

1992

## The Portrayal of Obesity in Young Adult Fiction

Janice E. Weber  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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## The Portrayal of Obesity in Young Adult Fiction

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### Abstract

This study presents a content analysis of a random sample of 24 young adult fiction books published between 1970-1980 and 1981- 1991, showing the portrayal of obese characters and determining if this portrayal changed over time. Findings concerning obesity were: negative presentations in 79.2%, presence of ridicule in 87.5% and rejection in 83.3%, obesity shown as a problem to solve by dieting, and a rise of 37.5% in negative portrayals in more recently published books. It is concluded that the idea of "fat acceptance" has not had an effect on young adult fiction and that despite modern society's campaigns against "isms," stereotyping is prevalent in relation to obesity. Application of this study could be made to selection practices and in future writing featuring obese characters.

**THE PORTRAYAL OF OBESITY  
IN YOUNG ADULT FICTION**

**A Graduate Research Paper  
Submitted to the  
Division of Library Science  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA**

by  
**Janice E. Weber**  
November, 1992

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This study presents a content analysis of a random sample of 24 young adult fiction books published between 1970-1980 and 1981-1991, showing the portrayal of obese characters and determining if this portrayal changed over time. Findings concerning obesity were: negative presentations in 79.2%, presence of ridicule in 87.5% and rejection in 83.3%, obesity shown as a problem to solve by dieting, and a rise of 37.5% in negative portrayals in more recently published books . It is concluded that the idea of “fat acceptance” has not had an effect on young adult fiction and that despite modern society’s campaigns against “isms,” stereotyping is prevalent in relation to obesity. Application of this study could be made to selection practices and in future writing featuring obese characters.

This Research Paper by : Janice E. Weber

Titled: The Portrayal of Obesity in Young Adult Fiction

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts.

December 7, 1992  
Date Approved

Barbara R. Safford  
Graduate Faculty Reader

Dec. 7, 1992  
Date Approved

Leah Hiland  
Graduate Faculty Reader

Dec. 7, 1992  
Date Approved

Peggy Ishler  
Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Obesity crosses the lines of nearly all the “isms” campaigned against by modern society--racism, sexism, ageism and handicapism. In our culture, remarks that would never be tolerated in reference to race, religion or gender are allowed to go unchallenged when made in reference to weight. The obese person may even berate himself. Obesity is used as an accepted basis for jokes and put-downs. We have been conditioned to believe fat means boring, lazy, stupid, ugly, dirty, piggish and weak (Olds, 1982).

We live in a society obsessed with thinness. According to a 1990 study by Papalia and Olds, children develop a dislike of obesity between the ages of six and nine--largely because American society equates thinness with beauty (p. 399-401). Yet millions of young Americans are clinically overweight, and there are indications that their numbers are rising. A study by Gortmaker, Dietz, and Sobel in 1987 shows that in recent years obesity has increased 54% in children between ages six to eleven and nearly 40% among individuals between ages twelve to seventeen. This increase means that 3 million children and 12 million teenagers qualify as clinically overweight (Goulart, 1985).

We may not think of nine and ten year olds going on diets,

but some do. In a study by Iowa State University in 1990 of boys and girls in the third through sixth grades, 45% wanted to lose weight, 37% had dieted, 12% had cut back on eating to lose weight, and 7% showed a tendency to become anorexic. Even infants are being affected by society's craze for thinness. Barsotti (1989) reported on a Beech-Nut Baby Food Company poll of 243 mothers of babies between the ages of three and sixteen months old. They discovered that 44% were very concerned about their child becoming an overweight adult. Cases were documented of stunted growth in infants and children that stemmed from parents' concern about keeping their kids thin.

What does it feel like to be fat in a society that worships thinness? Gilana Gelman, 16 years old, relates what it feels like to be an overweight teenager:

I've lived my entire life with people reminding me it isn't okay to be fat...I have to accept the fact that I gross people out, that nobody wants to be seen with me--including some of my family...My life is a catch-22: I'm lonely and don't have friends because I'm fat, and I eat because I'm lonely. In school, I spend my lunch period in the library. I am too embarrassed to eat in front of people. Whenever there are people walking behind me, I am afraid they are making fun of me. Sometimes they are...For me, living is literally hell. The insults I must endure, the pity, the loneliness, the self-hatred and loathing are all punishments I would not wish on anybody. I didn't do anything wrong. I am fat. And I'm being punished for it because this society believes it isn't okay to be fat. There is nothing I would not give to be thin. (Minton, 1989, p. 16)

A 1968 study on discrimination against overweight teenagers by Dr. Jean Mayer, a nutrition specialist and president of Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, revealed that an overweight male high school student is only two-thirds as likely to be admitted to his first choice college as is a thin boy with comparable grades and SAT scores. Obese girls are only one-third as likely to be admitted as are their slender counterparts (p. 91).

Berscheid and Walster published their findings in 1972 regarding biases toward the unattractive youngster--a category in which obese children find themselves. Their findings were:

1. Academic grades are influenced by attractiveness.
2. When shown a set of pictures and asked to identify the child who probably created a disturbance, adults selected the unattractive child more often.
3. Misbehavior is likely to be handled more permissively for the cute youngster and more severely for his ugly counterpart.
4. The ugly child was thought to be more dishonest than his cute peer. (p. 42-46)

Early in life, children in our culture begin to learn the social importance of physical beauty. Examining classic children's literature, one can see how many traditional stories revolve around physical attractiveness: The Ugly Duckling, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, Dumbo, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Sleeping Beauty, Beauty and the Beast, and Cinderella. We are

incredibly effective in teaching very young children the importance of personal beauty. A research experiment by Feldman et al. (1988) involved showing young children pictures of obese children as well as those of average weight. Each child was asked whom he would choose as a friend. The children overwhelmingly chose the thin individuals. When shown snapshots of physically deformed or handicapped children of average weight, along with those of overweight children, and asked the same question, once again they preferred children of average weight. Another study asked kindergartners and first graders to describe overweight people. The adjectives "lazy," "dirty," "sloppy," and "ugly" were most frequently cited. In no instance did a child mention positive attributes. The physical feature of fatness is already recognized and disliked by the age of three.

If children are taught to dislike fatness, it would appear that children could also be taught to appreciate individual differences in body size. An important purpose of education is to increase awareness of and sensitivity towards others. Books, especially fiction, can deepen this understanding. With the current emphasis on topics such as understanding aging, mainstreaming the handicapped, and removing racial and sexual stereotypes, books that bring insight into and foster acceptance and appreciation of individual differences, including body size, should be available in

a school library media center.

### Purpose of This Study:

The purpose of this study is twofold: to analyze how obesity is portrayed in young adult fiction<sup>1</sup> and to determine if this portrayal has changed over time.

### Specific Problem Statement:

Because the purpose of this study is to analyze how obesity is portrayed in YA fiction and to determine if this portrayal has changed over time, the specific problem can be stated as follows: How is obesity portrayed in YA fiction and has this portrayal changed over time?

### Hypotheses:

The suggested answers to the preceding specific problem statement are:

1. The majority of YA fiction books read for this study will negatively portray obesity by attributing negative physical, intellectual, emotional, behavioral or social characteristics to obese characters.
2. The majority of obese characters in YA fiction books read will suffer from peer rejection or ridicule.
3. In the majority of YA fiction books read, obesity will be presented as a problem that must be solved by losing weight before personal happiness is possible.
4. The number of negative portrayals of obesity will decrease

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<sup>1</sup> The term "young adult fiction" will be referred to in the remainder of this research study as "YA fiction."

by 25% in YA fiction books published after 1980, reflecting a trend towards acceptance and appreciation of individual differences that has developed in the last ten years.

### Assumptions:

As the reader considers the design and conclusions of this study, five assumptions made by the researcher should be kept in mind.

1. Stereotypes exist in our culture regarding obesity.
2. These stereotypes are fostered by negative perceptions of obesity.
3. Because of society's attitude toward the condition of obesity, the condition of being obese functions as a handicap.
4. Characterizations of obese persons in books may be evaluated using established criteria that are accepted and used to evaluate characterizations of handicapped persons.
5. The collections used as sources of YA fiction books in this research study are representative collections that have been compiled by professional media specialists according to standard and accepted selection policies.

### Significance of the Study:

It is the hope of the researcher that the knowledge obtained through this study will make a difference in selection practices concerning YA fiction books having at least one obese character. This study will make the reader aware of any negative portrayals

of obesity that may exist in the YA fiction books analyzed. The result could be an increased effort by media specialists to select books that reflect real and true portrayals of obesity to balance portrayals that may exist in collections. Furthermore, this study may initiate changes by authors in future characterizations of obesity in YA fiction books, to eliminate negative portrayals and increase the number of real and true portrayals written.

### Definitions:

1. Obesity is having a body weight that is greater than 20-25% above ideal weight for height.
2. Young adults are those individuals currently between the onset of puberty and 18 years of age and is synonymous with the term "adolescent" as used in this study.
3. YA fiction books are fiction intended for an adolescent audience.

### Limitations:

1. This study was limited to YA fiction books that focus on obesity as a dilemma facing one main character in each book.
2. The number of books was limited to those identified by the researcher in four existing collections.
3. YA fiction books included in this research study were limited to those published between 1970 and 1991.
4. The criteria and characteristics of portrayals of fat people that the researcher developed and used in this study were not validated by previous researchers or authors.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The researcher examined sources that discussed the condition of obesity not only in respect to physical aspects, but also psychological and social ramifications. In addition, sources were sought that offered guidelines to use in evaluating portrayals of obese characters in materials. Literature that concerns the condition of obesity is separated into two main categories, literature offering help in overcoming obesity and literature suggesting obesity be accepted. No sources were found that offered evaluative guidelines specifically for literature having at least one obese character.

Literature offering help to overcome obesity is prolific. Bowker's Subject Guide to Books in Print 1990-1991 lists over 420 "reducing diet" books. Many experts treat obesity as a physical and/or psychological disease. Within the scope of this pathological interpretation, some authors display an accusing attitude towards obese people while others are more magnanimous in their treatment. It is ironic that, in the name of helping obese people, some experts are the obese person's severest critics.

Dr. Broda O. Barnes, M.D., and Lawrence Galton (1976), said that thyroid function has an effect on obesity and recommended a diet high in fat and low in carbohydrates in



addition to medicine to elevate thyroid levels to normal. A study of obese patients in the 1930's who lost weight by following Dr. Barnes' advice is cited as proof of his theory concerning the connection between thyroid function and the condition of becoming obese. Clearly, low thyroid function as the cause of obesity places no blame upon the patient. Surprisingly, despite Dr. Barnes' attribution of patients' obesity to a purely physical and uncontrollable cause of thyroid dysfunction, his description of the obese people he studied contains insulting negative references. Dr. Barnes writes:

The purpose was to find out if possible from their eating habits and whims how they got into their present shape. And their shapes were something to write home about...The champion was a middle-aged woman with a height of exactly 60 inches and an abdominal measurement of 72 inches. She was literally 'Mrs. 5 x 6' and weighed 350 pounds. There were two rolls of fat around her abdomen, one just above the pelvis and the other around the stomach area. The two rolls touched each other and resembled two tractor tires around a barrel. (p. 258)

Dr. Barnes draws analogies between the eating habits and metabolism of humans and hogs that "...are so similar that they could well be embarrassing to the hog" (p. 259). Later, he refers to his obese patients as "my pachyderm volunteers" (p. 261).

Bonnie L. Lukes, author of How to be a Reasonably Thin Teenage Girl (1986), refers to herself as an "ex-fatty" and begins

the first chapter by saying, "So, you're a blimp. So you had to lie on the floor this morning to zip your jeans...Maybe you should go on a diet" (p. 3). Obesity is, in Lukes' opinion, the result of gluttony and sloth on the part of the obese girl and she recommends a low-calorie diet and increased activity to lose weight. Subsequent chapters are titled, for example, "How'd you get so fat anyway?" "It's called exercise, or get off your duff and do something," and "Fifty ways to lose your blubber." An illustration on page 29 in the chapter "What if I Mess Up?" shows a drawing of a curly-headed pig in earrings and a sweater, stuffing dozens of cookies into her mouth at once. (The illustration was defaced in the book the researcher examined. The name "Connie" was penned across the face of the pig.) The book jacket synopsis calls Lukes' book "light-hearted." It is curious that the author, who says she remembers the "heartache of the fat, teen years" and wanted to write a self-help book for obese teenage girls that would be "fun to read," would consider negativism and ridicule as either helpful or humorous.

It is generally agreed that obesity has no single cause. Too much sugar, nutritional deficiencies, metabolic disorders, illness, food allergies, stress and heredity--have all been suggested causes of obesity. The classic explanation for obesity has been a combination of gluttony and sloth. Obese people have been

perceived as being weak-willed, lazy overeaters.

This explanation was first challenged by psychiatrists who, though in agreement that obesity resulted from too much food and too little exercise, proposed that obesity was not a sign of a weak character but an outgrowth of psychological problems that caused the patient to overeat and to be inactive. Some researchers believe that emotional and psychological factors play a role in excessive weight gain. According to psychiatrist Theodore Rubin (1978), people use food for various reasons other than simply to provide fuel for their bodies. At times, people may use food to comfort themselves when they are depressed or stressed. Other times, people may use food as a temporary escape from boredom, loneliness and other negative feelings. Food can be seen to represent love and caring or become a battle ground for control between parent and child. A parent may use food as a reward or punishment for specific behaviors, punishing a child who doesn't eat his vegetables by withholding dessert or sending the child to bed without supper, and rewarding good grades with ice cream or a clean room with pizza. Food becomes laden with meanings other than being just a source of fuel. Some psychotherapists believe that eating compulsions rooted in anger evolve from traumatic childhood experiences.

Those who view obesity as the result of overeating for

emotional reasons, see the obese person as a deeply troubled, psychologically sick human being. Dr. Rubin supported this idea in his first book A Thin Book by a Formerly Fat Psychiatrist (1966). In his most recent book, Alive and Fat and Thinning in America (1978), Rubin refutes that position saying, "Some of my insights and opinions have changed radically...I now take issue with my previous views...Ordinarily overweight people are no sicker, psychologically or physically, than thin people" (p. 22).

While psychological illness is mentioned less today as a cause of obesity, stress is given credit for causing overeating. Goulart (1985) views obesity in children and adults as a symptom of stressful lives. Family stress is seen as the greatest cause of stress-induced overeating and Goulart recommends a diet low in fat and rich in vitamin B to combat it. Once a child has become obese, Goulart says that social stress becomes a key factor in the child remaining obese and becoming even more obese. Peer reaction to an obese child is so negative as to cause further overeating and increased weight-gain as the child responds to constant rejection. Nutritionist Dr. Lewis Coffin is quoted by Goulart as saying:

Fat children are viewed with automatic dislike or revulsion by their schoolmates. Their physical appearance stirs a vestigial reaction against their apparent gluttony. How puzzling for these children to be reminded again and again in various subtle and unsubtle ways that they aren't 'good' people... Eventually they alter their behavior. Expecting to be

disliked, they withdraw: anticipating revulsion, they project indifference. They are trapped within a body which has become unaccountably bloated and which announces their guilt to all. In a word, they are miserable. (p. 47-48)

Silberstein and Galton (1982) said this kind of rejection and discrimination faced by an obese child, results in a severely distorted self-image and a crippling lack of self-esteem.

Other researchers believe that some people become overweight because they have an abundance of fat cells (Silberner, 1987). These fat cells are supposedly formed during fetal development and during periods of weight gain and body growth. Scientists who support this theory claim that although fat cells may shrink during weight loss, they remain permanently in the body--causing the person to easily regain lost weight. The fat cell theory was popular in the 1970's but has since received criticism. No positive proof indicates that a large weight gain during pregnancy or overeating as a child dooms the child to a life-long struggle with excessive fat cells.

The "yo-yo" theory suggests that frequent dieting contributes to weight gain (Gray et al., 1988). A cyclical pattern develops of gain and loss that cannot be maintained. It is thought that successive attempts to lose weight become more difficult as the body adjusts to constant food deprivation by becoming more efficient. Fluctuating weight causes the body to burn fewer

calories and to store any extra calories as fat. The yo-yo dieter eventually finds himself gaining weight on the number of calories on which he previously lost weight.

Another theory says that neurotransmitters--chemicals in the brain that carry messages between nerve cells--affect food cravings and appetite. Researchers believe that a chemical called serotonin influences the amount of food an individual eats as well as that person's craving for carbohydrates and protein. Studies reported by DeBetz (1986) show that overweight people have significantly lower serotonin levels than individuals of average weight. Researchers have concluded that the brains of these overweight people do not receive the message that they have had enough to eat. These individuals also crave carbohydrates, leading to snacks of high-calorie food such as cake, cookies and candy.

Silberstein and Galton (1982) believe that a person's tendency toward obesity is shaped by the environment and recommends a family approach to weight loss for children. In single-parent homes or homes where both parents are employed, older children may be left unsupervised after school. Frequently, this leads to snacking on junk food or fast food during this period. Sometimes the child eats out of boredom, other times they are hungry and feel they cannot wait for a parent to come home and prepare a nutritious meal. Unsupervised children may play video

games or watch television. These activities do not burn many calories. This lack of physical activity contributes to weight gain.

For years, the environmental theory has suggested that poor eating and exercise habits are passed from parent to child and explains the fact that obesity appears to be a “family affair.” Goulart (1985) reported that children of two obese parents have an 80% chance of becoming obese, while only 7% of children with two slim parents become obese. Obese families also have obese pets. More recent research suggests that genetic factors play a very significant role in determining how much an individual will weigh. Stunkard et al. (1986) reported on a study by Danish and American scientists of 540 Danish adults who had been adopted in infancy. The study showed that in the majority of cases, the children resembled their biological parents in size, not their adoptive parents, in whose home environment they had been reared. The author commented on his findings by saying, “Childhood family environment alone has little or no effect on obesity” (p. 193).

Researcher Dr. Dale M. Atrens (1988) opposes those who believe obesity is an illness that causes other ailments. His book Don't Diet refutes some medical theories by saying that the rationale for dieting is wrong. Dr. Atrens believes that diets do not work and exercise does not cause weight loss. He reports on

research that he says shows obesity is not due to overeating or lack of exercise. Neither, according to Dr. Atrens, does obesity cause cancer, heart disease, diabetes or early death. He says that fatness is not a disease and is very often not as dangerous as the medical community would have people believe. Obesity is a result of an energy intake that is greater than energy output, based on the obese person's genetically low metabolism. Fat people eat more than they need, but not more than a thin person, and exercise less than they need, but not less than a thin person. The problem lies in a fat person's genetically low metabolism that necessitates a very low intake of food, combined with a very high output of exercise to become and remain thin, intake and output that exceeds reasonable limits most people could tolerate.

Dr. Atrens says modern attitudes towards fat are more of a problem than the fat itself and that most of our assumptions about fat are wrong. He chastises society for its discrimination against fat people, especially fat women, based on rigid, unrealistic standards of beauty. Fatness has become a moral issue to Dr. Atrens because thin wrongly equals beauty and health while fat equals ugliness and poor health. Modern society has an irrational fear of fat and an obsession with thinness that must be overcome. He applauds organizations such as the Fat Underground, the National Association of Fat Americans, and the Fat Sisters



Organization that are attempting to gain acceptance and appreciation of obese people.

The effort of these groups is applauded by other authors. Sociologist Marcia Millman (1980) says that American society is fat-obsessed and that obesity has become a powerful taboo. Millman says fat women are especially seen in negative terms and punished because they violate society's beauty standards. Millman suggests, because obesity is so dreaded, that losing weight should be secondary to gaining a true understanding of the meaning in this country of being overweight. The negative reactions and anxieties that obesity arouses cannot be explained by the argument that obesity is unhealthy. Other things that people do are unhealthy but do not create the same sense of shame, hostility and disapproval that obesity incites. People who have other diseases are not stigmatized the way obese people are. Being overweight is viewed by society as being intentional; a fault, a threat, a rebellion. The social and psychological stigma attached to obesity may cause much greater suffering for the obese person than does the physical condition itself. In interviews Millman observed that, "Obesity arouses emotions of surprising intensity, including horror, contempt, morbid fascination, shame and moral outrage" (p. xii). The media have contributed to negativism and discrimination by portraying fat women as loud, clumsy, hostile,

aggressive and unfeminine while thinness is associated with wealth and class. Physicist Joan Bauer, an obese person herself, is quoted by Millman as saying, "There is no denying that being fat in our society means living with a substantial handicap" (p. 223).

The National Association to Aid Fat Americans has chapters across the country. It emphasizes social activities for its members and is politically active for "fat rights." The organization maintains that fat can be beautiful and that dieting is not the solution for obesity. The NAAFA says fat people are victims of prejudice, stigma and self-hatred. Their purpose is to draw attention to the exclusion, exploitation, and psychological oppression of fat people and to demand changes in the way fat people are viewed and treated. The NAAFA draws analogies between their cause and the struggles of other oppressed groups like blacks and gay people. They have discarded labels and euphemisms for the condition of obesity in favor of calling themselves simply "fat." Lawsuits have begun to challenge the legality of weight criteria for employment based on the civil rights of fat people. The NAAFA hopes that federal laws requiring the employment of the handicapped will be useful in meeting discrimination towards fat people, viewing fatness as an involuntary condition based on body type.

The researcher found recent books that urged obese women to forget about dieting, accept their weight and look good as big

women. Jean DuCoffe and Sherry Cohen (1980) wrote Making It Big: a Guide to Health, Success and Beauty for Women Size 16 and Over. The Evelyn Roaman Book: an Expert Shows You How Heavy Can Be Happy (1980) was written by Evelyn Roaman, head of a chain of clothing stores for large size women, and Dee Ratterree. Breaking All the Rules: Feeling Good and Looking Great, No Matter What Your Size by Nancy Roberts (1985) and Big and Beautiful by Ruthanne Olds (1982) both advise obese women to take care of themselves and be beautiful as they are. These authors denounce today's obsession with thinness and the pain society inflicts upon obese women. Standards of beauty are challenged and obese women are encouraged to re-gain their self esteem, to be proud of who they are, to care for themselves and to reach their full potential. Olds tells her readers to "stop dieting and start living." She derides American "fatphobia" as an "unrealistic fear, dread, hatred of being, becoming or even being associated with fat" (p. 9). Olds calls the American craze for thinness a farce fuelled by the media, the fashion industry and a billion dollar "quack diet industry" (p. 9). Her tone is hostile and angry, surprising in relation to past norms when obese people were not only persecuted by others but also filled with self-hate.

The tone of "fat-activists" such as DuCoffe and Cohen (1980) matches in some ways the style of other rights activists; ethnic

minorities, the women's movement, rights for senior citizens, gay rights and the handicapped. Challenges by obese people to stereotypes and discrimination represent a new frontier in human rights. Consequently, the researcher found no criteria or guidelines specifically aimed at deprecatory representations in literature of obese characters. A comprehensive list of guidelines for examining characterizations in textbooks for handicapism, prepared by the Council on Interracial books for Children, titled Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks (1980) most closely matches what the researcher believes will be criteria eventually evolving to facilitate analysis of attitudes in literature for "fat-ism." A list of the points from these guidelines, adapted for use in examining characterizations of obesity, comprises Appendix A.

#### Summary:

Two approaches to obesity, under which the literature reviewed can be classified, were, first and most traditionally, that of overcoming obesity by losing weight or, second and more recently, the philosophy that obesity should be accepted--both by society and by the obese person. Literature that advocates overcoming obesity by losing weight also concerned itself with rooting out the cause of obesity. The premise of this type of thinking is that obese people must know, understand and remove

the cause of their weight gain in order to successfully lose weight. Obesity is, in their view, a problem that needs solving. Advocates of the other approach to obesity, that of fat acceptance, see obesity not as a problem that needs a solution but as a human condition that needs acceptance. They point to an often-quoted statistic that shows 95% of those who lose weight, regain the weight lost and often more. Since obese people have little chance of becoming thin, fat-activists deplore society's discrimination and prejudice towards obese people and the resulting self-recrimination of obese people towards themselves.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

The researcher read 24 YA novels published between 1970 and 1991. Titles were selected from information gathered by library catalog searches under the subject headings of “Obesity,” “Overweight,” and “Reducing.” The bibliography Bookfinder (vol. 3, 1985 and vol. 4, 1989) was consulted for titles under the subjects of “Appearance” and “Weight Control.” Titles were also suggested by professional media specialists and faculty members of the University of Northern Iowa Division of Library Science. A file of 52 potential titles was compiled from YA collections at the University of Northern Iowa Rod Library’s Youth Collection, the Waterloo Public Library, the Cedar Falls Public Library, and the McKinstry School Library Media Center, Waterloo. This file was divided into two categories. 27 books published between 1970 and 1980, and 25 books published between 1981 and 1991. If more than one book by the same author fell into one category, one title by that author was chosen by random selection for inclusion in the pool. Twelve books were chosen from each of the two categories by random selection. The twenty-four titles read are listed with their publication dates in Appendix B.

A checklist (see Appendix C) was devised that correlated with the hypotheses proposed in Chapter 1. This checklist was

patterned after guidelines listed in Appendix A. In addition, characteristics listed in the checklist were based on sources cited in the Literature Review. The checklist was used in completing a content analysis of the portrayal of obese characters in each of the YA fiction books read. The checklist contained four major categories for the subheadings with space provided for evidence from the text to substantiate the assignment of the chosen characteristic. The first category related to negative characteristics attributed to obese characters. These characteristics were classified under subheadings for physical, psychological, intellectual, behavioral or social characteristics. Under each of these subheadings, a wide array of positive and negative adjectives or phrases were listed, describing that particular subheading. Each word or phrase was identified as a positive, negative or neutral characteristic. The symbol “-” denoted a negative, “+” denoted a positive, and “0” denoted a neutral status. Each attribute also included a place for “other.” If “other” was marked, an explanation was given under “evidence” at that point. In tabulating attributes for a single title, “-” had a value of negative one, “+” a value of positive one, and “0” a value of zero. Tabulating these positive and negative attributes allowed the researcher to determine if an obese character was portrayed negatively, positively or neutrally. Negative portrayals contributed to acceptance of the first

hypothesis while neutral or positive portrayals led to rejection of the first hypothesis. The second category related to hypothesis two and reported whether the obese character was accepted or rejected, ridiculed or admired by others. If the majority of characters were rejected or ridiculed, hypothesis two was accepted. Category three reported if the obese character's weight was portrayed as a problem, if the character was portrayed as trying to lose weight as a solution to the problem, if the character lost weight, and finally if weight loss led to acceptance, admiration, or personal happiness. Category three allowed the researcher to accept or reject hypothesis three. Category four related each title's publication date to the degree of negative portrayal of obesity in the book. Books published from 1970 to 1980 were compared to books published from 1981 to 1991. This allowed the researcher to accept or reject hypothesis four.

A computer system was used to organize the titles read. As the researcher read each title, the following information was recorded: author, title, publisher, and date. A brief plot summary and main character description for each title was also included. These summaries are shown in Appendix D. Each book was then analyzed by completing the checklist.

When all the data were gathered and recorded, frequency counts and percentages were calculated for the categories



represented on the checklist. The data were then compiled according to the four hypotheses of the research study. An hypothesis was accepted if a majority of the books examined supported that hypothesis. The researcher established a majority as being greater than 50%.

## Chapter 4

### Data Analysis

A content analysis performed on 24 YA books in this study revealed a substantial number of negative portrayals of one obese main character in many of the books. The following tables are compilations of frequency counts for characteristics listed in the checklist. Characteristics have been organized under headings used in the checklist.

Table 1

#### Physical Characteristics

	f	%
<b>Dress:</b>		
poor (-)	15	62.5%
good (+)	7	29.2%
neutral	1	4.2%
n/a <sup>2</sup>	1	4.2%
<b>Grooming:</b>		
poor (-)	8	33.3%
good (+)	8	33.3%
neutral	1	4.2%
n/a	7	29.2%
<b>Appearance:</b>		
sloppy (-)	18	75.0%
neat (+)	4	16.7%
neutral	0	---

<sup>2</sup> The term "n/a" designates that characteristics did not apply in some titles analyzed.

(Table 1 cont.)

n/a	2	8.3%
Coordination:		
clumsy (-)	17	70.8%
well coordinated (+)	7	29.2%
neutral	0	---
n/a	0	---
Movement:		
slow (-)	16	66.7%
fast (+)	5	20.8%
neutral	0	---
n/a	3	12.5%

Evidence of negative physical characteristics included out-of-style, ill-fitting, unflattering clothing worn by obese characters. Negative appearance of characters was described by adjectives such as: awful, disgusting, sloppy, gross, shapeless, lumpy, messy, sweaty, and red-faced. The words "fat" and "ugly" were often linked in describing an obese character. Sample terms depicting actions of obese characters were: heaving, panting, plodding, clumsy, klutzy, awkward, and lumbering. A memorable obese character cast positively was Jack Muldoon in Fat Jack who was described as impeccably dressed, immaculately groomed and graceful.

Table Two

## Intellectual Characteristics

	f	%
Intelligence:		
low (-)	1	4.2%
high (+)	17	70.8%

(Table 2 cont.)

average	2	8.3%
n/a	4	16.7%
Grades:		
low (-)	3	12.5%
high (+)	6	25.0%
average	7	29.2%
n/a	8	33.3%
Knowledge:		
uninformed (-)	6	25.0%
informed (+)	12	50.0%
neutral	0	---
n/a	6	25.0%
Problem Solving:		
poor (-)	9	37.5%
good (+)	10	41.7%
neutral	1	4.2%
n/a	4	16.7%
Critical Thinking:		
poor (-)	4	16.7%
good (+)	8	33.3%
neutral	0	---
n/a	12	50.0%
Special Talent:		
no(-)	13	54.2%
yes (+)	11	45.8%
neutral	0	---
n/a	0	---

A majority of obese students showed proficiency in their schoolwork, received high grades and were praised by teachers. A typical portrayal is that of Susan Hocker in Dinky Hocker Shoots

Smack who was described as a voracious reader with a mind like a steel trap. Talents obese characters displayed included playing the piano, sculpting, painting, drawing, writing poetry and prose, singing, acting and cooking.

Table 3

## Emotional Characteristics

	f	%
unhappy (-)	23	95.8%
happy (+)	1	4.2%
neutral	0	---
n/a	0	---
critical of others (-)	13	54.2%
accepting of others(+)	7	29.2%
neutral	1	4.2%
n/a	3	12.5%
self critical (-)	21	87.5%
self accepting (+)	2	8.3%
neutral	0	---
n/a	1	4.2%
angry (-)	21	87.5%
not angry (+)	1	4.2%
neutral	0	---
n/a	2	---
moody (-)	19	79.2%
stable (+)	2	8.3%
neutral	0	---
n/a	3	12.5%
low self esteem (-)	22	91.6%
high self esteem (+)	1	4.2%
neutral	1	4.2%
n/a	0	---

(Table 3 cont.)

pessimistic (-)	19	79.2%
optimistic (+)	1	4.2%
neutral	2	8.3%
n/a	2	8.3%
overly sensitive (-)	5	45.8%
insensitive (-)	2	8.3%
sensitive (+)	11	45.8%
neutral	0	---
n/a	0	---
cruel (-)	5	20.8%
kind (+)	15	62.5%
neutral	2	8.3%
n/a	2	8.3%
introvert (-)	19	79.2%
extrovert (+)	3	12.5%
neutral	0	---
n/a	2	8.3%
confused (-)	19	79.2%
decisive (+)	4	16.7%
neutral	0	---
n/a	1	4.2%

Words and phrases expressing characters' unhappiness which were found included: miserable, despair, sad, unhappy, unloved, unwanted, hate life, feel bad, hurt, lonely, do not belong, do not fit in, jealous of thin people, feel like an outsider, hopeless, and helpless to change. Obese characters often experienced low self esteem as evidenced by self criticism such as: fat ugly girl, stupid, idiot, dumb, moron, sloppy, lazy, fat slug, dumpy, piglet, fat slob, inflated balloon, blimp, dog, hideous, fat bug, elephant, repulsive, ashamed, gross, and blob.

Table 4

## Behavioral Characteristics

	f	%
dishonest (-)	8	33.3%
honest (+)	4	16.7%
neutral	0	---
n/a	12	50.0%
lies (-)	10	41.7%
truthful (+)	7	29.2%
neutral	0	---
n/a	7	29.2%
sneaky (-)	14	58.3%
open (+)	1	4.2%
neutral	1	4.2%
n/a	8	33.3%
aggressive (-)	5	20.8%
passive (-)	10	41.7%
balance of both (+)	4	16.7%
neutral	0	---
n/a	5	20.8%
complaining (-)	13	54.2%
cheerful (+)	1	4.2%
neutral	1	4.2%
n/a	9	37.5%
violent (-)	3	12.5%
peaceful (+)	3	12.5%
neutral	0	---
n/a	18	75.0%
lazy (-)	4	16.7%
industrious (+)	10	41.7%
neutral	1	4.2%
n/a	9	37.5%

(Table 4 cont.)

overly competitive (-)	2	8.3%
overly cooperative (-)	4	16.7%
balance of both (+)	3	12.5%
neutral	0	---
n/a	15	62.5%
helpless (-)	13	54.2%
capable (+)	11	45.8%
neutral	0	---
n/a	0	---
ignores own needs (-)	11	45.8%
meets own needs (+)	11	45.8%
neutral	2	8.3%
n/a	0	---

Some obese characters were portrayed as sneaking food and taking money from parents to buy forbidden food. Eating habits were described as out-of-control, binge eating, and lacking willpower. Obese characters accepted taunts and teasing without retaliation and kept feelings inside. Some felt rage and bitterness but remained outwardly passive and compliant. In addition, some obese characters kept their heads down and avoided eye contact, expressing a self-conscious wish to hide and go unnoticed.

Table 5

## Social Characteristics

	f	%
friendless (-)	11	45.8%
friends (+)	12	50.0%
neutral	1	4.2%
n/a	0	---
powerless (-)	14	58.3%



(Table 5 cont.)

powerful (+)	7	29.2%
neutral	0	---
n/a	3	12.5%
bad reputation (-)	8	33.3%
good reputation (+)	6	25.0%
neutral	2	8.3%
n/a	8	33.3%
uncommunicative (-)	11	45.8%
communicative (+)	10	41.7%
neutral	1	4.2%
n/a	2	8.3%
insignificant in group (-)	16	66.7%
important to group (+)	4	16.7%
neutral	1	4.2%
n/a	3	12.5%
rude (-)	7	29.2%
mannerly (+)	9	37.5%
neutral	0	---
n/a	8	33.3%
follower (-)	10	41.7%
leader (+)	3	12.5%
neutral	3	12.5%
n/a	8	33.3%

Descriptions of social traits of obese characters found in the books included: loner, single friend, few friends, a follower, outcast, outsider, left out, unpopular, isolated, and ignored. Indicative of these qualities, Marcy Lewis in The Cat Ate My Gymsuit says she would not want to embarrass anyone by having them be seen talking to her. Gabby Finkelstein in I Was a Fifteen Year Old Blimp says she is always liked, popular, but never loved. Elsie in Nothing's Fair in Fifth Grade is important to her class only

as an object of ridicule.

Most frequently occurring characteristics, both positive and negative, are given in Table Six.

Table 6  
Most Frequently Occurring Characteristics

		f	%
Physical:	(-) sloppy appearance	18	75.0%
	(+) good grooming	8	33.3%
Intellectual:	(-) no special talent	13	54.2%
	(+) high intelligence	17	70.8%
Emotional:	(-) unhappy	23	95.8%
	(+) kind	15	62.5%
Behavioral:	(-) sneaky	14	58.3%
	(+) capable/ meets own needs	11	45.8%
Social:	(-) insignificant	16	66.7%
	(+) friends	12	50.0%

The most frequently occurring negative characteristic, overall, is “unhappy” with a count of 23. The most frequent positive characteristic of all is “high intelligence” with 17 occurrences.

Combining all positive and all negative frequency counts for characteristics listed under each of the major headings resulted in

the following condensed table.

**Table 7**  
**Total Number of Positive and Negative Characteristics**  
**in Each Division**

	- f	+ f
Physical Characteristics:	74	31
Intellectual Characteristics:	36	64
Emotional Characteristics:	192	39
Behavioral Characteristics:	97	55
Social Characteristics:	77	51

These data indicate 476 instances of negative characteristics compared to 240 occurrences of positive characteristics. Negative characteristics outnumbered positive characteristics in every division except that of intellectual characteristics. Negative and positive characteristics were tabulated for each book, yielding an overall score for each title that represents the level of negative or positive portrayal presented. This score was used in calculating the percentage of books with negative portrayals of obesity in response to the first hypothesis. A “+” score was indicative of a positive presentation of obesity. A “-” score was evidence of negative treatment. The following table is a list of the books analyzed,

ranked in order from most negative to most positive.

Table 8  
Scores Indicating Levels of Negative or Positive Portrayals  
in YA Books Analyzed

<u>Author</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Score</u>
Sachs	The Fat Girl	84	-35
Stren	I Was A Fifteen-Year Old Blimp	85	-32
Perl	Hey, Remember Fat Glenda?	81	-26
Holland	Dinah and the Green Fat Kingdom	78	-26
Greenberg	The Pig-Out Blues	82	-25
Hamilton	Little Love	84	-23
DeClements	Nothing's Fair in the Fifth Grade	81	-22
Smith	Last Was Lloyd	81	-22
Miles	Looking On	78	-21
Mazer	The Dollar Man	74	-20
Blume	Blubber	74	-19
Hamilton	The Planet of Junior Brown	71	-18
Kerr	Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack!	72	-17
Danziger	The Cat Ate My Gymsuit	74	-14
Benjamin	Nobody's Baby Now	84	-13
Rabinowich	Underneath I'm Different	83	-7
Holland	House in the Woods	91	-2
Pinkwater	Fat Men From Space	80	-1
Wersba	Fat: A Love Story	87	-1
Greene	I Know You Al	75	+1
First	Look Who's Beautiful	80	+2
Pinsker	A Lot Like You	88	+5
Perl	That Crazy April	74	+6
Cohen	Fat Jack	80	+11

Of the 24 books analyzed, 19 received negative scores and five received positive scores. Transformed into percentages, 79.2% of the books presented obesity in a negative manner and 20.8%

presented a positive portrayal of obesity. Therefore, the first hypothesis, "The majority of YA fiction books read for this study will negatively portray obesity by attributing negative physical, intellectual, emotional, behavioral, or social characteristics to obese characters," was accepted.

Part II of the checklist denoted the number of books in which obese characters were rejected or ridiculed. In 20 books (83.3%), obese characters were rejected by their peers. Twenty-one books (87.5%) contained instances of obese characters being ridiculed. Ridicule typically took the form of name calling such as: hulk, fatso, butterball, elephant, scrounge, blimp, walrus, chub, fathead, ton of fun, piggy biggy, fatstuff, jelly belly, creep, P-I-G, blubber, smelly whale, and detestable creep. Evidence showed instances of characters being rejected at home and school by family and peers. Both the conditions of ridicule and rejection occurred to a majority of obese characters. Based on this evidence the second hypothesis, "The majority of obese characters in YA fiction books read will suffer from peer rejection or ridicule," was accepted.

In relation to hypothesis three, "In the majority of YA fiction books read, obesity will be presented as a problem that must be solved by losing weight before personal happiness is possible," the researcher found that 21 books (87.5%) presented obesity as a problem. Of those 21 books, 17 (80.9%) portrayed the obese

character as trying to lose weight as a solution to the problem of obesity. Of the 17 books in which obese characters tried to lose weight, seven (41.2%) succeeded in losing weight and all seven (100%) were then accepted and happy. Based upon this data, hypothesis three was accepted.

An examination of the scores indicating levels of negative portrayals of obesity (as listed in Table 8) and dividing those scores into two categories, one for books published between 1970-1980 and one for books published between 1981-1991, shows that eight books (66.7%) in the 1970-1980 category and 11 books (91.7%) in the 1981-1991 category have negative scores. For acceptance of hypothesis four, "The number of negative portrayals of obesity will decrease by 25% in YA fiction books published after 1980, reflecting a trend towards acceptance and appreciation of individual differences that has developed in the last ten years," it would be necessary for six or fewer books in the 1981-1991 category to display negative scores (a reduction of 25% from the 1970-1980 category). Instead that number rose from eight to 11. In the 1981-1991 category, only one book received a positive score. Therefore, hypothesis four was rejected.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions, Recommendations, and Summary

#### Conclusions:

If one purpose of literature is to mirror society, then YA literature portraying obese characters in essentially negative terms is evidence that society has remained, “obsessed with thinness” as described on the first page of the introduction to this study. We still are being conditioned to think of obese people as ugly, disturbed, unacceptable, and disgusting. Indications of this as a continuing mind-set are the consistently high frequencies noted in this study of negative qualities ascribed to obese characters. In only 16.7% of the titles examined, was it suggested that obesity should be accepted. The first hypothesis was accepted on the basis that a majority of the books analyzed did negatively portray obesity. The researcher believes it to be significant that the exact figure was 79.2%. This relates to the finding that negative portrayals of obesity did not decrease in books published more recently, but rose by 37.5%. Of interest is the fact that seven titles with the most negative scores were published in 1981 or later. This suggests that the idea of “fat acceptance” proposed by fat “activists” since 1980 has not yet had an effect on the way authors view obesity.

That obese people have also been conditioned to consider

obesity to be repulsive and unacceptable is corroborated by the astonishingly high occurrence of obese characters being unhappy, self-critical, and suffering from low self-esteem. In only two of 24 titles did obese characters display self-acceptance. High frequencies of rejection and ridicule coincide with high levels of obese characters being portrayed as introverts. Dr. Lewis Coffin offered an applicable explanation of this phenomenon as “...expecting to be disliked they withdraw...they are miserable” (Goulart, 1985, p. 47-48). The researcher proposes that it is the rejection, discrimination and psychological pain experienced by obese characters, not the weight itself, that causes such widespread unhappiness, low self-esteem and self-criticism.

Surprisingly, the negative portrayal of obese people as “stupid” did not appear in the majority of books analyzed. In 70.8% of the books, obese characters were portrayed as highly intelligent. Despite this being a positive attribution, when combined with a high incidence of obesity presented as unacceptable and problematic, one may speculate being thought to possess high intelligence may indirectly contribute to the disapproval obese people experience. If fat people are not “stupid,” one might conclude that they should be able to do something about their problem. Being intelligent yet failing to lose weight, suggests that obese people are weak-willed. Data collected confirm this



conjecture. In 54.2% of the books analyzed, obese characters were pictured as “helpless.” In 80.9% of the books, obese characters attempted to diet; however, 58.8% of those characters lost no weight at all. Of the 41.2% who lost weight, no evidence was given of how many, if any, kept the weight off. According to a statistic quoted earlier from Atrens (1988) 95% of those who lost weight would, in real life, regain the weight and often more. In previous research studies it was noted that those who see this statistic as proof obese people have little chance of becoming thin, maintain obesity should not be treated as a problem to be solved but as a human condition requiring acceptance. Data collected validating the second, third and fourth hypotheses of this study (showing obese characters as victims of rejection and ridicule, presenting obesity as a problem to be solved by dieting and showing a dramatic rise, not a decline, in the number of negative portrayals of obese characters) lead the researcher to conclude that obesity is far from becoming an acceptable condition.

Information not sought by the researcher, but thought to be of interest, concerned the causes given for obesity and also the family status of obese characters that predominated in the YA novels analyzed. Despite recent research that ties the occurrence of obesity to environmental factors and genetic predisposition, a classic explanation for obesity prevailed. In the book analyzed,

obesity was attributed to various combinations of gluttony and sloth. Nineteen out of 24 titles (79.2%) pictured obese characters as out-of-control overeaters. Sixteen of 24 titles (66.7%) presented obese characters as slow-moving, inactive people. Contrary to research by Goulart (1985) that showed a strong correlation between obesity in parents and in their children, 91.7% of the YA novels reviewed portrayed obese children as having thin parents. Conflicts between thin mothers and obese daughters occurred in 89.5% of the books having a girl as the obese character. Curiously, in the remaining 10.5%, the mother of the obese girl was deceased. Emotional reasons were implied as the source of obesity for the girls engaged in these conflicts. An emotional basis for obesity was further implied through the portrayal of half the families of the obese characters analyzed as dysfunctional. Of these 12 families, ten had an absent father, one an absent mother, and one an abusive father. In the four titles portraying obese male children, fathers were absent in every case--suggesting emotional reasons for the child's obesity. In addition, it was noted by the researcher that books portraying obese characters showed a higher percentage of female obesity compared to male obesity. This coincides with a comment by Marcia Millman (1980) that stated fat women are especially seen in negative terms.

### Recommendations:

Further research could be done to examine the effect of reading books with negative as opposed to positive portrayals of obese characters on the attitudes of young adult readers towards obesity. Readers could be separated into two groups, reading YA novels found to be most negative and those most positive. Participants could be given an attitude survey before reading and after reading, the results tabulated and changes, if any, compared.

This study could be modified and replicated to analyze the portrayal of obese characters in children's picture books or in adult novels, with the results being compared to those found in the examination of YA novels. In addition, since assumption one of this study is, "Stereotypes exist in our culture regarding obesity," further research could be done by analyzing literature from other cultures, especially those whose attitudes differ towards obesity from our own, and comparing those findings with this study's results.

It is hoped by the researcher that the results of this study can be applied to selection practices for YA novels portraying obese characters. The result could be an increased sensitivity towards negative portrayals of obesity and an effort to balance those representations by seeking to include books that reflect real, true, positive characterizations of obesity in library collections. In

addition, awareness of the results of this study by authors of YA novels could eventually initiate changes in future characterizations of obesity that reduces negative portrayals and increases the number of real, true, and positive obese characters created.

### Summary:

This study served a dual purpose: to analyze how obesity was portrayed in YA fiction, and to determine if this portrayal changed over time. Four hypotheses were proposed. A random sample of YA fiction books was selected and each book examined by completing a content analysis checklist designed to evaluate portrayal of obese characters. Three hypotheses were tested and accepted:

1. The majority of YA fiction books read for this study will negatively portray obesity by attributing negative physical, intellectual, emotional, behavioral or social characteristics to obese characters.
2. The majority of obese characters in YA fiction books read will suffer from peer rejection or ridicule.
3. In the majority of YA fiction books read, obesity will be presented as a problem that must be solved by losing weight before personal happiness is possible.

One hypothesis was tested and rejected:

4. The number of negative portrayals of obesity will decrease by 25% in YA fiction books published after

1980, reflecting a trend towards acceptance and appreciation of individual differences that has developed in the last ten years.

Recent books displayed more negative scores than books published earlier. Obesity is still seen as a repulsive problem to be solved by dieting. Obese characters are shown as unhappy, self-critical introverts who suffer from a lack of self-esteem. One positive quality attributed to obese characters is high intelligence. The researcher speculates that even this, however, works against a flattering perception of obesity. Failing to use one's intelligence to overcome obesity creates the impression of weakness in obese characters. The researcher proposes that it is not the weight itself that causes misery, but rejection, ridicule and psychological pain imposed on obese characters by others.

Secondary findings discovered in the process of this study included the causes given for characters' obesity. A classic explanation, a combination of overeating and inactivity, prevailed in the books analyzed. In addition, emotional causes are implied by the portrayal of a high number of mother-daughter conflicts and by depicting half of the families of obese children as dysfunctional. A higher percentage of female obesity than male obesity was also presented. Plus, despite research to the contrary, obese children were generally portrayed as having thin parents. The study concludes that obesity is portrayed in negative terms

and, in spite of the rise of “fat activists,” the idea of fat acceptance has not yet had an effect on the way obesity is presented in YA fiction.

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## Appendix A

### Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Books

#### With Obese Characters

Note: These guidelines are based on an adaptation of nine points to consider in evaluating characterizations of the handicapped, prepared by the Council on Interracial Books for Children in Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks (1980), pages 60-61.

1. Are obese people always shown as lonesome, unhappy, somehow in need of help from thin children or adults? Is this situation ever vice versa? (Obese people should be depicted as equals, not as objects of charity--a dehumanizing characterization.)
2. Is the emphasis placed on what obese people cannot do, rather than on the wide range of things they can do? (Portrayals of obese people should show them as productive members of society, as important family members, as students, teachers, workers, etc.)
3. Are obese people characterized in the story as possessing individual and complex personalities and interacting with thin story characters based on their individuality, not on their obesity? (Obese people should be depicted in the same situations of love, hate, etc. as are thin people.)

4. Does the story line use an obese person for reasons of sensationalism, as a ploy to create fear, laughter, pity or curiosity? (They should be depicted as part of an average population, in background as well as in central roles. Story lines which do otherwise, or which depict obese people only as victims, merely reinforce stereotypes.)
5. Does the story line imply a connection between a person's obesity and personality? (Messages that make these implications appear in numerous children's "classics" and fairy tales, and since the personality of the obese character is invariably portrayed as negative, children develop a dislike for obese people.)
6. Does an obese character perform some feat to be accepted by the thin characters?
7. Does the plot suggest that obese people will be happy once they have lost weight and only when they have lost weight? Or is their unhappiness shown as being legitimate and often due to society's prejudice and discrimination against obese people?
8. Does the book offer positive role models to obese children of both sexes and all races? Obviously, no

one text can fit in every role model for every category of student. But through stories, illustrations, etc., attempts should be made to be as inclusive as possible.

## Appendix B

Books Selected for Content Analysis

Blume	Blubber	74
Cohen	Fat Jack	80
Danziger	The Cat Ate My Gymsuit	74
First	Look Who's Beautiful	80
Greene	I Know You Al	75
Hamilton	The Planet of Junior Brown	71
Holland	Dinah and the Green Fat Kingdom	78
Kerr	Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack	72
Mazer	The Dollar Man	74
Miles	Looking On	78
Perl	That Crazy April	74
Pinkwater	Fat Men From Space	80
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Benjamin	Nobody's Baby Now	84
DeClements	Nothing's Fair in the Fifth Grade	81
Greenberg	The Pig-Out Blues	82
Hamilton	Little Love	84
Holland	House in the Woods	91
Perl	Hey, Remember Fat Glenda?	81
Pinsker	A Lot Like You	88
Rabinowich	Underneath I'm Different	83

Sach	The Fat Girl	84
Smith	Last Was Lloyd	81
Stren	I Was a Fifteen-Year-Old Blimp	85
Wersba	Fat: A Love Story	87

## Appendix C

Content Analysis Checklist

Book

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Obese character's  
name: \_\_\_\_\_**Part I  
Character Portrayal****Physical characteristics:**

Dress: Poor (-) Good (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Grooming: Poor (-) Good (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Appearance: Sloppy (-) Neat (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Coordination: Clumsy (-) Well (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Movement: Slow (-) Fast (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

**Intellectual characteristics:**

Intelligence level: Low (-) High (+) Average (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

School grades: Low (-) High (+) Average (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Knowledge level: Uninformed (-) Informed (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Problem solving: Poor (-) Good (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Critical thinking: Poor (-) Good (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Special talent: No (-) Yes (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

**Emotional characteristics:**

Unhappy (-) Happy (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Critical of others (-) Accepting of others (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_



Self critical (-) Self accepting (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Angry (-) Not angry (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Moody (-) Stable (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Low self esteem (-) High self esteem (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Pessimistic (-) Optimistic (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Overly sensitive (-) Insensitive (-) Sensitive (+) Neutral (0)  
Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Cruel (-) Kind (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Introvert (-) Extrovert (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Confused (-) Decisive (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

**Behavioral characteristics:**

Dishonest (-) Honest (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Lies (-) Truthful (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Sneaky (-) Open (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Aggressive (-) Passive (-) Balance of both (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Complaining (-) Cheerful (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Violent (-) Peaceful (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Lazy (-) Industrious (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Overly competitive (-) Overly cooperative (-) Balanced (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Helpless (-) Capable (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Ignores own needs (-) Meets own needs (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

**Social characteristics:**

Friendless (-) Friends (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Powerless (-) Powerful (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Bad reputation (-) Good reputation (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Uncommunicative (-) Communicative (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Insignificant in group (-) Important to group (+) Neutral (0)  
Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Rude (-) Mannerly (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Follower (-) Leader (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Part II Peer Treatment of character**

Rejected (-) Accepted (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Ridiculed (-) Admired (+) Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Part III Portrayal of Obesity**

Unacceptable condition (-) A condition that needs acceptance (+)  
Neutral (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

A problem (-) Not a problem (+) Neutral Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

If a problem: Solution is to lose weight (-) Solution is to change  
attitudes toward obesity (+) No solution offered (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

If character loses weight: Now accepted (-) Now admired (-) Now happy (-) No change (0) Other ( )

Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

**Total** [Sum of -, +, 0's] \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Part IV**

#### **Publication Date/Level of Negative or Positive Portrayal**

Publication date: 1970-1980 \_\_\_\_\_ 1981-1991 \_\_\_\_\_

Score (see "Total" in Part III) \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

Book Summaries

Title: Blubber

Author: Blume, Judy

Publisher: Dell

Date: 1974

Setting: elementary school classroom

Main Characters' Descriptions: Jill Brenner, a sensible, average fifth grade girl and Linda Fischer, a sensitive, quiet, overweight classmate of Jill's, nicknamed "Blubber" and teased unmercifully by the cruel but popular Wendy and her friends.

Brief Plot Summary: After an unfortunate report on whales, overweight Linda is nicknamed "Blubber" then teased and bullied relentlessly by Wendy and her classmates. The cruelty of the other students is without reason, except "...There are some people who just make you want to see how far you can go." However cruel and unfair everybody is, Jill takes part in the "fun" instead of defending a helpless Linda. When the tables are turned and Wendy, taking Linda under her wing, begins to tease Jill instead, she has to make a stand. In the process, Jill learns a lesson about popularity, human nature, and what's really important in a friendship.

Title: The Cat Ate My Gymsuit

Author: Danziger, Paula

Publisher: Delacorte

Date: 1974

Setting: Dwight D. Eisenhower Junior High, the Lewis home

Main Character Description: Marcy Lewis, an overweight 13 year old girl; a quiet, compliant but unhappy child, a good student

Brief Plot Summary: Marcy Lewis has problems--bored at school, tyrannized and demeaned by her hot-tempered father at home and uncertain of her own worth. She is certain she will always be fat and unattractive when along comes Ms. Finney, an innovative and eccentric young English teacher who tries lots of new things to interest and reach out to her students--light shows, student productions, "far-out" books, videotaped student productions, and sessions in group dynamics. Best of all is Smedley Club, started by Ms. Finney, where the kids can be themselves, learn about themselves and others, and talk about important things like their feelings and fears. Life begins to have a purpose and school begins to be fun and interesting. All of a sudden, Ms Finney is suspended by the school board for her unconventional teaching and her refusal to pledge allegiance to the flag. Up until now, Marcy has been a model student--compliant, passive, good grades--but this is

too much! She speaks out in class to the principal about the unfairness of Ms. Finney's dismissal and is called into the office for being rude and a troublemaker. Marcy helps organize the other students in protest. Her overbearing father is against Ms. Finney's reinstatement but Marcy's brow-beaten mother thinks Marcy is right! For the first time, Marcy and her mother stand up to Mr. Lewis. At the school board hearing, Ms. Finney is reinstated, only to have her resign immediately after the decision is made. Marcy and her friends are devastated--was all this fighting for nothing? Gradually they realize that Ms. Finney was right in resigning--things could never be the same after all the trouble; someone would be constantly watching her for any little mistake. Marcy discovers that in the process of standing up for her principles, she has emerged a changed person--stronger, able to communicate how she feels and stand behind what she thinks. She discovers there is more to life than a thin body, her mother begins to strike out on her own, Marcy begins counseling and the family tries to work out their problems.



Title: Dinah and the Green Fat Kingdom

Author: Holland, Isabelle

Date: 1978

Publisher: Lippincott

Setting: A small city

Main Character Description: Dinah Randall, a 12 year old redhead who is 35 pounds overweight

Brief Plot Summary: When Dinah was 12, she and her family moved to a new town and took her cousin Brenda to live with them. Brenda is everything Dinah isn't--thin, beautiful, well-mannered, neat and brilliant! Dinah feels compared to Brenda, whom Dinah's mother seems to favor. It becomes "everybody's business" to make Dinah lose weight, especially her mother's. Tired of being nagged at home and teased at school, Dinah escapes to a fantasy kingdom in the boughs of a favorite tree near home--The Green Fat Kingdom. Here, the fattest people are the most beautiful. When Dinah makes new friends, including an ugly puppy she names Francis and Sister Elizabeth, an understanding nun to whom Dinah is sent for nutrition lessons, the real world becomes more bearable and Dinah starts to take charge of her life. Things come to a climax when Dinah takes off one night after an angry exchange with her family, later she expresses her painful

feelings and comes to a reconciliation with her family-- especially her mother who becomes an understanding and loving ally at the close of the story.

Title: Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack!

Author: Kerr, M. E.

Publisher: Harper & Row

Date: 1972

Setting: Brooklyn, N. Y.

Main Character Description: Susan "Dinky" Hocker: Bright, opinionated, yet sensitive fifteen year old, overweight girl; daughter of a lawyer and a do-gooder mother who has encounter groups for drug addicts in her home while ignoring the needs and feelings of her daughter.

Brief Plot Summary: Dressed in her father's old clothes, Susan Hocker seems not to care about her needs at all--she's engrossed in social justice and relishes any bizarre happenings she reads about. Her right-wing boyfriend, also overweight, tries to get her to join Weight Watchers and develop more self-respect, but he is rejected by Susan's family for his upsetting opinions. Her mother is constantly trying to save the drug addicts and the underprivileged of New York, while she thoughtlessly picks at, demeans and criticizes Susan. Susan keeps gaining until, in a desperate plea for attention, she embarrasses her mother into realizing that even people who don't do drugs have problems.

Title: The Dollar Man

Author: Mazer, Harry

Publisher: Delacorte

Date: 1974

Setting: New York City

Main Character Description: Marcus Rosenbloom; a fat, fatherless, insecure seventh grade boy.

Brief Plot Summary: Raised by a fiercely independent mother, in complete ignorance of his father, Marcus, after years of daydreaming about his other parent, feels compelled to find him. Rejecting the open and loving relationship he has with his mother and her friend Bill, Marcus starts hanging out with older boys and tries on a new identity as a fearless oddball. But that only leads to his expulsion from school when he wrongly accepts the blame for a marijuana charge. Embittered by the failure of his older friends to stand up for him and more unsure than ever, he sets out to track his father down. His search leads him to the "dollar man," George Renfrew, a wealthy, powerful and respected businessman in another community. Marcus confronts his father, concluding they are strangers who "...don't know each other...don't understand each other...don't even think the same things are important...The truth was, his father didn't care about him. He was an embarrassment

to his father. His father had tried to buy him off with a twenty-dollar bill and a forty-dollar watch.” The story closes with Marcus coming to a new realization of himself as a “...searcher, a doer, a person with principles who stuck up for what he believed no matter what,” with an identity of his own that no longer revolves around finding his father and being with him.

Title: Fat A Love Story

Author: Wersba, Barbara

Publisher: Harper & Row

Date: 1987

Setting: Sag Harbor (part of "The Hamptons" on Long Island, New York)

Main Character Description: Rita Formica, a 16-year-old, overweight high school girl who thinks she can only attract a handsome boy by losing weight.

Brief Plot Summary: Rita has always been fat--ever since she was born. She has come to believe her looks will never change.

Anyway, she wants to eat, calling food is her "god and religion." Her friend, Nicole thinks she looks like a fat spy in her baggy raincoat, and her long-suffering parents have sent her to every diet counselor and psychologist on Long Island. Meanwhile, Rita the extrovert, the clown, popular and liked by all (but "never loved") keeps eating. She takes a job working for an eccentric gentleman named Arnold Bromberg who runs a cheesecake business. Then she sees Robert Swann--a rich, blond, athletic "Greek-god" who lives in Sag Harbor over the summer. In love at first sight, Rita is determined to change her image. She joins a health club to help her lose weight, an added benefit being the

opportunity to watch Robert Swann who is a member of the same club. Nothing works--Robert doesn't even know Rita exists. When her sexy, older, French friend, Nicole, sets out to help Rita seduce Robert trouble really starts. Nicole says Robert is a shallow, boring "jock," but they eventually fall in love and marry. Mr. Bromberg is the only one ever to appreciate Rita, fat or thin. She gradually comes to have a new outlook as she learns to love and appreciate him--an older, intellectual, talented "Renaissance Man" with a peculiar perspective on what is really valuable in life, whom Rita finds she loves and who loves her too.

Title: The Fat Girl

Author: Sachs, Marilyn

Publisher: Dutton

Date: 1984

Setting: San Francisco

Main Characters' Descriptions: Jeff Lyons; a good looking, popular high school senior from a broken home and Ellen DeLuca; a fat, unhappy classmate

Brief Plot Summary: Jeff Lyons thinks Ellen DeLuca is a bloated, disgusting, gross and revolting slob. But when he makes her cry, he feels pressured by a gorgeous girlfriend to apologize. Once he reaches out to Ellen, he becomes wrapped up in her problems and suicidal threats and is eventually obsessed with creating a new and beautiful person out of "The Fat Girl." He chooses her clothes, make-up, and jewelry, teaches her how to walk, what to say, gives her advice on what activities she should participate in and tells her what college plans she should make. Ellen worships Jeff, hangs on his every word and does whatever he says. Flattered by her adoring admiration, Jeff takes more and more control of Ellen in his effort to re-make her until Ellen begins to resist. When Ellen begins taking charge of her own life, Jeff cannot cope with the loss of power. The story ends with Ellen going her own way and Jeff



wishing he had never met her.

Title: Fat Jack

Author: Cohen, Barbara

Publisher: Atheneum

Date: 1980

Setting: Carbondale High School

Main Characters Description: Judy Goldstein; a senior girl, bright, active in school affairs and sometimes included with the most popular girls--yet she is a loner who does not feel she fits in. Jack Muldoon; a senior transfer student, impeccably groomed, good student, talented actor but ridiculed and an outcast because he is enormously fat.

Brief Plot Summary: Having carved out her niche in high school as feature editor of the school newspaper, an actor in school plays, and a brainy girl--Judy Goldstein doesn't have a boyfriend, has never been kissed, and really isn't concerned about it. She finds herself in the comfortable position of being accepted, yet free enough to go her own way and she doesn't want to jeopardized it by befriending Jack Muldoon. Yet when she sees some popular girls she knows humiliating Jack, an enormously fat, new senior boy, she cannot resist trying to protect him. They become friends. His only other friend is Mr. Sharf the school librarian. When the senior class needs a director for the senior play, Mr. Sharf, who

has had experience directing theater, is persuaded to take the job. He agrees only if he can choose the play he wants--Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part One. No one cares for the choice--the class has always done a popular comedy and Shakespeare will surely be doomed to flop. Jack is especially opposed to the choice when he finds out Mr. Sharf is determined to cast him as Falstaff--a wonderful part, but a character who is funny and hugely fat. Eventually, Judy (cast as Mistress Quickly) and Mr. Sharf convince Jack to take the role--not because he looks like Falstaff, but because he has the talent to be Falstaff. In spite of everyone's misgivings, Mr. Sharf begins to make something remarkable of the production. The theme of the play revolves around honor. Judy asks herself, "Was I an honorable person? Would I risk anything, or sacrifice anything, either for another person or for my idea of what was right and just?" The play did not provide any answers, but it certainly raised a lot of questions. It was as complicated as reality. Jack and Judy become close friends. He feels romantic but Judy holds back--as much as she likes Jack, she just cannot face what people might think if they knew she was in love with someone who looked like Jack does. She hurts Jack's feelings badly. The play is a success. After its closes, Mr. Sharf announces he is resigning. Judy finds out he was pressured to resign because of a past hospitalization for mental illness. The unfairness of it all

haunts Judy for years--her betrayal of Mr. Sharf by not speaking up on his behalf, her betrayal of Jack by being so concerned about appearances. Jack and Judy meet as adults at the close of the story and try to repair the distance between them.

Title: Fat Men From Space

Author: Pinkwater, Daniel Manus

Publisher: Dodd, Mead

Date: 1977

Setting: A town somewhere in the U. S.

Main Character Description: William Pedwee; a young boy with a rare tooth--one that receives radio messages

Brief Plot Summary: William has a "one-in-a-million tooth"--one that receives radio programs. The dentist says he can do the filling over so it would stop working, and William's parents almost made him have it done. But then the tooth started receiving bulletins from outer space of an approaching invasion! Thousands of fat spacemen in plaid sports jackets, knitted neckties, and two-tone shoes descend to earth, covering every square mile and eating up all the junk food in the world. William, beamed aboard their craft and held captive so he cannot warn the world, knows that the worst is yet to come. When all the junk food is consumed, the fat spacemen plan to hold everyone on earth captive and force them to produce more of the goodies the gluttonous invaders love. World-wide shortages of candy bars, Twinkies, hamburgers, hot dogs, jelly doughnuts, pizza, and chocolate covered marshmallows develop. William braces himself for lifelong captivity when,

miraculously, the spacemen head off to investigate a report of the biggest potato pancake ever seen in another galaxy. William escapes--floating harmlessly back to earth in a plaid sport jacket. Months of clean-up faces the population of earth; wrappers and garbage are everywhere. William's parents forget about his tooth and its special ability gradually fades away.

Title: Hey, Remember Fat Glenda?

Author: Perl, Lila

Publisher: Clarion

Date: 1981

Setting: Havenhurst, Long Island N.Y.

Main Character Description: Glenda Waite, an overweight, self-conscious, and insecure high school girl

Brief Plot Summary: Encouraged by letters from her best friend, who moved away, Glenda tries desperately to lose weight. Her efforts are further enhanced by a crush on her handsome English teacher, Mr. Hartley. She takes dance lessons and practices tirelessly on a routine for the Spring Show that Mr. Hartley is directing. But her dance teacher, Miss Esme, who has known Mr. Hartley as an actor, warns Glenda that he is a “user” she should be careful of. As she gets thinner, Glenda sees her chances of getting into the show increase. Her most triumphant moment comes at the class Halloween party when she’s mistaken for thin, popular Cathanne and wins a prize for her glamorous costume. She does get a part in the show--as Mr. Hartley’s assistant. After doing all the work and fetching dozens of cups of coffee “H-O-T” for Mr. Hartley, Glenda calls it quits, fights the urge to get fat again, and faces her life with a new determination.

Title: House in the Woods, The

Author: Holland, Isabelle

Publisher: Little, Brown

Date: 1991

Setting: New Hampshire countryside

Main Character Description: Bridget Moorland, an overweight 14 year old girl who was adopted at the age of two. Her adopted mother is dead and she feels she does not belong in the family, nor does she feel loved by her adopted father.

Brief Plot Summary: Bridget thinks her adopted father no longer loves or wants her. She feels like a misfit in the family of two young twin sisters and a brother. She is only close with her little brother, Morgan, who at seven years old has never spoken and for no apparent reason. Overweight and unattractive, she thinks nothing will ever change for the better until the day she finds a mysterious old house in the woods near the place her family is staying for the summer. She is strangely attached to and moved by the house--as though it has something to tell her. Through secrets unleashed by the house and its contents, Bridget connects with her past, meets her real father, comes to an understanding with her adoptive father, and hears Morgan speak for the first time.



Title: I Know You, Al

Author: Greene, Constance

Publisher: Viking

Date: 1975

Setting: New York apartment building

Main Characters' Descriptions: the narrator, an unidentified 12 year old girl who is a best friend and neighbor to Alexandra, an outspoken, fatherless, overweight, eccentric 12-year-old girl

Brief Plot Summary: In this sequel to A Girl Called Al, Al's divorced mother has a boyfriend, Al's father re-appears after eight years to invite her to his wedding in the country, she continues to await her period after everyone else in her class, battles bad hair and the bulge. The loyal friendship and love of the narrator helps pull Al through all her struggles.

Title: I Was A 15-Year-Old Blimp

Author: Stren, Pati

Publisher: Harper & Row

Date: 1985

Setting: Martha Washington High School

Main Character Description: Gabrielle “Gabby” Finklestein, an overweight 15-year-old high school girl who is determined to “get skinny.”

Brief Plot Summary: Ridiculed and ignored by boys at school, Gabby Finklestein decides to “take control” of her life. She dreams of becoming thin and of winning the adoration of Cal Armstrong, the coolest-looking boy in school, as a replacement for her current pimply, nerdy admirer, Mel Lampel. Over her mother’s objections, she starts with the Stewardess Diet of grapefruit and hard-boiled eggs. But she isn’t losing fast enough, then her mother forces Gabby to go to Dr. Baber for a “sensible low-calorie diet.” In an effort to help her over the challenge of losing for an important dance in a few days, Gabby’s thin friend Nicole gives Gabby laxatives and tells her how she stays thin for dance class--by Ex-Lax and vomiting after eating. Gabby tries it for a “quick-fix”--but only, she thinks, temporarily. When she gets thin she will stop. But her brother stumbles upon Gabby’s secret and her worried

parents send her to Camp Blossom, a summer fat camp where she can lose weight safely and learn to deal with the eating disorder she has developed. There, Gabby slims down and takes time to examine life. When she comes home thin, to her own Sweet Sixteen party and to adoring classmates and compliments, Gabby realizes that even being thin doesn't solve every problem and that there is a lot more to being a great person than appearance. Just as Cal Armstrong is within her reach, Gabby surprises everyone, including herself, by choosing Mel.

Title: Last Was Lloyd

Author: Smith, Doris

Publisher: Viking

Date: 1981

Setting: Hanover, Georgia

Main Character Description: Lloyd Albert; a fat, fatherless 12-year old boy

Brief Plot Summary: Lloyd, sheltered and pampered at home by his 26 year-old single, working mother, tries to stay in a world of his own at school. He is always chosen last for games and is the strike-out king who always swings at the first three pitches. He may be powerless to stop the taunts of his classmates and the disgust of his teacher who views him as a trouble-maker but he feels the power of keeping a secret. He will never reveal that he's really a superb hitter, one of the best in town. Lloyd hates school and misses so many days he is in jeopardy of being expelled and, his mother fears, of being taken away. An understanding attendance officer gives Lloyd another chance, then Kirby and Ancil from his class begin to be his friends and Lloyd takes a chance--he hits the ball clean out of the park--marking a start towards independence and an identity to be proud of.

Title: A Little Love

Author: Hamilton, Virginia

Publisher: Philomel; Putnam

Date: 1984

Setting: Ohio town and a trip to Dalton, Georgia

Main Character Description: Sheema Hadley, an overweight, black 17 year-old girl; her mother died at her birth and her father took off; she has been raised by her aging Grandparents

Brief Plot Summary: Although she has been lovingly raised by her maternal grandparents, Sheema longs for the father she has never met. A weak person, beset with real and unreal fears and plagued by conflicts that overwhelm her, Sheema relies on her boyfriend Forrest for protection and the strength to get through each day at Harrison Joint Vocational School. With him, she sets out to find her father. The clues to her father's whereabouts are very slim but a chance meeting with a man who knew him leads to success. Searching for him brings Sheema new strength. Once he is found, she realizes that "He can never make up for all my seventeen years...it's over. He can't love me now; it's too late. And I can't sit around and worry about what I don't have..."She returns home at peace with herself, changed by crossing over from a troubled teenager into adulthood.

Title: Look Who's Beautiful

Author: First, Julia

Publisher: Franklin Watts

Date: 1980

Setting: City near Washington D. C.

Main Characters' Descriptions: Cornelia "Connie" Griswold; thirteen-year-old "Ugly Duckling" and Mrs. Marston, 85-year-old widow who befriends Connie

Brief Plot Summary: Connie's mother appears to value appearance above everything else. Connie, who is overweight, allergic to practically everything and wears braces, is hardly the daughter she thinks her mother would like to have. The eighth grade is planning a trip to Washington D.C. and every student is required to earn \$90 toward expenses. Connie's arch-enemy since 2nd grade--Ricky "Icky" Birnbaum is walking dogs to earn money and goes after Connie, who is deathly allergic to dogs, just for laughs. Connie and her friends decide to earn money by running errands for the residents of a nearby apartment house for the elderly. While she's not crazy about the plan, Connie can't think of any other way to earn the money needed to get away from her mother--even if it's only for three days-. Then she meets Mrs. Marston, the 85-year-old tenant of #15. Connie finds they can really talk and

grow very close. Mrs. Marston is the kind of substitute mother Connie always wanted, someone supportive and understanding, who treats her like a real person. When it's almost time for the trip disaster strikes. Mrs. Marston falls, breaks her hip and is taken to the hospital. She will have to go to a nursing home as soon as she is released from the hospital--something she never wanted to do! Connie cannot see her in the hospital because she's too young, but she can help Mrs. Marston make the change to the nursing home. She decides to give up the trip she's worked for, earns her mother's admiration, and learns what it means to be a real friend to Mrs. Marston and to her lifelong nemesis--Icky Birnbaum.

Title: Looking On

Author: Miles, Betty

Publisher: Knopf

Date: 1978

Setting: Vandam, a small junior-college town

Main Character Description: Rosalie Hudnecker; an awkward, dreamy, tall, overweight fourteen-year-old girl; her parents are divorced and the father deserted the family years ago.

Brief Plot Summary: Rosalie's life is as dull and stagnate as Loretta's House of Beauty where her mother works. Things are especially boring since her older brother Joe Pat got married and moved 50 miles away. As much as she loves and appreciates her mother, Rosalie doesn't want to become a beautician, despite the school's urging to take the free vocational course instead of attempting college. Then a trailer house replaces the wooded lot next to Rosalie's old house. She hates the big, ugly metal box that took the place of the beautiful pines she had admired and dreamed under for so long. But Jill and Tony Judson, the young married college couple who move into the trailer fascinate Rosalie. She becomes more and more absorbed in watching them, fantasizing about being part of their seemingly perfect life. When her involvement becomes real, she loses touch with her mother and



with old friends like Ed and Judy. When she discovers that life in the trailer isn't magic after all, or even all that different than her own, she realizes the strength and the value of what is already good in her own life and begins to take charge of setting her own course instead of just "looking on."

Title: A Lot Like You

Author: Pinsker, Judith

Publisher: Bantam

Date: 1988

Setting: A small city, Parkview High School

Main Characters' Descriptions: Barbara, "Butter" or "Bo," Barrett; an overweight fifteen-year-old girl and Howard Nevelson; a popular seventeen-year old who finally returns to school after the death of his mother, having gained a lot of weight since his mother's accident

Brief Plot Summary: Barbara eagerly anticipates Howard Nevelson's arrival back at school the Fall after his mother's accident. They first became acquainted during the spring show last year--she couldn't imagine popular Howard Nevelson being nice to Barbara and he didn't make an issue out of her weight. When he does come to school, Barbara hardly recognizes him, he has gained so much weight. The other kids try to treat him like always, but it just isn't the same--he's so fat! Barbara is sure she is the only one who understands the new Howard and she's determined to help him. Barbara only sees their friendship as a way for her to help him with his "problem," rather than one based on shared feelings. As their friendship grows and weathers

trouble, Barbara discovers that the “real” Howard is a person just like she is--not the hero she imagined him to be, trapped in a temporarily fat body--who is a terrific person. Along the way, Barbara learns who she is, how others see her, and that she is pretty terrific herself.

Title: Nobody's Baby Now

Author: Benjamin, Carol Lea

Publisher: Macmillan

Date:1984

Setting: New York City

Main Character Description: Olivia Singer, an overweight, self-conscious, resentful 15-year-old girl

Brief Plot Summary: When Olivia turns 15, she decides that this is the year to stop being a kid, lose the "baby fat" and get Brian Kaplan to start thinking of her in a romantic way--not just as a pal. Her plans go on hold, however, when her ill grandmother has to move in with the family and Olivia must help take care of her. She used to be close with her grandmother but now Grandma doesn't talk at all, or walk well, or eat much, or use the bathroom without help....the list goes on and on. Olivia feels the strain of Grandma's care along with the rest of the family, especially since Grandma has HER room and Olivia is moved into a "closet" where her father had a little office fixed up. Hindered by resentment, nothing Olivia does seems right at home or at school. Finally, she takes charge of her life and through hard work, develops a relationship with Grandma (who begins to speak), loses weight (by secretly running), and captures Brian's attention.

Title: Nothing's Fair in Fifth Grade

Author: DeClements, Barthe

Publisher: Viking

Date: 1981

Setting: Brier, Washington

Main Character Description: Elsie Edwards, a new girl in the fifth grade who is so fat that none of the kids think they can stand her.

Brief Plot Summary: Elsie Edwards is "gross." She is so fat that none of the kids in her class can even imagine her as a human being with feelings. She is teased and made fun of constantly. She deserves it. She asks for it. At least that's what her classmates think. Elsie begs food off the lunch trays of other kids after she's gobbled her own diet lunch down in a minute. She's ugly and disgusting. When she walks down the aisle, her hips brush the desks on both sides. Then money starts to disappear from the room--lots of kids are missing their lunch money and Elsie is seen buying candy when everybody knows her mother never gives her money! Elsie is convicted and put on probation by the school. This was her last chance since having similar problems at her last school. Her thin, extremely critical, and exasperated mother decides to send Elsie to boarding school next term. The divorced mother says Elsie is "just like her father," and despises Elsie,

favoring the younger sister instead. The only thing Elsie is good at is math. Jenny gradually becomes more sympathetic to Elsie but she's afraid of sacrificing her own popularity in class if she's nice to an outcast. But when she gets a D- in math and her parents are looking for a tutor, Elsie is Jenny's choice--she teaches better than Mrs. Hanson or Jenny's mother! Gradually the results of a strict diet imposed on Elsie begin to show. Elsie's getting thinner and her clothes are getting really baggy. Skill in math and her efforts to fit in slowly gain Elsie some standing in the class. She's invited to a slumber party but has to "...come after supper and leave before breakfast." The other girls begin to get an idea of what life is like for Elsie--living with a mother who hates her. After a harrowing incident hitchhiking, and with the help of their teacher, who says Elsie has made dramatic improvement in behavior and is one of the brightest students in class, Jenny and Elsie convince Mrs. Edwards to let her stay at the end of the year.

Title: Pig Out Blues

Author: Greenberg, Jan

Publisher: Farrar, Straus, Giroux

Date: 1982

Setting: small Connecticut town

Main Character Description: Jodie Firestone, 15 year-old high school junior, overweight, interested in drama; her father was killed in Vietnam when she was a baby; her mother and she fight continuously.

Brief Plot Summary: Jodie's mother, Vanessa, has a "perfect figure" and works for an upscale department store. Bitter over her own circumstances, Vanessa takes it out on Jodie, they fight and scream at each other constantly--especially over Jodie's weight. The more cutting remarks her mother makes, the more Jodie eats--until the school drama club prepares to put on Romeo and Juliet. Jodie decides to go on a crash diet to win the part of Juliet. Thin but ill, she faints before her tryout and loses the part. Jodie goes on a gigantic binge. On her way to eating herself into oblivion, she meets people who make her re-think what's she's doing. Finally realizing that other people have problems too, even her mother, and that eating won't help, Jodie begins to reconcile with her mother and get control of her life.

**Title:** The Planet of Junior Brown

**Author:** Hamilton, Virginia

**Publisher:** Macmillan

**Date:** 1971

**Setting:** New York City

**Main Characters' Descriptions:** Junior Brown; a 300 pound musical prodigy with a neurotic, overprotective mother and who is becoming increasingly mentally unstable himself. Buddy Clark, a loner, a street kid with no family whatsoever, living by his wits, who befriends Junior and looks out for other street kids like himself

**Brief Plot Summary:** Junior Brown and Buddy Clark have been absent from eighth grade classes all semester. They have been in the school building most of the time--in a secret basement room, behind a false wall, where Mr. Pool, the janitor, has created with them a model of the solar system. Outside school Junior contends with an overbearing "sick" mother, paints grotesque art to cope, attends piano lessons at Miss Peebs where the piano and a strange "relative" are not real, and practices his lessons on a piano without a keyboard. Buddy works when he can at a news stand, lives by his wits in abandoned buildings, watches over Junior and plays the role of "Tomorrow Billy" caring for younger street boys like the



first Tomorrow Billy took care of him. When they are caught at school, Junior's fantasies become more desperate and Buddy tries to save him from certain committal to a mental institution.

Title: That Crazy April

Author: Perl, Lila

Publisher: Seabury Press

Date: 1974

Setting: New York City suburb

Main Character Description: Cress Richardson; short, plump 11-year old girl, an only child of a feminist and a successful businessman

Brief Plot Summary: With her father's success in business, the family moves to a beautiful home in a ritzy suburb of New York City. Her mother takes up the cause of women's rights as a full-time volunteer activist. Cress bakes cookies for her friend Peter Link III who doesn't care that she is short and "plump." She envies her friend Monique, a real junior fashion model, until she herself is chosen for a role in a lavish fashion show. Cress struggles with the dichotomy of wishing to be accepted on equal terms by Peter, his friends and the metal shop club and with her desire to be thin and glamorous. Cress comes to grips with her own values when her experience with the fashion show turns sour and she decides never to accept any role dictated by gender. She looks forward to a summer wilderness camp at the end of the story that "...wasn't a camp for girls who wanted to be 'girls' or for boys who wanted to

be 'boys,' or even for girls who wanted to be 'tomboys...Because maybe when you get down to basics is when you find out who you really are."

Title: Underneath I'm Different

Author: Rabinowich, Ellen

Publisher: Delacorte

Date: 1983

Setting: Westfield, New York

Main Character Description: Amy Williams, an overweight, over-protected high school girl who's never had a date.

Brief Plot Summary: Amy becomes friends with Cara, the most popular girl in school, and would give anything for Cara's way with boys. Amy's thin, beautiful mother, who is opening her own upscale beauty salon, picks at Amy constantly. When she enrolls a resistant Amy in ballet in order to lose weight, Amy meets Ansel Pierce. Ansel is the accompanist--an artistic, high strung boy who spends his time at the family estate in his sculpture studio. Amy literally "falls" for Ansel, tripping and landing in his lap during lessons. Surprisingly, Ansel responds by asking her out. Ansel prefers heavy girls and Amy agrees to model for him. But her mother thinks something must be wrong with a boy who likes fat girls--her point is proved when Ansel has a nervous breakdown and is hospitalized. At last Amy succeeds in sneaking in to see Ansel who is struggling to cope with personal and family problems--the tragic death of his mother and his father's

estrangement. Ansel tells her he won't be coming back to Westfield when he gets out of the hospital, but that Amy has meant a lot to him. Amy returns home with strength and confidence, a changed person from knowing Ansel and feeling his appreciation.