

**The Bodies of Art - Art, Media and Body Norms:  
Exploring Body Image through the Collection at the  
Bechtler Museum of Modern Art**

*Barbara Biesak Wesselman*

“Be the change you wish to see in the world.” Mahatma Gandhi

**Introduction**

There is an article I read to my students every year when we start to study proportion and standard clothing sizes. It gives a brief history of clothing through the ages, styles that shaped and distorted (or misshaped?) the human form. Corsets broke ribs, punctured lungs and lead to the belief that women were fragile when the reality was they were faint from lack of oxygen, all in the quest for a tiny waist. Marilyn Monroe’s famous white wind dress was a size 12. Twiggy changed the image of beauty; curves were out, and a shapeless form was in.

As an Apparel/Costume Design teacher, body image portrayed through art offers a unique opportunity for student exploration on many levels. Google “body image” and “self esteem” pops up. Is self-esteem the root of our being? How does body image drive our success, or affect our self-esteem? Some believe that self-esteem is innate. I believe that environment and exposure play an important role in who we are. The effect that media has in our lives is enormous. There are countless residual effects from advertising and television when the producers and marketers do their job. This unit will focus on art, media, fashion and body image. What is the “norm”? Who establishes the “norm”? We will look at art from The Bechtler Museum of Modern Art in Charlotte, North Carolina but art from any collection can be used.

During my research into this topic I have explored how an artists’ view (specifically the collection at the Bechtler) of the body is portrayed. What we see in art may be a determining factor of how we see the world and ultimately ourselves. When I see Roman statues of women, I jokingly say that I would be a thing of beauty in those times, my body cherished and sculpted by great artists, preserved for all time! Creating a unit on body image that encourages students to open their minds and become more accepting and understanding of themselves and others is my ultimate goal.

Fashion shows and theatre performances challenge me to design or approve designs that project a positive body image for students’ at the most sensitive time of their lives when their own self-image is being considered. Our recent fashion show at The Bechtler

museum raised the issue of walking the runway in a garment that is not flattering. I struggled through the process and as delicate as I believed I was, I found out afterwards that one participant told another participant that I didn't want her on the runway because she was fat. I was crushed. Obviously this is what she heard through my carefully chosen words and my attempts to persuade her not to model. The garment was not designed for her body type. She modeled, she made a spectacle of herself and she was pleased with herself. Was she looking to affirm a poor self image and get laughed at, or was she confident, so confident that she strutted her "stuff" regardless of the outcome? Do those who break the conservative norms have it right?

I finally reached the conclusion that for the next show, the models would have to be chosen based on the body type portrayed in the design sketch. So the guidelines for the future are set. It raises the issue of how I handled, or didn't handle the events of this particular show. How will I handle costume events for actors on stage? I am aware of issues surrounding our teenagers today. The media and peer pressure is enormous. Fashion and style are strong influences.

Then the questions arise; does someone (for the moment, let's focus on teenagers) who wears a shirt that is clingy and tight and may show extra rolls of body mass, exhibit higher self-esteem and have a more positive body image, than someone who wears styles that mask that extra body mass? Or, does that person lack style or perception? Is reality and beauty in the eye of the beholder? Are these all cultural ideologies?

Culture, art, taste, style, dimension, flatness, texture, color, size; I would like to make this unit an adventure of exploration of all of these terms, as they relate to body image. The starting point will be a summary of famous bodies in art and media. I will ask students to compare and contrast differences and similarities of the images in art forms and media forms. Then I will provide a brief background of the artist and or the subject (if available) and attempt to interrupt the image. Bringing the cultural aspect into the discussion will add another dimension for consideration. Encouraging students to share their cultural knowledge and exposure to differences and norms will heighten the discussion and learning.

### **Rationale / Background**

The embodiment of the norm relating to body image has been portrayed in art through paintings and sculpture for thousands of years. We see that cave drawings, art carved into granite, paintings, sculptures and later photography have all captured what we believe was the normal body image of its time. Are these images telling truths about the body? What is that culture's reaction to the art? Does fashion mirror the art or art mirror the fashion? How is couture determined?

In Constructing Normalcy, Lennard Davis remarks, “I began with the rather remarkable fact that the constellation of words describing this concept ‘normal,’ ‘normalcy,’ ‘normality,’ ‘norm,’ ‘average,’ ‘abnormal,’ - all entered the European languages rather late in human history. The word ‘normal’ as constituting conforming to, not deviating or differing from, the common type or standard, regular, usual only enters the English language around 1849. (Previously, the word ‘perpendicular’: the carpenters square, called a ‘norm’, provided the root meaning). Likewise the word ‘norm’, in the modern sense, has only been in use since around 1855, and ‘normalcy’ appeared in 1849 and 1857 respectively.”<sup>1</sup>

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s article “From Wonder to Error - A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity,” in discussion about the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia, critiques the way bodies throughout history have been devalued in the way they are presented.” “Our ideas about love and what is “normal” are heavily defined based on what is not normal rather than what is normal. To define normal we have to define what normal is not.”<sup>1</sup> (Gendered Bodies in Visual Culture). In the 1700’s, French statistician Adolphe Quetelet noticed that astronomers used averaging to plot the location of stars. He formulated the concept of ‘l’homme Moyen’ or the average of man. By averaging the features of humans, height and weight, he figured it would be logical to identify a norm for humans.<sup>2</sup> This standardizing of humans has brought upon some very dangerous concepts throughout time. Normal implies the majority should fit into that category.

However once normal is defined, the population becomes divided above normal, normal and below normal. We rely heavily in education on data that pinholes teachers and students into categories exactly in this way. It is argued that this extreme weight of measure is unrealistic and not a healthy way to group our students. When put in the perspective of the degree of lunacy “normal” has played in the world, you’d think the education system would come up with a better way to evaluate people.

In looking at the norm, or the not-norm we also establish what is familiar and what is not familiar. Professor Joseph Roach proposed the challenge during our Yale National Initiative seminar, The Intangible Heritage of New Orleans 2010-11, to make the unfamiliar, familiar. It’s become a way of life. It has an impact on everything I do and every way I access and analyze making the unfamiliar - familiar.<sup>3</sup> The goal is to look at what is considered normal, in a new way. To see what we didn’t see before. Or, maybe we will see what we saw before, but in a new way. This way of thinking is the perfect model for defining normal and what we think a “normal” body should look like.

Ideal bodies were first presented as mythological figures. Artists chose the best features or body parts from a number of different people and came up with one ideal to be worshiped. Conversely people say in jest that the camel was made by a committee who each wanted to prove their idea was the best and didn’t work together. As society thrives for the ideal, the more complicated life becomes, because the ideal is not real.

Plastic surgery, eating disorders, body piercings, tattoos; are they mutilations to enhancements? What will people stop at in the quest to achieve the ideal body?

Edwin Black documents in *The Horrifying American Roots of Nazi Eugenics*<sup>4</sup> by George Mason University's History News Network that, "even the United States Supreme Court endorsed aspects of eugenics. In its infamous 1927 decision, Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, "It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind.... Three generations of imbeciles are enough." This decision opened the floodgates for thousands to be coercively sterilized or otherwise persecuted as subhuman. Years later, the Nazis at the Nuremberg trials quoted Holmes's words in their own defense." Radical supremacy went to an abhorrent extreme and ultimately brought to light the possibility of creating an entire race of supreme beings based on physical and intellectual characteristics. As horrifying as history has been we must ask ourselves about the social practices we have today and the rationalization behind them. I will not address all the political implications, but I encourage teachers comfortable and knowledgeable to pose many essential questions to your students about the implications throughout history of normalcy and perfection. The quest for perfection has and continues to lead to terrible consequences. Eugenics, engineering genetics and genocide, killing people deemed unworthy, are extreme historical results that should be considered and researched in the realm of discussing the norm. We may be making headway in the United States but in many parts of the world these forms of discrimination exist today. The United States continues to struggle with insurance issues denying coverage and employment based on genetic results.<sup>5</sup>

A friend in college had a sibling she (at that time) only recently became aware of. Her sibling was born disabled, deformed, handicapped, mentally retarded (all terms used in the 70's to classify differences in people). The child was institutionalized at birth. The discovery turned her world upside down. She went on to become a celebrated teacher for the disabled. I was fortunate to know a boy with severe cerebral palsy while I was growing up. His family treated him "like he was normal," though his condition was severe. At 48, he lives in a group home and works. His doctors strongly encouraged his family to institutionalize him at birth. I am not making a judgment. I am only trying to show that what may not be normal for some may become normal for others.

I have "modified" instruction and classroom set up for students with differences for the past 11 years as a teacher. One of my students approached me this year to ask if her sister, who is severely disabled, was allowed to attend an event. I asked, "Why"? "Because of her wheel chair," was the response. I had a hard time believing that in 2011 people are not welcomed because they are disabled, but was told that there are many occasions where her sisters' presence was obviously not welcomed. I can help with that. I can teach my students to understand body image through all art and a local collection of

art to expose them to opinion and differences and make them aware we are all really the same.

## Art

The well known drawing by Leonardo da Vinci (1500), *Vitruvian Man*, named in honor of the architect Vitruvian, is noted as the Canon of Proportions and the Proportions of Man. Using geometrical calculations this pen and ink drawing on paper is credited as the principal source of proportion of classical architecture and has profoundly influenced art throughout history.<sup>6</sup> The classical ideal of beauty is derived from symmetry and a modular relationship of parts to a whole on a mathematical basis.

Socrates set out to create a standard idealized contour of the human body in exact proportions to gain balance and harmony when he sculpted *Aphrodite of Melos* (Venus de Milo 130-100 bc). His portrayal of the goddess was again an example of an ideal, which has been viewed as a standard for a norm for thousands of years. The Hellenistic conception of art derived from natural life was realistic and therefore allowed the first individual portraits in history. Fabric draped the body below the waist. The arms and hands holding the gathered fabric were never seen by modern conservators, but evidence of structural supports and in-depth analysis allow us to provide an educated hypothesis of how the statue looked in its original form.

“She has no arms or hands, although the stump of her upper right arm extends just to her breast. Her left foot has been severed, and her face is badly scarred, with her nose torn at the tip, and her lower lip gouged out. Fortunately, her facial mutilations have been treated and are barely visible, except for minor scarring visible only up close. The big toe of her right foot has been cut off, and her torso is covered with scars, including a particularly large one between her shoulder blades, one that covers her shoulder, and one covering the tip of her breast where the nipple was torn out. Yet she is considered one of the most beautiful female figures in the world.”<sup>7</sup>

During the Early Middle Ages, in 840, physical characteristics and proportions became unimportant. The art was much more stylized, almost abstract in portraying features of the body. Late Middle Ages/Gothic style of 1400 portrays luxurious refined fashion with a slim silhouette; the beautiful female body had a big belly, looking pregnant. This period of time held many upheavals in society, the black plague, great shifts in populations, loss and gains of prosperity. Many forms of art followed the societal changes. Christian art was lavish, Byzantine arts, colorful and detailed.

The painting *Birth of Venus* by Sandro Botticelli (1486) shows the revival of classical style with symmetry and proportions as the ideal body image. While the Baroque period shows women with voluptuous bodies, late Baroque, Rococo/Louis Quinze portrays ladies as graceful and petite. The ideal was a very slim waist line.

During the mid-19th century, women were painted with soft curves. Impressionist Toulouse-Lautrec's "ball at Moulin Rouge" shows new fashion of slim waist, again the buttocks emphasized. Expressionism/Classical Era/The Roaring Twenties is when the apparent differences between sexes disappear in art for the first time. Curves are no longer an ideal; bodies of male and female have very much the same form.<sup>8</sup>

From the website, Thoughts from the Underground, one person's thoughts helped guide this unit; "I have to admit that I don't quite get the art, but I really like the phrase, "Your Body is a Battleground." It represents so well how strongly we have to remain conscious of the fact that we have a right to not look like how the media, fashion, and the contemporary body aesthetic tells us we should look."<sup>9</sup>

### **Body Image in Media: A Brief Survey**

For at least half a century magazines have been showing us the ideal body images from which we judge ourselves. Sure, some people will say that they are intelligent enough to know better than to allow an image intentionally staged for the promotion of a product, to influence how they value themselves, if so, the more power to you. The truth is, it's difficult not to compare yourself. Period. As Professor Ann Fox, Davidson College asks, "Are we simply in a society that is absolutely saturated with these images? So, it's easier said than done to "rise above" them... when they're literally in the air we breathe!"<sup>10</sup> "In one week American teenagers spend 31 hours watching TV, 17 hours listening to music, 3 hours watching movies, 4 hours reading magazines, 10 hours online. That's 10 hours and 45 minutes of media consumption a day."<sup>11</sup>

The media is the most powerful advertising tool available. Technology has advanced greatly from those times and we have the power to switch channels, turn the television off and instantly send a message to the product firm and let them know what we think, positive and negative. Abercrombie and Fitch is just another company in a long line of exploitive marketing campaigns that sexualize teenagers' bodies and lifestyles through its models. In the 1980's Calvin Klein had a series of provocative ads featuring Brooke Shields that pushed the limits of decency and featured a body that few young women could replicate. We need to turn off the television or change the channel; we need to not buy jeans we can't fit into. We need to be healthy and happy with our bodies.

"The emergence of the slender body type as a beauty standard for women is especially salient in the mass media, and several researchers have demonstrated how the female body depicted in the media has become increasingly thin."<sup>12</sup> Over the past fifty years many studies have been conducted that conclude that the Media's depiction of women in print and film is often responsible for women's negative perceptions of themselves. Very thin body types are what we are shown. It has long been known (Leon Festinger, 1954) that people compare themselves to others. Celebrities are seen often and become our

social references. Media only shows us what it wants us to see. We do not see the hours of make-up, smoothing and restricting undergarments, or hours with a personal trainer while eating two celery sticks a day! Often, we do not realize that pictures and photographs have been touched up, body parts can even be edited to provide the “perfect image.” Television may show us people eating a certain way with unrealistically thin bodies, when in reality the character they are portraying is not that they really are. It is comforting to become involved in the characters on television, alter egos in a sense.

Fashion models in magazines are another source of unrealistic body images. These images have a huge impact on teenagers. When fashion designers render a sketch of a new design the average female body is elongated by two head lengths. This alone presents a dilemma. The dream of many young girls is to become a model. Achieving a body that will be used on the runway is not an easy task. Health issues in that industry are rampant. 65% of teenage girls have eating disorders. They are the source of comparison for many. We have become so accustomed to the images that print, film and internet present that we have lost a sense of reality.

The media is sending a message to girls and women that their value is the way their body looks. Girls are more objects than people. People learn more from the media than any other source of information. The ideal body image is impossible to achieve. Images are technologically changed using computers, digitally enhanced, and that’s what the media shows us. As girls receive the message that their self worth is based on how they look, boys also get the message that the most important thing about a girl or woman is how she looks.

### **Body Image**

Body image is an integral part of everyday life. The feelings we have for ourselves and others’ appearance come from many experiences and our environment. “The first impression that many people will have is about their body weight.”<sup>13</sup> Body image is a social restraint that is influenced by culture, family and media. Notions of the body can be studied through a perceptual and conceptual look at art and media.

BDD- Body Dysmorphic Disorder is a dangerous disorder caused by a distortion of perceived negative body image. “People with BDD are so obsessed with perceived flaws in their appearance that it affects relationships with family and friends, as well as creating problems with work or school. BDD can result in anxiety, depression, and even thoughts about suicide.” Fortunately it is a curable disease through medication and therapy.<sup>14</sup>

Valuing a particular body image goes back to preindustrial times. “Myths of beauty and ugliness have laid the foundation for normalcy”.<sup>15</sup> It is our perception of what our bodies look like. The body shapes most often identified as ideal by teens and women are actually unhealthy, underweight bodies. “Body image is a widespread preoccupation. In one study of college students, 74.4% of the normal-weight women stated that they

thought about their weight or appearance “all the time” or “frequently.” But the women weren’t alone; the study also found that 46% of the normal-weight men surveyed responded the same way.

Poor body image increases the risk for extreme weight/body control behaviors. Researchers have found that increased preoccupation with appearance and body dissatisfaction put people at greater risk for engaging in dangerous practices to control weight and size. Extreme dieting, exercise compulsion, laxative abuse, vomiting, smoking and use of anabolic steroids have all been associated with negative body image.”  
16

“Current ideals are not only biologically unattainable for most people, but downright dangerous. Just take a look at Barbie and GI Joe Extreme. If Barbie were life-sized, she’d be at 76% of a healthy body weight – a weight consistent with acute hospitalization. And GI Joe would have biceps almost as big as his waist, and bigger than most competitive body-builders!”<sup>17</sup> With genetics, the fact is only a small percentage of the population have the genes to naturally have the body types shown predominately in the media. The more a person focuses on his or her body, the more they seem to become negative about their bodies. Men and women both fall into this trap of negative body image. We hear more about women, but books like, *The Adonis Complex* (Pope, Phillips, Olivardia), reveals how men are closely gaining ground in the body dissatisfactions area. Men suffer from eating disorders and self esteem issues just like women.

Very few women are able to achieve the bodies culture tells us through media images, are ideal. They are not attainable for most. Remember that ‘ideal’ is really a myth, but our society uses ideal as the norm. Stanford and Massachusetts Universities study results indicate that 70% of college women surveyed feel bad about their body images after reading and looking through magazines.

## **Body Diversity**

In our culture, accepting different body types says a lot about the society we live in and the environment we’ve been raised in. Various shapes, sizes, forms, some familiar, some unfamiliar, are all around us testing the social norms. Ultimately the acceptance of variations allows people to know more about themselves and others. Prejudice against size and form is discrimination. People are beginning to fight back. Airlines are being challenged for charging for an extra seat if a person is too big to fit in one chair. I am not negating the health concerns when a person weighs more than their body frame and skeletal, muscular structure can sustain. Being healthy physically and mentally is the goal.



An interesting challenge to my students thinking came a few years ago when my students made dolls - Raggedy Ann type dolls approximately 30 inches tall. One student chose to make a "Hiroshima" doll, with a leg coming from the area where an arm would normally be and an arm coming from the head. He never took it home, I finally got rid of it this year (after about 6 years), but I showed it to all of my classes and watched their reactions to this doll that did not look like it was expected to, or like the ones presumably most of them would make. We must each learn to deal with our differences, we must become educated. This is possible through the study of body image portrayed through art.

There is a need to expose our students to the richness and diversity of our world and specifically the uniqueness of people in our society. As I will briefly outline below, most information our students receive today is from media sources. By sharing stories in the classroom and validating experiences they have through sharing, students experience more. It is like reading a book, imagining a character then seeing the book made into a movie. Your feelings from the movie will likely reflect whether or not your image of that character is validated. Stories help us to imagine. Getting students to imagine is a powerful way to get a message across.

One story I like to share is; I requested, then begged for a handicap accessible ramp under the school auditorium for a wheel chair bound student to safely and easily access our costume storage area. It took 3 years. This same student whose parents elected not to have a full time aid assigned and paid for by the school system, wanted to travel with our group to New York City. The school system refused to provide an assistant for the trip, stating the teacher assumes the same risk and responsibility for any students that are on a trip. The student needed full time assistance, especially on a jam packed "Fashion Tour of New York City". I doubted I could supervise 30 students and give her the time that was needed. Luckily, we finally found a high level decision maker who agreed and "found" the funding for the mom to travel with us. As Professor Ann Fox, Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina explained, "Clearly the people she encountered understood that helping doesn't necessarily mean pity- it means interdependence and acknowledging the needs of different kind of bodies not as a "burden" but as a reflection of human variation."

I mention this because the experience was enlightening. The people of New York opened their arms to her, stopped whatever they were doing and offered assistance every day we were there. A jogger in Central Park, a city worker shoveling snow, a business man on a phone call and a street vendor all wanted to help. She operated the manual elevator at Mood Fabrics, and charmed everyone whose path she crossed. The only thing that didn't work out was that she was not able to go onto the ice at Rockefeller Center, and that was sad. Her mother wrote to the mayor to thank the city for opening its arms and showing love and compassion. What an opportunity we have as educators to open

minds and teach! With a unit like this one, students' minds will be opened to a deeper understanding of all people, not just those they are familiar or comfortable with.

### **The Bodies of Art**

Identifying nine works from The Bechtler museum of Modern Art, we can see the wide range of body images presented in one collection. The sampling listed below starts the process of analyzing the art in terms of body image:

- Andy Warhol, (1928-1987), *Marilyn Monroe*- 1967, Warhol was enamored by celebrities and their impact on society. This image copied from a publicity shot of a movie Monroe was in, was cropped and manipulated and became an iconic image.

-Edgar Degas- (1834-1917), *Femme s'essuyant aores le bain*, In his later works, Degas chose the subject of nudes, often bathing. This work shows a shapely woman, just out of the bath tub, holding her hair up in one hand, using a towel at her neck with the other. Her only clothing accessories are slippers.

-Alberto Giacometti, (1901-1966), *Feeme Assise* (seated woman) 1956  
“This idea of the perfect standard proportions in the creation of universal beauty that can be defined and measured and has no place in the work of Giacometti. This work is the complete antitheses of this notion. The body is asymmetrical, the form is not detailed. Nor is it flattering”.<sup>18</sup>

Paul Klee- (1879-1940), *Arie des-Buffo*, Influenced by his love of music, Klee's figure has a feeling of flight, of a note suspended in air. Humanlike but primitive in style. “The body and single cyclopic eye of the tenor is painted in purple. the rest of the stick figure is in black” (p102, Bechtler Collection ). Is one leg extended in the tail like projection or do his feet move across the page?

Niki De Sanit Phalle,(1930-2002), *Vive Moi* . Niki de Saint Phalle was a woman artist when that was a disadvantage. Women artists were not taken seriously. She did not have a strong role model growing up. Her Nana's were inspired by artist Larry River's wife's pregnant form. Her black Nana's were made to speak as representations for black women, who also often did not have strong women role models. Niki abandoned her children ( as many famous male artists did) much to the condemnation of her character. She suffered a nervous breakdown and was institutionalized. How many of these disabling events are depicted in her art, where can they be seen?

“I had not heard of de Saint Phalle until a student discovered her while conducting research for her IB workbook. She was researching body image and women and came upon the Nana sculptures. These large scale sculptures feature large scale, round women that resemble ancient mother earth figurines; my student found this take on the female form refreshing.

Aside from investigation of women and notions of beauty, Niki de Saint Phalle enjoyed portraying images from ancient Egyptian culture, Hinduism, and Native American culture, to name a few.

Max Ernst, *W.C Fields* is a favorite with my students. The vibrant mosaic colors, the stained glass imagery, ghost like faces and parasol, are intriguing. Max Ernst's image represents WC Fields and Mae West. Max Ernst was influenced by birds, the faces have a bird like appearance. In his depiction of *My Little Chickadee* he chooses to accentuate certain body parts and accessories. We can look at what the picture is showing and explore the meaning of those images.

Other works from The Bechtler Museum collection for student consideration include: Le Corbusier, (1887-1963), *Spirales Logarithmiques* / Ferdinand Leger, (1881-1955), *La Partie de Campagne ideuxieme etat* / Pablo Picasso, (1888-1973), *Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe* / Germaine Richie, (1904-1959), *Femme Sauteurelle* /. Each image depicts a female body image that is worthy of further study in terms of shape, depiction of body concept, explanation relative to the "norm" and comparison to media images. As with pieces described above, these pieces will provide rich analysis.

## **Fashion**

Apparel is art. Garments may be utilitarian, but that in itself is a statement. Art is a statement. Fashion is a statement. I recommend for a more in depth understanding of art and fashion refer to my 2010 CTI unit, "Redefining Modernism through the Collection at The Bechtler Museum of Modern Art, The Influence of Modernism on Fashion." Using the principle and elements of design we can make or analyze art and fashion.

For the purpose of this unit we will focus on shape, line and texture. "Color, shape, line and texture contribute to the overall design." (Fashion) The shape is its form. Form is the silhouette. There are three classic and one new fashion silhouette used to describe form. They are; bell, tubular, bustle and natural. The most complimentary clothing choices occur when the silhouette accentuates the form of the body. Shape can also help identify a given time period for a particular style.

There are three types of line, straight, curvy and jagged. Line suggests emotion. Line can be structural or decorative. Eyes follow line. They can connect, emphasize, draw focus, and show space. Comparing line in fashion and art will lead to valid conclusions. Illusion is another way to use line. Combining lines can produce different effects. Line also divides clothing which established proportion.

Texture is the look and feel of a surface. Rough or smooth, dull or shiny, texture may be used to hide irregularities and add visual excitement. Creating fashion that works with

different body types is the goal. Leaving behind the paper thin model and designing for the real body is our ideal!

## **Strategies**

### **Relating to Common Core Standards**

8.1.3.B Identify fact, opinion, multiple points of view, and primary sources as related to historical events.

8.1.5.B Classify and analyze fact and opinion from multiple points of view, and secondary sources as related to historical events.

1.2.4.C Distinguish between essential and nonessential information within and across a variety of texts, identifying stereotypes and exaggerations (bias) where present.

### Apparel Development I, II- 12.00 The Principles and Elements of Design

Some of the issues raised in this unit may be difficult for some students to discuss. Students will need to share ideas, so teachers are asked to be sensitive in the classroom as this information is presented. The strategies may be adapted and some materials omitted depending on the makeup of the class. Designing a garment based on a piece from the Bechtler collection that portrays body image would challenge students to break apart the image whether flat or a sculpture and make a model of that particular body type.

These strategies are designed for introductory level High School students. The basic unit will take approximately 7-9 hours for completion, 3-5 block period days and a few hours of homework assignments if necessary.

Introducing ideas of eugenics, school testing or disability studies will provide higher level analysis for Advanced Apparel classes, or allow for a more complex analysis with differentiation in the classroom. The more interesting and multi sensory the material, the more students will enjoy the learning!

-Students will watch the 1979 documentary *Killing Us Softly* by Jean Kilbourne<sup>19</sup> which examines medias portrayal of women.

-Students will watch the video documentary *Miss Representation*, another in-depth analysis of how the media portrays women and girls and the physical and psychological impact it has on girls and boys, women and men. There is a complete course curriculum and study guide available for purchase also.

After watching these videos on medias representation of girls and women, students will choose a piece of art from the Bechtler collection and identify its relationship to body image either through an actual body form (realistic image) or a meaningful

symbolic representation of a human form (abstract art). Explain that representation. Examples are given in this paper in the Bodies of Art and Arts sections. From that art, students can start to “take apart” the body. The more abstract the art is, the better. This exercise will force the students to see the human form as just that, a form and hopefully begin to accept form for form rather than expect what they consider “normal”. In conjunction with the chosen piece find a media image that also reflects the same principles of form. This might be a print advertisement or a commercial.

Form is the three dimensional shape of an object, shape is the outline. The height, weight and depth of a body make up its form. Clothing is defined by 4 basic forms or silhouettes; bell form, tubular form, full back/bustle form and the natural form. The silhouette form of clothing may make a body appear taller, wider, thinner, larger or heavier. When looking at a body image presented in art or the media we must address the clothing being worn and the impact of those clothes using the principle and elements of design. Design is created through structural lines or decorative lines. Structural lines are formed in the construction of a garment piece; decorative lines are part of the textile used.

Balance, rhythm, emphasis, texture and proportion will also influence the harmony of a garment. The proportion, the relationship of one part to the other parts is a main point of establishing normal.

Using these terms and concepts students can better evaluate and analyze the art work and media image.

Answer the following essential questions:

How do these images relate to our perception of body image?

Does this confirm our perception of a normal body image? Explain in detail.

In your view, do you believe other people would agree with this analysis?

Do you feel personally connected to this image? Explain.

### *Summary*

Students have viewed videos, chosen art work, chosen media image, reviewed principles and elements of design, understand form and are now going to develop a project.

### *Project*

Students will research the background of the art work from a selection provided by the teacher (example - the list from the Bechtler Collection provided above) or from a local museum or art collection, artist background, where and when the work was done.

Answer these questions: What is the medium. What was the significance of this art work when it was created / now? What is the social response to the piece? How does this piece make you feel, and why?

Students will analyze the purpose of the media image. Is it selling a product or service? Is it targeting a particular market? Describe in detail.

Students will present their findings in the form of a project that compares and contrasts both images, along with the design for a fashion that mirrors that image and makes it a current wearable garment, or accessory.

Using students' current knowledge of constructing a garment, this project will challenge students to look at a bodies form look at normal and take the necessary steps to design and construct clothing that has unique characteristics. Bridging the image and the art work will enable students to push the limits on what they know

Describe the garment in terms of line, color, proportion, shape, texture, balance, emphasis and rhythm. Since body image is a comparative concept, how does the garment you have created relate to the cultural acceptance of body? How can you make the unfamiliar - familiar?

The project must take both the media image and the art work and connect the two through design. All projects must have a rendering with fabric swatches along with a presentation:

An actual garment.

A collage.

A story board of multiple images that connect the artist, the media and the design.

To complete the unit and project, each student will present their project to the class following a rubric guide.

Upon completion of the project the groups will sarcastically roundtable their experiences with this assignment so they may share areas that had an impact on their lives.

### **Teacher Resources**

-Prior to presenting this unit conduct a web search for current information. Because sites change so frequently and research is ever evolving, google: Body Image and Art; Body Image and Media.

-Brown University Health Education Department has great resources and ideas

-Davis, Lennard, *Enforcing Normalcy* is an eye opener and I highly recommend it. You may opt to use some quotes or read specific chapters with the class.

-*Killing Us Softly* can be found on You Tube.

-*Miss Representation* is sometime available on OWN network but may also be purchased through their website; <http://misrepresentation.org/education>

## Student Resources

Students may research this topic through the internet and via handouts from the teacher.

Fashion Magazines

Analysis of television programming

Survey of peers

## Material

Computers with internet access

Magazines

Miss Representation video

Sewing Machines and materials for garments

LCD projector for presentations

Foam Boards

Coloring tools

## Bibliography

Fox, Ann. "Body Image." Class lecture, Seminar from CTI, Charlotte, September 29, 2011. *One of Dr. Fox's specialties is disability studies, her knowledge and insight into body image offers perspectives not always covered.*

"Body Image in Art and Design - Thoughts from the Underground." alliwalk.com. <http://alliwalk.com/blog/?p=1422=1> (accessed November 8, 2011). *This site has many interesting facts and ideas but some material may not be suitable for students.*

"Body Image | Brown University Health Education." Brown University. [http://brown.edu/Student\\_Services/Health\\_Services/Health\\_Education/nutrition-&\\_eating\\_concerns/body\\_image.php](http://brown.edu/Student_Services/Health_Services/Health_Education/nutrition-&_eating_concerns/body_image.php) (accessed November 8, 2011). *Excellent resource.*

Davis, Lennard J.. *Enforcing normalcy: disability, deafness, and the body*. London: Verso, 1995. *Selected chapters from this book are recommended.*

"Ideal Beauty." Ideal Beauty. [www.winifred.cichon.com/ideal\\_beauty/](http://www.winifred.cichon.com/ideal_beauty/) (accessed October 22, 2011).

- Killing Us Softly 3: Advertising's Image of Women*. Film. Directed by Jean Kilborne. tbd: Media Education Foundation, 0. *Classroom assignment to view*.
- "Reshaping Body Image." Teaching Tolerance.  
<http://www.tolerance.org/print/activity/reshaping-body-image> (accessed November 8, 2011).
- Siddiquee, Imran, Social Media, Communications Manager, MissRepresentation.org." Miss Representation . <http://missrepresentation.org/education/> (accessed November 8, 2011). *Documentary. Classroom assignment to watch- powerful video.*
- Roach, Joseph. "The Intangible Heritage of New Orleans." Lecture, Yale National Initiative from Yale University, New Haven, July 18, 2011.
- Thomson, Rosemarie. *Staring: how we look*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. *Eye opener!*
- Turner, Sherry L., Heather Hamilton, Meija Jacobs, Laurie M. Angood, and Deanne Hovde Dwyer. "The influence of fashion magazines on the body image satisfaction of college women: an exploratory analysis | Adolescence | Find Articles." Find Articles | News Articles, Magazine Back Issues & Reference Articles on All Topics.  
[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2248/is\\_n127\\_v32/ai\\_20413253/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2248/is_n127_v32/ai_20413253/) (accessed November 8, 2011).
- Wolfe, Mary Gorgen. *Fashion!*. Tinley Park, Ill.: Goodheart-Willcox Co., 1998.

## End Notes

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Constructing Normalcy
- <sup>2</sup> Enforcing Normalcy
- <sup>3</sup> Joseph Roach, Yale University
- <sup>4</sup> <http://hnn.us/articles/1796.html>
- <sup>5</sup> <http://hnn.us/articles/1796.html>
- <sup>6</sup> [http://www.winifred.cichon.com/ideal\\_beauty/](http://www.winifred.cichon.com/ideal_beauty/)
- <sup>7</sup> Enforcing Normalcy p126
- <sup>8</sup> [http://www.winifred.cichon.com/ideal\\_beauty/](http://www.winifred.cichon.com/ideal_beauty/)
- <sup>9</sup> <http://alliwalk.com/blog/?p=1422=1>
- <sup>10</sup> Ann Fox, Davidson College
- <sup>11</sup> <http://missrepresentation.org/education/>
- <sup>12</sup> [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2248/is\\_n127\\_v32/ai\\_20413253/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2248/is_n127_v32/ai_20413253/)
- <sup>13</sup> [www.tolerance.org/print/activity/reshaping-body-image](http://www.tolerance.org/print/activity/reshaping-body-image)
- <sup>14</sup> [www.brown.edu/Student\\_Services/Health](http://www.brown.edu/Student_Services/Health)
- <sup>15</sup> Enforcing Normalcy
- <sup>17</sup> Brown University
- <sup>18</sup> Bechtler Musuem of Modern Art Catalogue
- <sup>19</sup> [video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-1993368502337678412](http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-1993368502337678412)



---

## Appendix

### Relating to Common Core Standards:

8.1.3.B Identify fact, opinion, multiple points of view, and primary sources as related to historical events.

8.1.5.B Classify and analyze fact and opinion from multiple points of view, and secondary sources as related to historical events.

1.2.4.C Distinguish between essential and nonessential information within and across a variety of texts, identifying stereotypes and exaggerations (bias) where present.

Apparel Development I, II- 12.00 The Principle and Elements of Design.

*The Apparel Development curriculum allows offers some flexibility with the use of this unit. The teacher may decide to use it during The Principle and Elements of Design, In Determining Body Shape or at another point. However, it is a valuable lesson for all students.*