

Bodies and Minds Under Construction



The development of body image perceptions of 5 and 6 year old children



What do we know about body image?

Impacts on physical, mental and emotional health

- Increase risk of eating disorders
- Increased risk of depression

Not taking up the challenge of life

Begins well before puberty

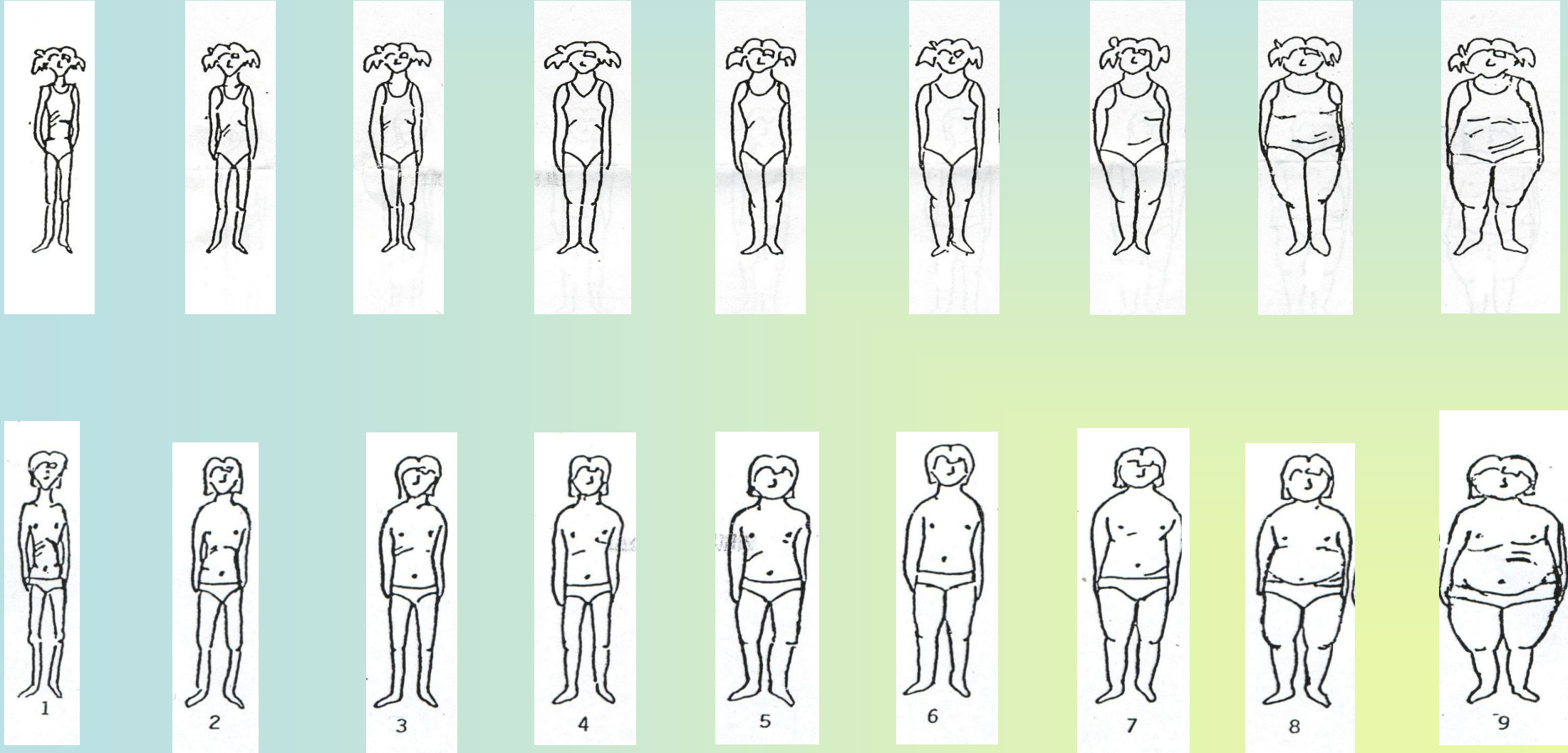
Affects both males and females



The Tool

(Tiggemann and Pennington 1990)

Permission to use and modify Professor Tiggemann 2001



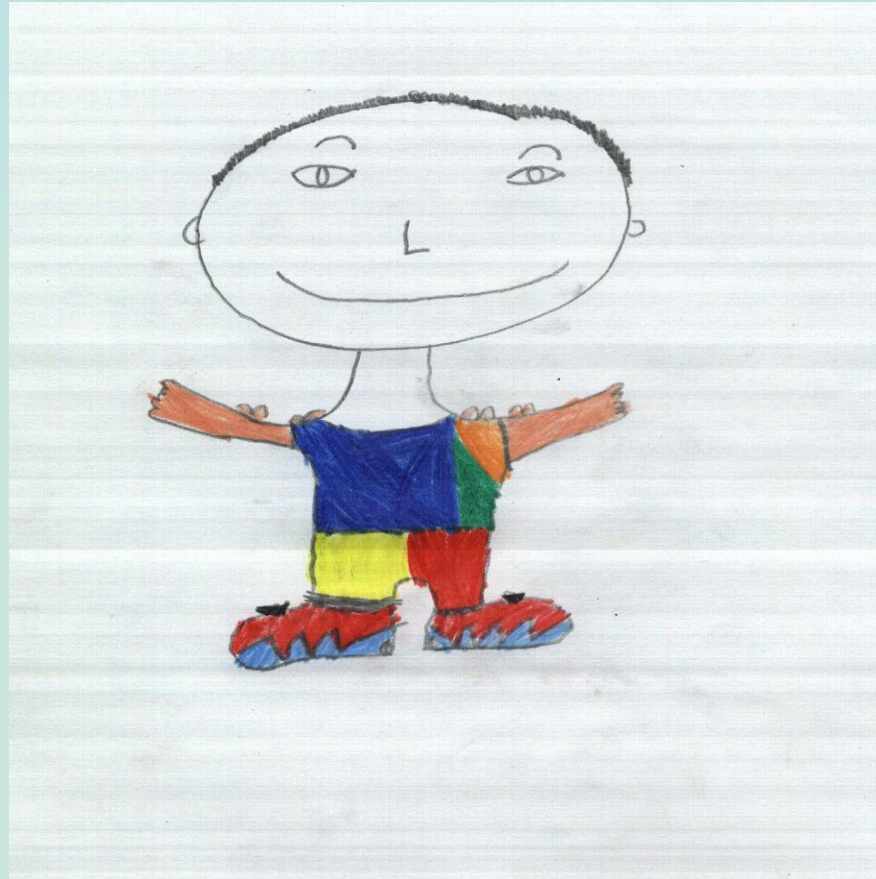
What we asked the children...

Activity 1

Which one do you think you look the most like?

If I was Harry Potter and I could change you.....

Why?



Activity 2

Which 3 would you like to invite to your birthday party?

Why?

Activity 3

Which do you think might be the healthiest? Why?

How do you get healthy?



Gender Differences: Girls

More likely to choose an ideal smaller than themselves

Tend to create and refine a continuum.

Establish a threshold size: typically 5-6

Not too concerned as long as they do not exceed the threshold size: but the thinner the better

Very concerned if you suggest a size that exceeds the threshold

“Number 1 is the best”....

“I know because I looked”

(5yrs 3mths)

Referring to image 1

“Because they might have yellow hair, blue eyes and brown skin”

(5yrs 0mths)



“I am just the right size, but I want to be thin because then my brother will not tease me any more”

(5yrs 10mths)

Referring to images 7,8,9

“They are mean!”

“They snatched money off people”

(5yrs7mths)



Gender Differences: Boys

Chose images both larger and images smaller than themselves

Not just about width...height also important

Also establish a threshold: tends to be 6-7

Better to be close to the threshold

Above....not a good thing

Boys' bodies are about purpose

Very concerned about being bullied...

want to be able to respond..fight or run

Referring to image 1

‘Would you tell my mum and dad which one I chose?’

‘Why would you like me to do that?’

‘So they would be proud’

About images they perceived as ‘fat’

If I was trying to get a drink

he would turn the tap on my head



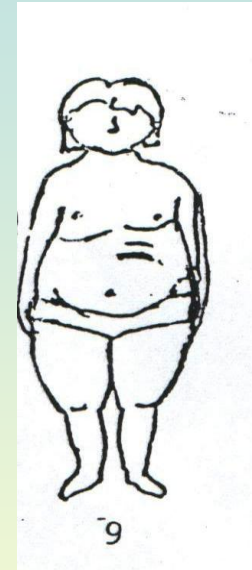
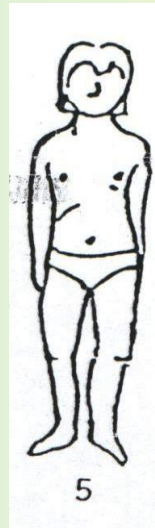
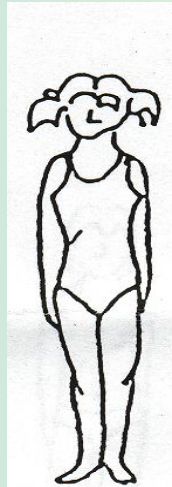
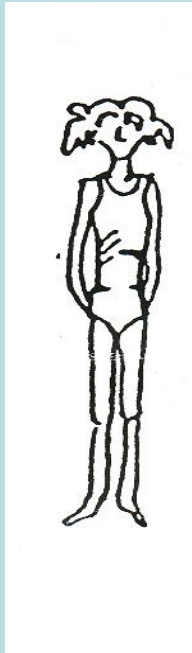
Referring to image 5

Because it looks bigger, looks taller and can reach things in the cupboard

Fat people cannot be nice, they are big and yucky and would hurt me

3 major constructions on what “healthy” looks like

‘The 3 thin ones have not eaten enough lollies to keep you just right. If all you eat is dairy you are always going to get skinnier but if you eat just some healthy food. The big ones have eaten too much fat food, probably hamburgers and nuggets.’



They look good. They are on diets and they are skinny

‘He is the healthiest because he is the fattest and has been eating all his food’

Health

Very strong link to food

Most believe exercise is important

BUT only on prompting

Awareness of diet as a restrictive
practice for weight loss.....Girls only



Health in the media

“If you eat lots of bad food you will get fat and die”

“I heard on TV they were making this brand new garden all I know is the girl said ‘do you want to die’and he was a big guy. They said if he didn’t want to die he has to be healthy so if you get fat you can die”



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