. The models in Medellín are a strong point of reference for the girls who want to look like them and dress like them:

The fashion is made for thin girls. (Colombian girl)

One is fat and then men don’t like fat women because they are used to see Natalia Paris (Colombian model). (Colombian girl)

In contrast to the girls in Amsterdam, girls in Medellín admitted to be very concerned about what boys think about them:

They only look at the pretty ones, good body, think, skinny, with attributes and with a cute face. (Colombian girl)

I think is the fashion and the culture men have nowadays, they like only the women with good body, nice boobs and bottoms. (Colombian girl)

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La moda ahora está hecha para las flacas (J)
...uno ahí bien repolludo y es obvio que a los hombres de hoy en día no les gustan las gordas porque están acostumbrados a ver a una Natalia París (J)
Men on this age want the girls to be thin and pretty. They only look at the girls that have a nice body. (Colombian girl)

Every boy likes thin girls. (Colombian girl)11

Not only do boys of the same age-group generally prefer thin girls, Colombian girls say their brothers also opine about the shape of their sister’s bodies.

My brother is always making me feel inferior saying to me that I am fat. (Colombian girl)12

It seems Dutch girls are less worried about their bodies and the way they look in comparison with Colombian girls:

T: Most of the girls that I know are satisfied with their bodies but I think there are very few people who aren’t. (Dutch girl)

In contrast, Colombian teenagers are more concerned about parts of the body that they want to change. Most of them want to have bigger breasts, a thin abdomen, big and firm buttocks and legs. Consequently use methods that are not always healthy or exercise to get the body they want to have:

There are girls who buy reducing creams, tablets, laxatives, injections. (Colombian girl)

I want to have a beautiful body and therefore I go to the gym three times per week and I do aerobics, I work out a bit too. (Colombian girl)13

Colombia society is very patriarchal and men frequently objectify women. In the Netherlands, women have more equality of rights and are treated more equally. That might explain why the concern about the body prevails in both
cultures but with different manifestations. In the Netherlands girls want to be admired, important and beautiful and this can be achieved by e.g. becoming a model. It is way to have status and even power. In Colombia, girls want to have a boyfriend and to feel admired and desired by men. This can be reached by looking like a model. As Seppä (2003) points out “In a patriarchal culture, women learn to look at themselves through the heterosexual male perspective” (Seppä, 2003: 104) and that is the Colombian case.

Girls in the Netherlands recognize that in some cultures women are looked at as somehow being “less”:

J: I think the people that come from other countries like Moroccan guys they were raised with the idea that women belong them, that the women have to wear that thing on the head and there is also a little women stand below them, they are lesser. I think Moroccan boys and also negroes they have that image that they can say anything to the girls because they have to accept it because they are the big men and I’m not saying that their culture is to humiliate women but that you have like a lower rank. (Dutch girl)

A Dutch girl tells why she thinks in other cultures men objectify women:

S: only the pretty girls are selected by the boys... like in MTV a little bit? (asking if it is like that in Colombia) The girlfriend has to be very pretty high and nice legs, pretty face, nice smile so they have something to be proud of, and that also shows you might be in mafia, very ugly old guy with a very pretty young woman... (Dutch girl)

Another issue that might have importance in the way girls give importance to boys is individualism. In Colombia, the family and social bonds are very close, and girls learn to play the role ascribed to them as females and respond to expectations of them in this regard. As Walter and Peterson say:

“Culturally patriarchal expectations and hierarchical narratives pressure young women to adhere to an artificial ideal of womanhood, be it in terms of physical appearance or relational qualities. Under these pressures, the growing range of options that adolescence offers turns into a competitive structure” (Walter and Peterson, 2002: 601)

A Colombian teenager expressed this issue the following way:
There are groups where you can see all the girls are very pretty: I don’t know what would happen if an ugly girl tried to be friend of them. I think they would reject her.

In the Netherlands, young people are apparently raised to be more individualistic. However, in conclusion, the preoccupation with the body is present in both cultural settings but is expressed in different ways. Whether the reference point is to the peers, pop stars or models, the concern about the body is present.

“Media models and celebrities as well as the proximal appearance culture of same-sex peers at school are both relevant sources for judging the self and gathering information especially about physical attractiveness attributes.”
(Jones, 2001: 658)

In Colombia, girls want to fit into the ideal to feel valued mostly by the boys but also to be accepted for other girls. In the Netherlands, it seems to be important to be accepted but it seems to be more about being important and finding an identity.

4.1 Body ideal

After looking in depth at the reasons girls give for a preoccupation with their bodies it is necessary to consider the ideal body as presented to girls in both cultures. For Dutch girls, being thin is important and being fat is something that is not wanted:

J: Nobody wants to be fat because we are so used to see the magazines...how skinny they are, you are used.
M: a friend of mine is like a bit fat and she was like oh my god I don’t like it anymore and she went on a diet and now she is just a bit thinner and she is eating everything again. (Dutch girl)

J: when you ask what is the ideal here they say that is slim but with little bit of fat chubbiness, but I don’t think it is true because a lot of girls think they are fat. When I am with my friends is not like we talk always about that but there’s a certain part in the conversation

14 Hay grupos en los que uno ve que todas son bonitas; no sé que pasaria si una fea tratara de ser amiga de ellas, yo creo que la rechazarian (H)
where we talk about “oh I just got like a bigger jeans size, I have parts of fat hanging over my jeans” we do complain about our figures, we do think like the slimmer girl is the more profit girl. (Dutch girl)

Nevertheless, it seems that being extremely thin is not desired because the beauty referents are pop stars as seen in video clips, mostly the ones that are shown with male singers, and not the skinnier fashion models. As girls say:

Js: I don’t think is beautiful to be so skinny because I see a lot of models when I read the magazines and you see the bones and I don’t think is beautiful I mean it is not really healthy and I know from a lot of boys that they don’t really care if you have a little bit of fat or not and I mean a lot of boys do think is beautiful when a girl has feminine shape and you don’t have a feminine shape if you don’t eat. (Dutch girl)

What is clear is that Dutch girls do not consider the idea of plastic surgery as much as Colombian girls:

J: there are also little things that we would want to have different, I don’t think we are so extreme like thinking about going to a surgery, that would not be our choice but we do complain, like that you have parts that you are not very comfortable with. (Dutch girl)

A Colombian girl says:

I would have liposuction, I would make a plastic surgery on my nose... maybe the nose I won’t do it but liposuction I think I will.15

However, the topic of the plastic surgery came up in the interviews with Dutch girls:

P: Maybe the people that has plastic surgery it is because they want to be more beautiful. (Dutch girl)

M: Yeah, sometimes plastic surgeries can improve your self esteem. When you are like flat and you think like oh my! (Dutch girl)

15 Me haría la liposucción, me operaría la nariz; tal vez la nariz no me la haga, la liposucción creo que sí.(F)
S: Yeah and if you have to walk like this (hiding no/breasts).
(Dutch girl)

Nevertheless, they considered plastic surgery is something that should not be done without a reason:

M: But I think if you have a bit of a breasts and a bit of a bum and you are skinny enough then I think is not really necessary to do it. But if you really have that thing that really makes you feel uncomfortable then I think is OK, but not when is not necessary.
(Dutch girl)

One of the Dutch girls expressed nevertheless that in the future plastic surgery will become more common:

J: I think plastic surgery will be bigger and will play a bigger role and people will go easier to a plastic surgery, they will take it lighter than they do it now. (Dutch girl)

Besides the shape of the body, when Dutch girls also mentioned hair, eyes, etc. referred to the looks:

J: I am very proud of the dark hair my opinion is like it was a time when blonde was fashion and darker hair was less important and the blondes were in the spotlight but there is this time coming now also girls with brown hair get more appreciated, because we are a lot of brunettes in my classroom and we like it. (Dutch girl)

A good-looking girl according is:

G: In the model in the street is like size 34 or something, yeah, smooth skin (Dutch Girl)
G: Brunette (Dutch Girl)
G: Blue eyes (Dutch Girl)
G: I like green eyes (Dutch Girl)
G: Flat belly (Dutch Girl)
G: Average bottom, I think the boys like it big. (Dutch Girl)
G: No skinny, no fat (Dutch Girl)

When boys were asked about what is a good-looking girl is, they responded:

G: Brunette, hmm... I don’t know I don’t have a kind of girl.
Medium... physically, a little bit of fat (Dutch Boy)
G: I think it is very important if she is intelligent. (Dutch Boy)
G: Not too skinny, not too fat (Dutch Boy)
G: Brown hair (Dutch Boy)
G: I said it would be nice a girl with big boobs and big ass, but is
not the most important thing!!!! (Dutch Boy)
G: Beautiful legs, that is important! (Dutch Boy)
G: More clothes is like more interesting, opened clothes is kind of...
is cheap! (Dutch Boy)

This ideal body is almost the same as wanted for Colombian girls. I could say
that the ideal body is the one presented by pop stars or women that appear in
the video clips of male singers. The difference is, Colombian girls want to be
taller, blonde, and they actually do things to change their bodies to conform
to an ideal of, what one of the Dutch girls says, are impossible bodies:

Some friends of mine spend two or three hours in the gym, I don’t
know how they have time to do other things (Colombian girl)

An article on the internet of the Universidad del Valle, in Colombia says: “In
Medellín, center of the fashion and modeling in Colombia, the cult to the
beauty and the body also takes almost sickly characteristics.” [En Medellín,
capital colombiana de la moda y uno de los centros de modelos del país, ese
culto a la belleza y al cuerpo también toma características casi enfermizas]
(Mendoza & Posada: 2001). In Colombia, girls go to the gym rather than
participate in sports. It might be explained partially because of security and
notions of safe spaces for females. The gym is such a place. It is also a social
venue where you can meet people, socialize, been seen by men. In addition,
the gym is viewed as more feminine. Sports and especially a professional
sport are viewed as masculine and competitive. Participating in sports is
more accepted when girls are younger and they are “playing” with friends.
What is clear is that most of Colombian girls go to the gym to obtain a ‘good’
body. Even the ones who do sport, do so to influence their body shape. In the
Netherlands, it is more common to participate in sport. Doing sports is

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16 Unas amigas mías están en el gimnasio 2 o 3 horas, no se como les rinde el tiempo. (E)
viewed as healthy, social and good for young people. Girls are not necessarily seen as more masculine if they are ‘sporty’.

M: I am playing a lot of tennis. (Dutch girl)

Cycling, walking and doing sports outside is viewed as normal and it is also safe for girls:

Js: I think they sport more because they like the sport than because they want to be in shape. (Dutch girl)

Dutch girls do not go to the gym because they have to get permission from their parents, it is expensive and is something done by older people:

M: I think that is because girls have to ask permission to the parents to go to the gym and you have to pay for it and I think is more the paying stuff. (Dutch girl)

G: (girls) is not common, going to the gym when people is older... is expensive. (Dutch girl)

On the other hand, in Medellin many girls go to the gym or combine the gym with other more feminine activities:

I exercise twice per week, maximum during four hours. It relaxes me. I do aerobics and I work out but directed by a professional trainer. (Colombian girl)

I do roller-blading twice per week and the rest of the days I go to the gym for two hours daily. (Colombian girl)

I do aerobics, abs and I work out. (Colombian girl)

They go a lot to the gym because they all the time say they want to be thin. (Colombian girl)

I used to go to the gym with my brother's girlfriend but then I got bored. (Colombian girl)
4.2 Marking the body

In the Western world, piercing, tattooing and other ways of modifying the appearance, including plastic surgery, are practices that are becoming more and more common for teenagers. “While at one point body modification was considered quite “deviant,” it is now so common as to be “ordinary.” (Langman & Cangemi, 2003: 149)

Dutch and Colombian often have piercing. According to them, tattoos are not nice:

J: I don’t think they are pretty on the girls (tattoos), and not pretty on the boys, well one maybe but because my thing is when you grow old and you get wrinkles then the tattoo loses its shape. (Dutch girl)

I don’t like tattoos. (Colombian girl)18

What seems to be more liked of is piercing:

G: I have a piercing on my belly button (Dutch girl)

G: I had my first piercing when I was like twelve(Dutch girl)

G: It is like nice but not everybody looks good with piercing. (Dutch girl)

In Colombia, the girls like piercing as well:

I like piercing, I had one in the belly button but my mother made me take it off one month later (Colombian girl)

I love piercing on the tongue. I am scared that it hurts but I do not mind, I want to put it anyways. (Colombian girl)19

18 Los tatuajes no me gustan. (F)
19 Me gusta el piercing, tuve uno en el ombligo, pero mi mamá me lo hizo quitar como al mes. (I)
Me encanta el piercing en la lengua (...) me da miedo que duela, pero no importa, me lo quiero hacer. (F)
In the stories of Dutch teenagers and Colombian girls, parents have to give permission for a piercing. In the Netherlands, girls have to be 16 or older to have a piercing. If younger, the parents must sign a statement to approve it and girl has to be accompanied by a parent:

- G: You have to be 16 to do it or ask permission if you are younger to put a piercing or a tattoo (Dutch girl)
- G: yes, the parents have to go with us. (Dutch girl)
- G: the most of us when you are older so we can choose if we want it or not. It is our own choice. (Dutch girl)

For Colombian girls, there is not a clear regulation that forbids piercing under certain age, but some of them tell how parents did not agree with their daughters using piercing:

- My mother would not let me to have piercing or tattoos. (Colombian girl)
- My father takes my tongue out if I put a piercing on my tongue. (Colombian girl) 20

Piercing and tattoos have a social function and it can be said that “Artificial changes in the shape, size and surface of the body, which are widespread throughout the world, can also have a social function” (Helman, 2001: 13) in that case, the feeling identified with a group.

The fact that law in the Netherlands regulates piercing makes it more “normalized” than in Colombia, where sometimes girls hide it from their parents. If they are discovered later, the parents force them to take it off. Piercing is often done by Colombian teenagers to transgress the authority of their parents. It seems not to happen this way in the Netherlands.

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20 Mi mamá no me dejaría ponerme piercing o hacerme tatuajes (A)
Mi papá me arranca la lengua donde me lo haga (el piercing en la lengua) (F)
Chapter Five
Boys and parents according to Girls

5.1 What do girls think about boys?

In the interviews with the girls, there was great deal of talk about what and how men supposedly think or behave. There are many assumptions but girls bring up examples that portray behavior of men.

The first issue concerns how girls are treated by boys on the street. The Netherlands is well known as a country where girls are safe on the street and they do not feel much harassed by men. They contrast this with experiences from other countries:

Js: (the way Dutch boys approach girls) is not like in Italy... I heard there boys are really easy with girls and talk say all the things oh you are so beautiful and the next minute to another girl. (Dutch girl)

T: In Rome when we go in fifth year a group of girls is not allowed to go out on the streets alone because they have to be at least with one guy from our school, because all the people all the guys on the street in Rome. I think is the culture. (Dutch girl)

It is clear that in Amsterdam, girls do not find it pleasant if males do approach or harass them:

J: it is very annoying here because when you walk around and I just love wearing skirts or something it doesn’t make me feel super sexy I don’t want to show anything off, I just feel feminine and sexy and you can just wear skirt, but you cannot wear skirt here without having boys saying stuff to you and it really makes you feel like you are some sort of whore and they just walk to you, and I am not the kind of girl that hit them I just walk pass them but they just stand against the wall and say things like or (sounds of kisses) or like I was sitting with my mother in the tram and that was this old man and he was like 65 and my mother turned around so she wasn’t looking and the guy looked at me and made a nasty thing with his mouth and I was so disgusted coz that man could be my grandpa you cannot wear what you want to wear because people would just they think you are challenging them to like yes say something to you but that is not it we just want to look the way we want to look. They take it like an invitation. I was walking with my little brother
and we had a camera with us and that boy of my brother’s age said to me hey you want to make a sex tape, how rude is that so yeah I do think that they are rude. (Dutch girl)

T: Lots of times when I’m going out with a friend or going downtown you have those guys saying something to you and I used to think is really really annoying and I still do. They say like nice things that you look good or whatever but sometimes they are coming on to you! So normally is just like EW stay away from me, most of the times I don’t say anything but sometimes I reply, if they say something funny to me I reply something funny too. (Dutch girl)

In Colombia, receiving “piropos” (men commenting on women on the street, most of the times nice but other times not so nice) is something very common and accepted. Girls did not raise this topic much because is apparently not problematic for them. Moreover, receiving “piropos” is expected and can be a way of feeling beautiful and secure.

I would like to lose weight so the people would tell me how beautiful I am and boys would look at me (Colombian girl)21

It is interesting to know what Dutch boys say about “piropos”. Dutch boys think girls get annoyed when they receive such messages on the street:

J: I think maybe sounds weird but I think Dutch don’t do that (approaching a girl easily) I think other boys do that.
F: here people here are more busy with their work and career and is not our culture to talk about women to get them in bed, some people do but is not very normal, also your parents tell you that you have to respect girls and not to talk about of a girl as if she is a piece of meat, so yeah maybe is also education, and besides they say the man and a woman are at one line here, and I don’t know about other countries but maybe men are high and women just have to cook, but I don’t know really. (Dutch boy)

F: you see more men on the streets on the southern parts of Europe and they do not work or they do not very much work and they are outside watching to girls, and looking at them, talking to them (Dutch boy)

21 Me gustaría rebajar para que la gente me dijera que como estoy de linda y los muchachos me miraran. (F)
J: Girls hate being approached in that way, my girlfriend when she is walking in the neighborhood and boys are yelling I like you and things like that she is just ignoring it so they start to scream she is arrogant and something like that. (Dutch boy)

Here I found a phenomenon that is explained in different ways for Latino and Dutch culture. In Latino America, receiving a “piropo” on the street is not a big issue, it is a compliment and girls do not consider themselves as a “piece of meat” because of it. In Colombia, girls were raised with the idea that receiving “piropos” is something normal, even a compliment. In Colombia, the cultural notions of masculinity and femininity are so ingrained that people consider it as socially accepted. It reinforces the gender identity of men and women as well.

Among Dutch girls, there were many assumptions about how boys feel or think about their bodies (boys’ bodies) or male bodies in general.

S: We don’t know when a boy is insecure about his body, maybe if you are really close to the person you can ask (Dutch girl)

S: Yes but some of them are hiding the non confidence by talking a lot. (Dutch girl)

M: But you see, you see if he is very confident, and there are guys that are quieter and stuff. (Dutch girl)

M: yes like the confidence in front of the class they come in front of the class and they start talking and making noises and the guys that are less confident stay in the back and they are a bit quieter. (Dutch girl)

Dutch girls say that boys are also preoccupied with their bodies but they do not make it explicit; Girls interpreted what they think boys are doing in the following way:

M: I don’t really think they want to have muscles, some people do I know but that is more like they want to stay skinny but I think mostly they have muscles because sports. (Dutch girl)

J: I think boys work out when they are older, 18 or more, of course there are guys that do it, in my class all the boys are very sportive, they don’t have the best looking body but they don’t look out of
shape, if they do it they don’t do it to gain muscles, I mean they do things like sporting. (Dutch girl)

Some girls give examples of how boys are concerned about their bodies:

S: My brother he is now eleven and he is starting to become a teenager and I have that friend of mine that has that muscled body, I love it! And my brother was to look like him and the next day he was using the little training weights and as like what are you doing!! And he said oh well I am training I want to have the same body as he has! But the next day he was like Ohhhhhhhhh my arms!! (Dutch girl)

M: and my brother comes into my room and says oh my hair is not looking well huh? And I said it is, is looking the same than everyday and he said really? Oh okay so now I can go to school now, but he is like my hair is weird, and then I put some extra gel on it and he was like oh yes -and it looked the same- but then he went to school. (Dutch girl)

In Colombia, girls make their assumptions about boys as well:

A friend of mine has a nice body but an ugly face and the girls are not interested about him. He is always telling me that I should stop being so worried about the weight but he spends daily three hours in the gym. (Colombian girl)

In Amsterdam as in Medellín, it is not so important what boys look like, because women are the ones that are culturally supposed to be beautiful:

J: I think if a boy is not shy if he shows character then there’s no problem, because I know a lot of fat guys that are very popular also among the girls I don’t know why. Just for showing character but if you are shy, but if a girls is fat then she is locked up. (Dutch girl)

J: Women are the ones that have to be the more pretty ones. There has not been so attention for the man to look pretty, like with the Greek gods, Aphrodite is that gorgeous creature and Zeus yes he has muscles but is not so cute and he can get any women. And the more attractive you become more men want to date you but if you just have money and everything and make up again that is like a also a push factor for women to start trying to transform themselves into these more beautiful creatures. (Dutch girl)

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22 Un amigo mío que tiene buen cuerpo pero la cara muy fea, y no le paran bolas las viejas. Él me dice que no me preocupe tanto por el peso pero se mantiene 3 horas diarias en el gimnasio (E)
A girl from Medellín says:

My brothers say that I am very fat but they don’t seem to see the belly they have, I tell them: ‘look at yourselves” but they say that it is different because they are men (Colombian girl)23

In the Netherlands, as in the rest of the Western world, girls are more concerned about their bodies than boys are. As Jones notes, girls are more concerned about the way they look and hence “the girls compared to the boys were more highly engaged in social comparisons” (Jones, 2001: 660). That might explain why girls were more willing to talk about how they perceive their bodies than boys. The latter imply that they just “don’t care” about it.

J: Girls are more intimate with each other, they know each other boundaries and we know we can be opened and say you know coz girls they gossip but they are very aware that we are girls we can just say... and guys are very insecure I am not saying all of them but most of the relationships among them are very superficial like they go to the movies or so but I don’t think they get to know each other and that is why they are scared of showing more feminine. (Dutch girl)

Dutch boys said:

D: A boy can be popular without being good looking because he is funny or more like a men (Dutch boy)

J: I think boys we are worried about their bodies but we are not talking about that like girls do. (Dutch boy)

In conclusion, boys are concerned about their bodies but not as much as girls are. Boys are not willing to talk about their bodies as freely as girls are - it is less acceptable, even ‘unmasculine’.

In Medellín, Lopez & Velez (2001) show how, the gender expectations involve being “cute as a doll” for women and “strong as a champion” for men.

They say:

23 Mis hermanos me dicen que estoy muy gorda, y ellos no ven la barriguita que tienen, y yo les digo: mirense, pero me dicen que es diferente porque son hombres(F)
La masculinidad se caracteriza por el esfuerzo de sobrepasar los límites del propio cuerpo; de ahí que el sudor, la transpiración, el desorden y el derroche de energía sean valorados positivamente y se valore negativamente el rechazo masculino a realizar esas actividades. [Masculinity is characterized by the effort of surpassing the limits of one’s own body; being sweaty, messy and wasting energy are valued in a positive way but refusing to do so is seen negatively.] (Lopez & Velez: 2001 89)

For women, the gender norm is being a “cute doll”:

La muñeca es producto cultural que el sentido común asocia a lo hueco, carente de corazón y de cerebro, que no puede sentir, pensar ni ejercer voluntad. Ser linda —atributo natural de la muñeca—, convertido en exigencia cultural para el-ser-de la mujer, le confiere una identidad que anula su poder-ser, legitimando contenidos de la feminidad que la colocan en posición de satélite del deseo y mandato de un corazón ajeno. [The doll is a cultural product that is commonly associated with emptiness, without a heart and brain, that cannot feel, think or exercise its will. Being pretty—a natural attribute of the doll—is converted into a cultural requirement for a woman’s being, giving her an identity that negates her ability to be herself and legitimates the elements of femininity that put her in the position of a satellite of desire and demand around another heart] (Lopez & Velez: 2001 89-90)

That might explain why in Colombia, men are allowed to be just “as they are” and they gain status and value from other things. Girls have to be beautiful to be valued by men. It is clear too that men cannot express concern about or indulge in the care of their, because that is not what a champion is supposed to do.

5.2 Daughters and parents

In the stories of Dutch and Colombian girls, I found they frequently referred to their parents as models of identity. There was however, a big difference in the way parents referred to their daughters’ bodies. In the Netherlands, girls perceive their parents as the ones who care for the adequate nutrition of their daughters:

J: My mom makes me eat vegetables everyday and like today I told her that today we are going to the pizzeria with the whole class and she said get a salad don’t just eat the pizza, and my mother is very healthy. (Dutch girl)
Mothers do not tell to girls that they should lose weight or be thinner, and if needed to, they do it in a subtle and polite way:

J: If the parents see their daughter need to lose weight they do it in a very neutral way like, they give you a diet bar, they wouldn’t say to your face you are fat they help you in an ok way not in a rude way like “come on you are fat you should lose weight” maybe more like “you should go to the gym. (Dutch girl)

In Medellín, girls perceive mothers as a great influence on how girls are supposed to eat:

Last year my mother was telling me that I was going to be anorexic. Now she is telling me not to eat that much. (Colombian girl)

My mother is thin and she has phobia towards fatness. (Colombian girl)

My mother says I eat too much. (Colombian girl)

My mother says I am fat and I have to lose weight. (Colombian girl)

Dutch teenagers found it very strange when I asked them if their parents suggested to them that they diet or should have a certain type of body. The general opinion is that parents want their daughters to be healthy more than good looking:

M: I think the parents just want the child to be healthy, they don’t like very skinny and big breasts kind of girl, they just want to be healthy and they don’t care if they have a little bit of fat, I think is just that they can see that they are eating enough and they prefer them a bit thicker than thinner. (Dutch girl)

As I pointed out before, in a patriarchal society like Colombia, the importance given to the looks of the girls is something very common. Mothers, who want their girls to achieve the beauty ideal, reproduce the
cultural acceptance of the need to have a particular kind of body. Fathers are not involved in the way their daughters eat or wanting them to have certain kind of body:

   My father doesn’t tell me anything about my weight or the way I eat. (Colombian girl)

   My father is not involved in the say I eat. (Colombian girl)

In Amsterdam, fathers are involved in the way teenagers eat and they want their daughters to be healthy and to eat well. Most of the times, girls do not talk about their mothers and fathers but they talk about their parents, which indicates that the father is also involved in the way the daughters eat.

   M: My parents bake and cook. I eat breakfast and dinner with them cereals in the morning, healthy, and in dinner vegetables and something else. My parents do look what they eat, I mean we eat together, some parents don t do that, after eating my mother brings some cookies or something like that. I am free for example when I am at school and I don’t have more food they say yes you can buy it, but not like buying all the time snacks. (Dutch girl)

In Colombia, all the activities related to food are considered as something for women and fathers are not involved in the way the girls eat. That might explain too why fathers do not deal with the eating patterns of their daughters. However, not only is the mother the one that is involved in the way girls eat but also the extended family:

   The family of my father, they say that I should diet because I am fat, but afterwards they say you are not fat. (Colombian girl)

In the Netherlands, there is more individualism, and the family bonds are not as strong as in Colombia where the extended family (both sides, mother and father) plays an important role for the girls. That might be the
explanation why Dutch girls did not brought up the topic of the extended family.
Chapter Six

Boys and the Body

Among boys, the topic of food was more related to their preferences (see Annexes) than to eating with the aim of achieving a particular body shape. Most of the boys said they were not concerned about the way they eat:

F: I just eat normal, sometimes I eat McDonalds and chocolates but I am also playing football so I don’t get really fat when I eat those things. (Dutch boy)

J: I think boys don’t really mind about the way they eat. I don’t really mind. (Dutch boy)

F: I know one boy in our classroom that is growing and for his muscles he drinks a special kind of shake with proteins for his muscles but no I don’t think many boys are so busy about how they eat for their muscles or to get other powders or proteins. (Dutch boy)

Only boys that do sports or participate in a competitive sport were careful about what they eat, because the sport demands it.

D: With rowing I care about it (proteins), I first ate protein but we had to consider because maybe it was doping and it was not good and if they test you and it becomes positive then you can forget your career, for five or ten years your might not row and now I am such a talent and next year I am definitely going to European championship and maybe to the world championship so you have to check what you eat so my mother bought proteins without the flavor that is granted to be doping free. (Dutch boy)

In the Netherlands, as in the most of the Western world, boys are not as apprehensive as girls are about eating patterns, or at least they do not freely express their worries about the subject. It might also be that the boys who are concerned about their body image are less likely to participate in research. As GH Cohane & HG Pope (2001) write: “boys might minimize their true degree of dissatisfaction or unhappiness in the presence of an interviewer.”
However, other topics besides the eating patterns and body image came up along the interviews. I will present them in the next paragraphs.

6.1  Boys and Girls are Different

Dutch boys and girls felt that boys and girls are different, mostly in the way they behave towards their bodies and food.

D: I think women look more in the mirror. They look in the mirror and they say oh that is not good I want to... (Dutch boy)

J: I think girls and boys are different, I think a boy wouldn’t say I want to have a color hair like that or something. (Dutch boy)

F: I think girls are more looking at their own; I think boys are looking more to the muscles and how big they are and how strong they are. (Dutch boy)

For boys it is more important to be strong and muscled than to be cute (sweet face). The way boys look is not very important for girls. They nevertheless expressed ideas about the ideal boy:

G: skinny, muscles but not too much, not too small (Dutch girl)
G: Green or brown eyes
G: Curly hair (Dutch girl)
G: just one piercing (Dutch girl)
G: sweaters, baggies, cotton shirts (Dutch girl)
G: Muscles, like skinny with muscles (Dutch girl)
G: Hair Short, brown (Dutch girl)
G: Brown Eyes (Dutch girl)
G: I like baggy jeans (Dutch girl)

The things girls do not like about the looks of a boy are:

G: NO tattoos! (Dutch girl)
G: NO tight shirts!!!! (Dutch girl)
G: Clothes that are too short and pants very tight (Dutch girl)

Looks are not important for feeling attracted to a boy:
J: I think if he is not shy if he shows character then there's no problem, because I know a lot of fat guys that are very popular also among the girls I don't know why. Just for showing character but if you are shy, but if a girl is fat then she is locked up. (Dutch girl)

In a study done by Jones, (2002), she shows that: “Gender differences in social comparison indicated that girls reported more social comparisons across targets and attributes” (Jones, 2002: 645). In this study, girls said that, even while boys are concerned less about their bodies, they cannot express worries about it if they do have some:

M: Yes, boys are not so opened as girls, oh well maybe gays are very opened. The boys that are a little bit fat they look to other boys and they say oh I want to be like that and they do have like posters like how they want to be but less than girls. (Dutch girl)

When I asked to boys what is the ideal of the body for a boy all the response I got was:

G: (Boy) I think boys don’t look at boys. (Dutch boy)

Nevertheless, in the individual interviews boys said they have particular ways of comparing themselves with their peers. They told me joking is one way of comparing themselves with each, other without risking their sense of masculinity:

J: Is more like joking, I do know people that are really mean but I think boys take it less serious. (Dutch boy)

J: Well they joke a little bit (of a boy is fat or small for example), a friend of mine he is not fat but still a bit fat and they are making jokes like you are ugly or something. (Dutch boy)

F: I think that is common but every person has to say something different about other people, sometimes in good way and sometimes in negative way, but about jokes is just we got them when we are standing next to you and not when they are at home ill and we are gossiping about them, is more for fun but sometimes it just gets out of hand and they get angry about it, sometimes they go too far. (Dutch boy)
F: Sometimes we talk about the body but not many times, like when we have PI physical... then we talk about it, and we do exercises, but just when we have break is not really something we talk about. (Dutch boy)

However, some of them confessed there are some parts of the body that require more attention then others. These parts of the body are hair and muscles:

F: I think not many boys are really looking to themselves, well you look at the mirror every morning but no like I don't look good. (Dutch boy)

J: Well I had my hair special like different hair cut but after 3 weeks it was too long again and I didn't want to cut it again and my mother didn't want to pay for that, but I don't like it when my hair is too long so I just did it myself. (Dutch boy)

D: I look at my face for the pimples but I only do my hair and brush my teeth. (Dutch boy)

D: Hmm, sometimes, if you are having a beer belly I think if you hear it a lot then you become concerned. (Dutch boy)

Boys also told me what they think is the ideal boy according to girls:

D: They talk. You hear in class oh did you see the movie with Orlando bloom, he is very beautiful and cute and with muscles. And if you ask the girls describe a men you like then they say he has to have the six pack. (Dutch boy)

However, the kind of boy girls like differs from what boys think:

T: I think the kind of guy the girls of my age like is the kind of sweet guy. The gangster type started to go out, lots of guys, like the popular guys are like gangster type, some girls used to like them but not anymore really, but I t really depends on the guy who chooses that style, some guys look really nice in that style, other looks very stupid.

T: I think the girls are not very interested in the physical point because all the guys I know are not very good I hear lots of times that they like guys and then we ask do you think that physically is he hot and they say no but they still like the guy, but they say physically no, thank you, I think is more like facial looks and the
height. It doesn’t matter if they are older or not but taller than the girls, because girls won’t go out with a guy at all if he is shorter than them.

In a study done by Popeet al. (2000: 1301) they found that men think women prefer the former to be more muscleed, but “women indicated that they preferred a very ordinary looking male body”. This study was done among older college-aged men in Austria, France, and the United States. I asked boys how they think older boys perceive their own bodies and they agreed that older boys are not concerned about it:

F: Some boys become more interested about exercising because when they are finished with growing and they think now I can practice because now. Nowadays I think not many people go to the gym to make muscles. (Dutch boy)

J: I think when you are older I think you start caring less about how you look. (Dutch boy)

D: No I think is only in that stage that boys want to be with a pretty girl and they care about the status it gives to them. (Dutch boy)

F: I have an older brother he’s 19, but he is also not really interested in exercising. He’s more interested with his school, he is not at home anymore so I think he is more busy with friends and with outs and going to a bar. (Dutch boy)

Dutch boys said one of the reasons they do not work out is because they are growing up and it is not good in this stage. Another reason is that parents do not agree. I thought it necessary to ask about the role of the parents regarding the way Dutch boys eat or deal with their bodies:

F: Actually I don’t really know what my parents think I think they trust me with the training, for myself I know is not good for myself when I’m growing

J: I do sports but about working out my parents say is not good to be training in that age, and I don’t think is necessary, but I don’t know boys that are doing that.

J: My parents know (about smoking weed) and they said like if it is like 1 time is not that bad, but don’t do it again, but they did it too
when they were older, 18 and I think times are changing and things happen earlier.

J: My mother is very strict she always makes me eats fruits and she is not giving me money to buy in the school, she prefers that I take some bread.

J: My father is as strict as my mother, my mother cooks 5 times per week and my father cooks 2 and he is cooking like the same food because mostly my mother make the shopping.

D: my mother bought proteins without the flavor that is granted to be doping free.

The general perception is that parents want their sons to be healthy and to eat well and they consider working out for younger boys as not good.

Another issue that came up in the interviews with the Dutch boys was how they establish relationships with girls.

6.2 Relationships: Who gives the first step?

The topic of relationships came up in the interviews with Dutch girls and boys. It seems boys and girls have to have in account some norms that are important to approach the person in whom you are interested. The rules are not clear, but boys are expected to make the first step in approaching a girl. This is even in the Netherlands, where women have more equality of rights:

D: I think men are doing the first step; the girls want the boys making the first step. I have never seen a girl doing the first step. I think I would like it more, I don’t like to make the first step, sometimes I have to push myself to do it. Is not so difficult but you have some thoughts about it, like what would she say, what would it be right to say. (Dutch boy)

Js: (talking about boys approaching a girl) I think is the nature, I think you can do something when you are a girl but you don’t do everything when you are a girl so maybe a little step to show I like you as well but then the boy is the one that makes the big step on the end. (Dutch girl)
In Colombia, it is very clear that the boy is the one that approaches the girl. One of the reasons why girls want to be beautiful is because boys are going to be interested in them:

The most of men look at women that have good body, the most of them are not interested about the personality of the girl. They only look how her figure is and that is enough. The most of them are just looking at that. (Colombian girl)

The first thing my friends (boys) look at is the body of the girls, then they look at their faces and the last thing are the feelings. I don’t know why does it happen, maybe because nowadays there is a body ideal and that is what they are looking for. (Colombian girl)

When I told to Dutch girls about this phenomenon in Colombia, where boys are primarily interested in good-looking girls, they responded:

S: (Boys being so interested about getting beautiful girls) to show what they have, you can say well I have that million dollars in my bank account but I don’t have a woman

M: it is like but if you don’t have a woman you don’t have everything you are not beautiful enough!!!

S: I don’t know anybody who does it (“hunting” beautiful women), but if you read the newspapers...

I think in Colombia, where women are more objectified by men than in the Netherlands (they are seen like “dolls”) girls assume a passive role of waiting for the one that will hunt them. Parents, mostly the mothers, push the girls to be beautiful and thin and one of the reasons seems to be that it will enable their daughters to get a “good boyfriend”. Dutch girls and boys did not consider that if boys are giving the first step is because they are “hunting” girls but because is a social rule where I think they assume their femininity and masculinity.

27 La mayoría de los hombres miran que las mujeres tengan buen cuerpo, hay muchos que no miran la forma de ser, solamente como tiene la figurita y eso es suficiente. Pienso que la mayoría se fijan en la apariencia (G) Mis amigos primero se fijan en el cuerpo, luego en la cara y por ultimo en los sentimientos. No sé por que pueda ser esto, tal vez porque ahora se usa un tipo de cuerpo y en eso es en lo primero que se fijan. (I)
Chapter Seven
The Body as a “Locus” for Resistance and Control

In this chapter, I will show how body can be a symbol of resistance and control. Since in the Netherlands the use of soft drugs is allowed when people are 18 or older, and drinking alcohol is allowed for people older than 16, these topics came up in interviews with Dutch girls and boys. I will refer to how teenagers drink alcohol and consume soft drugs before the legal age and that the reasons have to be with feeling they have the control of their bodies.

Further, in this Chapter I will also present a case study of a Colombian girl, and some interviews with the Dutch boys and girls where I will show how eating patterns sometimes are related to power and gender forces.

7.1 Soft drugs and alcohol: “When you are young you have to experiment”

A topic that Dutch teenagers brought up in interviews was the consumption of soft drugs and alcohol. In the Netherlands teenagers have to be 16 or older to be allowed to drink, and 18 or more to be able to consume soft drugs. Nevertheless, only one of the teenagers interviewed was sixteen and the rest were fifteen, but most of them admitted drinking, some more than others. Some did it with the acceptance of parents but others hid the fact that they drank:

T: I don’t smoke, sometimes I drink alcohol, my parents would rather prefer that I be with them whenever I drink alcohol (laughs). And also with my friends practically they said that I am definitely not allowed to drink alcohol in school parties but they don’t know that actually I can control it! because I am one of the few people that don’t drink like tons of alcohol I can control and I never get drunk. I know people, for example, next week we are going to camp and one thing is you are totally not allowed to bringing any alcohol in the camp, but there is a group of girls in the class that think just because they are not allowed is cool!! And they
are acting all cool about it and making all this ways about how to hide it and stuff and hide it in the bags and they say are also saying we are going to go to the boy's side and we are going to drink alcohol! (Dutch girl)

One week later, another girl told me what happened to girls that tried to drink when camping:

M: Oh last weekend we went to camp and we were caught with alcohol, that was more like the fun to take it, and many people took joints. We didn't drink a lot. M: For me it was just the fun of taking it (alcohol) and not being caught. They said “okay every girl downstairs!! You know the drinking packs, we put alcohol in it and then we closed it and then we said “oh we are not going to be caught” but then they said “we are going to control every thing here” so we were really scared and we tried to put it in the fireplace and the teacher came in and every body ran upstairs so they said “every body come down” we want to have all the people that were in the complot and we wanted to say it. (Dutch girl)

The general opinion seems to be that almost every teenager has drunk alcohol before the legal age:

M: Oh yes it is common that people of my age drink. In the school we have like groups, like the ones that are girlish, normal people... I mean people like do not do anything. I think is more that they want to get drunk, is very common they drink I don't know why. (Dutch girl)

One girl said what her reasons for drinking were:

M: For me it was just the fun of taking it (alcohol) and not being caught. They said “okay every girl downstairs!! You know the drinking packs, we put alcohol in it and then we closed it and then we said “oh we are not going to be caught” but then they said “we are going to control every thing here” so we were really scared and we tried to put it in the fireplace and the teacher came in and every body ran upstairs so they said “every body come down” we want to have all the people that were in the complot and we wanted to say it. (Dutch girl)

Girls did not express themselves about smoking, but they said that boys smoked marijuana:

M: In the camping, there were boys that were stoned all the time. (Dutch girl)
When I asked them where they got soft drugs or alcohol if they are not of the legal age, one of them answered:

M: Some people have fake ID, and in some coffeshops they don’t ask for the ID. (Dutch girl)

Drinking is apparently related to identity among teenagers; it seems to be a symbol of opposing the social order. Some of them said they know perfectly how to control themselves, and they are not worried because they are drinking before the legal age.

F: To go in a coffeeshop you have to be 18 and to drink alcohol 16. but is so easy to get it, is not really the issue. For example in the school parties you ask a friend that is in the fourth grade or in the sixth just give me a beer and you give him the money. You can’t stop it. (Dutch boy)

F: when you are in a party a coke is 2 euro and a beer is 2 euro too! So yeah, and when you are with friends and you are a bit excited I think is important to know your limit or your line and if you are near your limit then you stop, you have to know what you are dealing with. And I think when you are blind, drinking that is not really good. (Dutch boy)

It seems that “breaking the law” is not something that causes worry, but gives a feeling of being powerful and ‘cool’. However, boys recognize that sometimes parents do not agree with this:

F: My parents don’t like it (experiencing with joints) it but you have to experiment (Dutch boy)

Other boy tells how the parents and their sons or daughters negotiate the smoking and drinking:

J: My parents know (about smoking weed) and they said like if it is like 1 time is not that bad, but don’t do it again, but they did it too when they were older, 18 and I think times are changing and things happen earlier. (Dutch boy)
F: Some people have an agreement with the parents if you don’t smoke till the age then you get a car and some kids don’t really want to drink or smoke. (Dutch boy)

Js: my parents let me drink a little glass of wine sometimes. (Dutch girl)

The general opinion is that smoking and drinking are a symbol of individuality among the Dutch teenagers and they feel they can do it, because their bodies belong to themselves. Besides, since Dutch society is well known for being tolerant, it is not stigmatizing or problematic for them to do it making they feel they can smoke and drink even if it is against the law because is they can control themselves. Taking ‘forbidden’ substances into one’s body is seen as daring and adventurous, a way to thumb one’s nose at society. Yet it is not really seen as particularly antisocial, unacceptable or even ‘against the rules’

7.2 Food, body, resistance and control

As I explained in the first chapter, food and the body are symbolic, psychological and culturally shaped. By eating, or not, teenagers can express many issues that go beyond medical or psychological explanations and definitions.

I showed that Dutch teenagers apparently have more freedom than Colombian teenagers regarding eating patterns. Dutch teenagers believe their parents want them to be healthy, but give them freedom and do not push them to eat in a certain way to have a beautiful body. Yet sometimes eating patterns related to of resistance and control:

J: My mother is very strict she always makes me eats fruits and she is not giving me money to buy in the school, she prefers that I take some bread. (Dutch boy)

J: My father is as strict as my mother, my mother cooks 5 times per week and my father cooks 2 and he is cooking like the same food because mostly my mother make the shopping. (Dutch boy)
D: I eat a lot so my parents only say you eat a lot, stop eating. (Dutch boy)

D: my mother bought proteins without the flavor that is granted to be doping free. (Dutch boy)

One of the Dutch girls said that it would be good if the parents were more involved in the way their sons and daughters eat:

Js: Parents should be more involved in the way the kids eat, because what you see sometimes what they eat is very unhealthy and you know in that age the body is growing and you need healthy food and a lot of children eat a lot of chocolate and chips. (Dutch girl)

However, the general perception is that parents give freedom to their children:

F: Actually I don’t really know what my parents think I think they trust me with the training, for myself I know is not good for myself when I’m growing. (Dutch boy)

F: If I would lift weights my mother would say I think is not necessary for you, but my parents are more like it’s your life, and you have to make your decisions, therefore they trust me and they have faith in me that I don’t do that things. (Dutch boy)

J: I do sports but about working out my parents say is not good to be training in that age, and I don’t think is necessary, but I don’t know boys that are doing that. (Dutch boy)

Js: I think in this country parents give a lot of freedom to the children I mean a lot of children buy their own clothes at this age, parents are almost not involved in it, we are quite free I think for myself too, the only thing is my mother doesn’t want me to dress really too sexy so she doesn’t have to say it because I don’t like too sexy clothes anyway. (Dutch girl)

Js: My mother doesn’t have to be involved in the way i eat. I am a really healthy and in my house we eat really healthy and she knows how to make healthy food so she makes sandwiches with tomatoes and that kind of stuff and she knows that I don’t like a lot of meat so she gives me a little piece and she gives me a lot of vegetables. (Dutch girl)
Colombian girls are “more controlled” by their parents, mostly their mothers, who push them to eat in a particular way and to achieve a certain type of body. I will use a case of a Colombian girl to highlight this.

The girl, that I named “C”, was skinny but not too much. She was of normal weight from what I could see. For me it was a surprise that she was so concerned about eating and her body. She was ‘obsessed’ with getting a body like Claudia Schieffer or Natalia Paris. It became clearer during the interviews that she ate the way she did because it gave her power and feeling of control and the possibility of being perfect:

I want to be thin, is something I have to get, it is something that is in my list of dreams, having a body like Natalia Paris o Claudia Schieffer, if I can’t get it I am not going to die but is going to be failure because I want to be perfect.28

In order to be perfect, “C” did many things, some of them considered ‘crazy’ by her. It nevertheless made her feel ‘under control’:

To get the body I want to have, I have stopped eating for 48 hours... it was to see how long could I be without eating, after that I ate normal, but then I am so hungry that I eat too much.29

I avoid eating chocolates and bread, then I eat apples and jelly. Before I was a little bit fatter than now. Now I don’t want to lose more weight I want to maintain the weight I have now, but I am too scared that I am going to gain weight. I eat 1000 calories per day, because I am too scared of being fat. Every little piece of bread I eat makes me feel guilty. Eating outside the established hours or eating starch makes me feel guilty too.30

When I stop eating, I feel more secure because I feel I have the power. I always thought that eating chocolates or sweets is symbol of weakness. Now I diet.31

28 Quiero ser delgada, es algo que tengo que conseguir; está en mi lista de sueños, tener un cuerpo como el de Natalia Paris o Claudia Schieffer, si no pudiera lograrlo, no me moriría pero si sería un fracaso porque quiero ser perfecta.

29 Por lograrlo he aguantado hambre, por decir he dejado de comer 48 horas... era para ver cuanto aguantaba y ya después como normal, pero luego me da demasiado hambre, pero porque se que no he comido, y como mucho.

30 Yo evito comer chocolatinas, panes. Pero como no puedo, entonces, como manzanas, gelatinas. Antes era más gordita que ahora, no quisiera adelgazar más, me quiero mantener, pero me da mucho miedo subir porque subo muy fácil. Yo como una dieta de 1000 kcal. porque me da miedo engordar. Cualquier pan que me como me da culpa.

31 Cuando dejo de comer me siento más segura porque siento que “tengo el control”. A mi me parecía que comer chocolates o dulces, es símbolo de debilidad. Ahora también me sigo pareciendo, pero hago dieta.
“C” had a boyfriend who told her to eat more:

I have a boyfriend six months ago and he says that I should eat more... that is why I don’t talk about it with him and I don’t go out to eat with him. We were already having the relationship when I stopped eating for 48 hours but he didn’t know about it.

One month ago, my boyfriend made me eat, after that I came back home and my mother gave me food. That day I threw up, I put my fingers inside my throat. Now I am throwing up every week. I feel guilty when I eat but no when I throw up, why should I? 32

Medical doctors, psychologists, nutritionists, became involved in the case of “C”, but she did not want to change the way she ate:

I haven’t gone to any nutritionist yet but I asked to the doctor to send me to one. If she tells me to eat more than I do now I won’t follow the diet, because I need something difficult do get, something challenging and if she tells me to eat normal I will eat more.

I have done a lot of ‘shows’ in my life, I said I was dizzy, I started to roll over myself on my room and then I went out all dizzy. I used to hit a wall and went to the psychologist of the school. They took my by the force there and I wanted to go anymore because she almost make that my parents got divorced. She told them that they didn’t know how to raise me, then they had quarrels, and they were blaming each other 33

As I explained in the first chapter, the mass media promotes health ideals, which are also representative of notions of beautiful bodies for women. As van Dongen points out, when referring to people labeled as anorexics: “They underline almost everything which is directed to maintain health, but at the same time they transform these ideas and their emotional reactions to those ideas into a form of resistance” (van Dongen, 2000: 67) “C,” says:

≈ Yo tengo novio hace 6 meses y él dice que debería comer más... por eso mejor no hablo con él, no salgo a comer con él. A él le tocó eso de las 48 horas sin comer pero no supo. Hace más o menos un mes me novio me "hizo" comer y luego llegué a mi casa y mi mamá también me dio comida. Ese día vomite. (Me muestra los dedos). Ahora sigo vomitando cada 8 días. Yo me siento mal por comer pero no por vomitar ¿por qué debería?
≈ No he ido donde ninguna Nutricionista, pero ya le pedí al médico que me mandara donde una pero si me pone a comer más de lo que como no creo que haga la dieta, porque necesito algo que sea difícil de cumplir, como un reto. Y si me ponen a comer normal voy a comer más. He hecho muchos shows en mi vida, decía que estaba mareada, daba vueltas en la pieza y salía toda mareada o le pegaba a un muro o me arrastraba hasta donde la psicóloga del colegio, y daba shows allá. No te digo que me llevaran arrastrada y yo no quería ir porque ella llamaba a mis papás, casi los hace divorciar porque ella les dijo que no me sabían educar, estaba haciendo esto o lo otro y ellos se echaban la culpa mutuamente.
Since I started with that obsession with my weight I search everything I can about diets on the internet, on the libraries.34

“C” was happy with the way she ate, because it symbolized for her that she had power over her actions. Not only with the food but also in other things related to her life.

A day that I feel very controlled I feel very good. I get up very early, I take a cold shower, I go and walk, I make all my homework, I feel fine with everybody, I help my mother with something. I am very strict with myself and I like it. I have tried not to be so strict but I don’t feel well when I am not strict with myself.35

It seemed that having the control made her feel independent. As she said:

I don’t have best friend, i don’t depend on anybody. I think that it has to be with my coldness. I mean, if my father dies I don’t mind. If my mother dies, I don’t care. I don’t mind about anything.36

Though she said that she had the control over her actions she complained because her mother was not strict enough.

My mother doesn’t control me I always end up doing what I want to do. That is the bad thing, that is why I am insecure because whenever my mother took a decision about me, I cried or escaped and my mother was telling me “okay girl, you go and do what you want to do”

Yet sometimes:

What I don’t like about my mother is she thinks she has the power. She says “you are only 14 and you have to obey me”37

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34 Desde que empecé con la obsesión con el peso averigué todo lo que puedo para adelgazar, consulto en Internet, en la Biblioteca.
35 Un día que amanezca muy controlada me siento bien me levanto demasiado temprano, me baño con agua fría, salgo a caminar, hago todas las tareas, sentirme bien con todo el mundo, ayudarle a mi mamá en algo, lo que sea, no sé...
36 Soy muy exigente conmigo misma y me gusta. He intentado no exigirme pero no me siento bien.
37 No tengo mejor amiga, no dependo de nadie. Creo que eso tiene que ver con la frialdad. O sea si mi papá se muere a mí no me da nada, si mi mamá se muere tampoco, a mí no me importa nada
38 Mi mamá no me controla, porque siempre termino haciendo lo que me da la gana. Ésa que eso es lo malo, por eso soy insegura, porque mi mamá siempre tomaba una decisión y yo hacia una pataleta, o lloraba o me escapaba por el balcón o cualquier cosa, y mi mamá terminaba “vaya, mijita, vaya no importa”. Lo que no me gusta es que ella crea que me domina. Mi mamá dice “es que usted tiene 14 años y yo la mando”, 
When some of my colleagues analyzed the case of “C”, she was diagnosed as anorexic. Accordingly, she ‘suffered’ from a ‘disease’ that could be diagnosed and treated. I think the case of “C” shows that teenagers can be interested in losing weight for reasons that go beyond beauty. “C” defines herself as being “obsessed with the weight” but she is not ashamed of it. She feels that the way she eats gives her power and control. In her case, we can also see how medicalized eating has become in Colombia. Simultaneously “C” was reacting against the control she felt everybody was trying to exert on her or as van Dongen points out: “against the general powerful others and ideas” (van Dongen, 2000: 70) that the Colombian culture represents for “C”.

Conclusions

Body and food are topics that raise interest in the Western world, especially in relation to adolescents. Considering the number of times we find the words “body” and “food” in scientific, medical, psychological and health education literature, we can say that eating patterns and many other issues related to the body are medicalized. “Medicalization describes a process by which nonmedical problems become defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of illnesses or disorders.” (Conrad, 1992: 209).

The phenomenon of medicalization relates to biomedical and psychological discourses, which prescribe norms about how human, should direct their bodies and eat. It is clear that even for the experts what is ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ is very difficult to define, however, medical and psychological discourses attempt to classify phenomenon, e.g. the same phenomenon that was named “hysteria” in the past is named “somatomorphic disorder” nowadays. One of the aims of this study was to explore the cultural construction of notions of normality and abnormality as seen in relation to the body and eating by teenagers.

There are many assumptions related to the body and teenagers’ eating patterns. One of them is that teenagers are in “crisis” and are more vulnerable to “contract diseases” such as anorexia or bulimia. That is why they are often considered to be “groups at risk”. Instead of that I propose that being in crisis during adolescence is “normal”, hence, the problematic situations that might be presented are not something deviant, but a moment in life.

A cultural perspective is fundamental to understand the teenagers’ behavior because “there is no concrete body that is decorated by culture. The body itself is a cultural creation” (Sault, 2001: 13) In Colombia, it is ‘normal’ to see girls going to the gym and thinking about plastic surgery to increase the size of their breasts. For Dutch teenagers, it is ‘abnormal’. Similarly, what is considered as a meal, or not, is culturally informed, e.g. what Dutch teenagers see as lunch, Colombian teenagers see as not a lunch, just a snack.
While a 14 year-old teenager in Colombia who thinks about having plastic surgery should not be taken lightly, we should also turn our “locus toward examining the body as the site of social and political control” (Sault, 2001: 7)

In this study, I found that beauty models in the Netherlands as in Colombia are almost the same. I compared pop stars for Dutch and Colombian teenagers and Colombian models for Colombian teenagers. It is important to note that Colombian models look pretty much the same as the pop stars. One of the Dutch girls defined that kind of bodies as “impossible bodies”. The first question that came to my mind when doing this study was: why then, if the beauty models are the same in both countries, is the reaction of the girls in the two countries so different.

Colombia is a patriarchal society where women are raised to answer to male notions of beauty and femininity. Women are defined through their attractiveness to men and the latter often pay their girlfriends to have plastic surgery for enlargement for breasts. Women are objects, “dolls” that are produced to fit the imagination of men. This ideal is reproduced in daughters by mothers who wish the former to attain the necessary bodily attractiveness and thus to ‘attract’ males. Women apparently have little power over their bodies – patriarchal and masculine expectations inform how they see their bodies as somehow not normal and medical professionals assist them to achieve an ideal. Anorexia, as in the case of “C”, can then be seen as a kind of resistance, a way to claim back control. However, viewing women as the victims of men is also not sufficient as Seppä says:

It does not make much sense to regard men merely as the enemy or the oppressor, because power is not simply possessed by men. In other words, power is not something that people have, but it is rather a non centralized struggle of forces, which constitutes a dynamic network into which power comes from everywhere, including from below. (Seppä, 2003: 94)

In the Netherlands, women are more equal to men, and they do not feel the same strong need to adhere to the kind of body men wish for. In a more equal society the taking of alcohol and drugs before legal age is more symbolic of resistance but with little apparent danger.
Parents play a role in the socialization of teenagers and in the Netherlands, parents are role models for their children. Parents are care-takers of the health of their daughters and sons. The boys as well as the girls think there is a lot of freedom from their parents and they see them as a point of identity but they feel they give them freedom and control over their own actions. In Colombia, girls perceived their mothers as pushing them to have an ideal body. Unlike Dutch fathers, in Colombia, fathers were not involved in how their daughters eat. In Colombia, the body is an issue for women, dieting is feminine, and eating problems are only related to women. As Bourdieu (2001) points out, women reproduce masculine and patriarchal domination by fitting into what is considered as a ‘beautiful woman’. Cultural notions and practices are so ingrained that people do not even see how distorted it is anymore and accept it as normal. That might be the reason why in Colombia, medical and psychological specialists search for reasons for eating disorders within the mass media or medicalize eating and the body and explain certain kinds of eating, like “C”, as deviant.

Regarding the use that teenagers make of their bodies, in the Netherlands there are clear rules. For example, teenagers have to be 16 or older to be able to have a piercing or a tattoo. The consumption of soft drugs and alcohol is regulated by law and teenagers have to be 18 or before it is used and 16 to consume alcohol. Teenagers do drink and smoke before the legal age, but it is viewed as signs of individualism and experimentation of youth within a tolerant culture. Drinking or consuming drugs are not a big issue and they do not stigmatize people much. Teenagers who smoke or drinks before the legal age, feel they have control of their own bodies and they can be free to experiment.

In Colombia, the legal age for alcohol use is 16, yet anyone can buy it. Alcohol is rarely used by Colombian girls because it has a moralistic connotation. A “good woman” does not drink only ‘crazy’ ones or ‘sluts’ do. Being beautiful also makes a “good woman” or “buen partido”, meaning marriageable.

Food and eating are very symbolic and are also used by Colombian teenagers to culturally express their dissatisfaction with the patriarchal
society they live in. It does not simply mean that women are the oppressed and men are the oppressors. As Seppä points out:

Foucault's genealogical scheme also implies that feminist analysis of power should not be based on the traditional model according to which men are simply oppressors and women are mere victims of patriarchal power. For if it is true that power comes from everywhere, and if resistance is always found where there is power, women also produce and use power, despite the fact that they are in many ways also oppressed by the political structures, habits and value beliefs of the patriarchy. (Seppä, 2003: 94)

Colombia is a catholic country, and a person who gets very thin is viewed as somewhat sacrificial and requiring attention and understanding. In this way teenagers use their bodies as a locus of resistance. They complain, “The society wants us to be like the models” accordingly, they are not responsible for their actions when they diet excessively, yet they know it will worry their families if they become too thin. Girls thus do exercise some choice, and have some power over their own bodies.

With the medicalization of eating, anorexia and bulimia are becoming more well-known and feared. Yet, in some sense, it is ‘admired’ too. It gives some kind of status because; since anorexia and bulimia are “mental diseases”, girls are somehow controlled by them. Instead of being blamed they are treated like sick people. However, I can say that after all, these “sick girls” also have power.

Objectification of female bodies is not so emphasized in the Netherlands. Girls do not like to be harassed by boys and boys think that it is not good either. Men do not tell girls what they should ideally look like. Girls feel more ownership of their bodies than in Colombia. I think that is reflected in the way Dutch girls manage their bodies. Dutch girls did not want to have an ‘ideal’ body to attract men.

Finally, I looked at perceptions of the body and eating patterns of boys in the Netherlands. While boys are concerned about their bodies, they do not discuss it. They use jokes to communicate issues that worry them or they just try to look ‘cool’ and act as if they did not care. Boys want muscles, but believe that when they are younger they should not work out because is not healthy for them, since they are growing up.
In conclusion, comparing two cultural settings is interesting because it allows studying the same phenomenon from different perspectives. However, precisely that difference permits one to get a better understanding of why teenagers behave in a certain way. It can lead to actions in health’s programs that sometimes fail because they have stereotypical and generalized assumptions that might not serve in all cultural settings.
## Annex I

### Healthy food – Unhealthy food for Dutch teenagers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>HEALTHY FOOD</th>
<th>UNHEALTHY FOOD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Caesar salad</td>
<td>Hamburger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>Hamburger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Potatoes and vegetables with fish or something</td>
<td>Fried potatoes with mayonnaise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Salads, vegetables</td>
<td>Fast food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Salad</td>
<td>French fries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Vegetables like potatoes with for example carrots</td>
<td>Hamburger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Cucumber and sushi</td>
<td>Cheeseburger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Fruit and vegetables</td>
<td>Kitkat (candy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>At our country we eat pretty healthy for example salads</td>
<td>But we also eat unhealthy, like hamburgers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Hufspot</td>
<td>McDonalds food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Salad</td>
<td>Fast food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Fruit and vegetables (cucumbers, mangoes) are healthy but expensive</td>
<td>McDonalds meals are not healthy, in the morning “hagel slag” chocolate sprinkles are not healthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Vegetables (broccoli)</td>
<td>French fries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Vegetables and fruit</td>
<td>French fries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Turkish pizza, eggs</td>
<td>Cheese, fries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Paprika</td>
<td>Turkish pizza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td>Cereals: choco pops (breakfast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Apple – vitamins</td>
<td>Hamburger – Lots of fat and white bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>HEALTHY FOOD</td>
<td>UNHEALTHY FOOD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tuna salad</td>
<td>Hamburger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Salad with potatoes and fish and vegetables</td>
<td>Hamburger chips and mayonnaise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>Steak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yogurt</td>
<td>French fries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Fast food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bread with cheese</td>
<td>Candy bars, chips, cola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Salad</td>
<td>No answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Salad</td>
<td>Potatoes chips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Potatoes, vegetables</td>
<td>French fries, hamburger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Salad</td>
<td>Chips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Salad, fish</td>
<td>Chips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Cereals, breakfast</td>
<td>Snacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Bread</td>
<td>Chips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Breakfast, salad</td>
<td>Lunch, fast food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Breakfast (slice of bread, cereals)</td>
<td>Dinner (rice meat, vegetables) Pizza, Because I eat a lot when it is dinner time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Breakfast, fruit</td>
<td>Lunch (chips, candy, ham, burgers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Mc Donald’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Annex II

### Food with Good taste – Bad taste for Dutch Teenagers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>GOOD TASTE</th>
<th>BAD TASTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lasagna, olives</td>
<td>French cheese, smells very nice, arbijac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chocolate sprinkles on bread or in the yogurt and pizza</td>
<td>Spinach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cheese fondue, pizza and salads</td>
<td>Rice with spinach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strawberry yogurt and potatoes and pasta</td>
<td>Rice and a lot of meat I don't like it, only some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I really like Mexican food and Italian food because it looks nice and the taste is fantastic</td>
<td>I don’t like mozzarella and French cheese because they are horrible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cake and candies</td>
<td>Vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Coq au vain</td>
<td>Spinach I don't like we eat it too often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I haven’t got a favorite one, but I like fries</td>
<td>I don’t dislike most of the food... as long as it is vegetarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The food I like the most is chocolade I am really addicted. I like almost everything. I also really like chicken with ketjap</td>
<td>The thing I really don’t like is spinach, I have never liked it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tacos and burritos and sushi</td>
<td>No answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Pasta</td>
<td>No answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>French fries, boerenhool met worst, cheese soufflés, curry, burritos (Mexican food is my favorite), Turkish pizza</td>
<td>Shellfish! Tofu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Fajitas (Mexican) because it is warm and has a good sauce</td>
<td>Brusselsprouts because they taste like soap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I really like tuna and the fajita wraps</td>
<td>What I really dislike is “erwtensoeop” it looks green and slimy with claunk in it and it is just vulgar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Turkish pizza because it looks so exotic with the samba and all</td>
<td>Olives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Tus pis</td>
<td>Potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Chicken tike masala, it is Indian, it is spicy and creamy that is why I like this food.</td>
<td>Pig, because it is unhealthy, disgusting and I am Muslim so I may not eat pig. The taste that is really bad: Vinegar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The food I like the most is pizza because I love cheese and the crust, and I like the way you can eat it</td>
<td>I hate spinach, I just really don’t like the taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>GOOD TASTE</td>
<td>BAD TASTE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hawaii pizza</td>
<td>Shrimps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pizza, chocolate</td>
<td>Shrimps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spaghetti</td>
<td>Fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Many things</td>
<td>Aubergine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>Shrimps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>Peanut butter, fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Spaghetti</td>
<td>Chicory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Everything</td>
<td>Chicory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I like all kind of food</td>
<td>I don’t like brusselsprouts but I eat it anyway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pizza, olives</td>
<td>Brusselprouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Pizza, olives</td>
<td>Brusselprouts, brown beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>Best ever: Ice cream (Haagen-Dazs, strawberry, cheesecake)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Chocolate, potatoes, lasagna</td>
<td>Chicory, olives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Salads</td>
<td>Meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Chicken wings, sushi, rice</td>
<td>Fish, mushrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Italian specialties</td>
<td>Lambs, meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Italian food for the good taste</td>
<td>No answer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex III
Favorite Food for Dutch Teenagers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>FAVORITE FOOD – GROUP 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lasagna, olives, they look nice. Favorite meal: dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lunch: Then I decide what to eat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dinner because then I am the hungriest and we eat together (I mean my mom, my dad and sister)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dinner because usually I eat breakfast because I need to. Usually I eat lunch alone and at dinner we are all together and it is fun and the food is the best at dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dinner is my favorite meal of the day because it is like most different meal, there are more different things in it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>My favorite meal is lunch because then I can eat bread and strawberries and that sort of stuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dinner because I eat together with family and it is warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dinner I don’t really know why, but it is the only “complete” meal, and it is nice to talk about the day when we are eating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>My favorite meal of the day is dinner because then the food is warm (except the salad) and we eat something different every day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>My favorite meal is dinner because it is warm and we mostly eat meat and I like that very much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Dinner that is always a surprise and it is warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Dinner: you always have enough time to eat it and so dinner is always a little bigger and more elaborated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Dinner, because it is warm and fills you for the rest of the day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>My favorite meal is tuna casserole or fajitas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Dinner because it varies all the time and even when you eat dinner there are always different kind of foods on your plate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Dinner because you eat warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Dinner: I like the most because is hot and spicy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Dinner it varies every day and it is always a surprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>FAVORITE FOOD – GROUP 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lunch, snacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dinner, spaghetti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 4    | I like breakfast but I haven’t got the time to eat much  
     | Maybe I like dinner because I can eat as much as I like and I have got the time |
| 5    | Dinner                 |
| 6    | French fries           |
| 7    | Dinner                 |
| 8    | Lunch, then I am most hungry |
| 9    | My favorite meal is dinner cause my mom comes from work and makes delicious food that I always like. |
| 10   | I like dinner the most |
| 11   | I like lunch the most: just bread and some fruit! |
| 12   | Dinner: you eat the most |
| 13   | I like dinner the most because we always have a lot so you can choose what you want |
| 14   | No answer              |
| 15   | No answer              |
| 16   | Dinner because you can enjoy and it’s more tastier than just a sandwich. |
| 17   | Dinner: Together with family, time |
### Annex IV

#### Like and Dislike about the body – Dutch Teenagers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>LIKE</th>
<th>DISLIKE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The things I like the most of my body are my eyes, my stomach, my hair and my eyebrows.</td>
<td>I don't like my ears, lips, and nose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- My eyes because I like the color</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- My stomach because it is always tanned and it's not too fat and not too thin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- My hair because it's different everyday, the one day it's darker than the day before and the other day it's lighter and the model is different every time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- My eyebrows because I don't have to do something about then, they are good just the way they are.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I like my arms, I don't really know why but they are quite normal I think.</td>
<td>I don't like my nose, because it's big but also because I am allergic for lots of things so it's always closed I mean that I mostly can't breath through my nose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I also like my ears, ears have soft skin and mine aren't too big or anything and I just like the most ears.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Good thing: My eyes, they are brown and people say that they are nice</td>
<td>Bad thing: My head, is a little big but I don't bother I can live with it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>My lips I think they are nicely filled</td>
<td>My feet because they are too big or not “too” big but just big.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nice: Eyes</td>
<td>Ugly: Don’t really like legs (not specially my own, just in common.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I am happy with my hair and eyes because I like the color and I also like curly hair.</td>
<td>I would like to be more skinny not much, but maybe 4 Kg. then I would be more secure in a bikini and everything. I would also like to have bigger breasts, but I am still growing (another girl would like to have bigger breasts too but she didn’t want to write it down we want to be anonymous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I like my belly</td>
<td>I don't like my butt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>LIKE</td>
<td>DISLIKE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I like my face</td>
<td>I don’t like the scar on my left chest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>My face is the most beautiful</td>
<td>My right foot is too weak and my fat ass. J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I like my belly is tanned and a little bit muscled.</td>
<td>I don’t like my chin because it has a small hole in it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>My back, is just smooth, my eyes are pretty nice color.</td>
<td>Part of me I dislike: My hands are often dry and you can see the veins and my ribs stick out. I don’t like not tanning quickly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I love my hair color. I like the dimples in the back of my shoulders and my back. I like my legs but they are sensitive to cold and become blotchy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I like the skin on my face because it is pretty smooth and I don’t have pimples.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I like my belly, because it has smooth skin and hardly any fat. I like my lips they are quite full. I love my hair color</td>
<td>I dislike my butt a little because it’s a little big but I wouldn’t like to lose a lot of weight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I also don’t really like the skin on my face, it is not smooth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Part I most like: I have 3 moles on my shoulder in a triangle. Nobody has them in that way. It is special</td>
<td>Part I don’t like: my chin it has a dent in the middle. It doesn’t really bother me but it could be better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comment: Many girls want to change but when it really comes out what they are happy with themselves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>My belly because is not too fat and not too big</td>
<td>My braces I don’t like braces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Part of my body that I like and why: Some people say I have long legs and they say its beautiful. I actually don’t have a part that I really like.</td>
<td>Part of my body I don’t like and why: The sacks under my eyes I don’t know how you call it but you usually get it when you don’t sleep enough but I have them all the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I am happy with my hair because it is really straight and a nice color</td>
<td>I am not happy with my freckles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I am happy with my eyes I like the color green.</td>
<td>I am unhappy with my hair because it’s curly and frizzy and I would like it straight. Now I cant do anything with it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>LIKE</td>
<td>DISLIKE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I like my eyes</td>
<td>I don’t like my hair and feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I like my lips</td>
<td>I dislike my feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Color of eyes</td>
<td>My eyes and color of skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teeth: they are nice and straight</td>
<td>Nose is broken and slightly bent. Won’t be right till I am 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>My eyes</td>
<td>My leg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I like my legs and my arms and my stomach and my eyes</td>
<td>I dislike my back and my feet nails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Like: Eyes</td>
<td>Dislike: Feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>What I like the most about myself is my eyes</td>
<td>My toe nail I hate because it came between the door and now is blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Like: Upper body (collarbones, shoulders)</td>
<td>My legs and feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I like my legs and my teeth the most</td>
<td>And I dislike my belly but I learned to live with it. I don’t mind it anymore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I love my breasts they are small and my hair because is straight</td>
<td>I hate my butt it is not firm enough and my feet because they look funny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I like my eyes and my upper body, my hair</td>
<td>I dislike my height</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Like the most: My hair, my eyes</td>
<td>Don’t like: My legs and my feet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex V Three Colombian Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natalia Paris</th>
<th>Natalia Paris</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana Sofia Henao</td>
<td>Catalina Maya</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pictures taken from:
- www.soho.com.co
- www.stockmodels.com.co
- http://modelos.conexcol.com
Annex VI Pop stars

Images taken from: http://es.allposters.com
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