

A Lifetime of Body Image Dissatisfaction among Women

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### **Abstract**

A history of body dissatisfaction may lead to lifelong emotional problems among women. Throughout life, a female's social environment may protect her from body image disturbances or exacerbate them. There are few studies investigating older women's experiences with long term body dissatisfaction. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand women's experiences with lifelong body dissatisfaction. More specifically, the objective of this study was to explore and better understand the personal body dissatisfaction triggers and outcomes of women's persistent body dissatisfaction. Seven adult women (Mean age = 55 years) were interviewed to better understand their lifelong body image struggles and health implications. Personal body image triggers were identified as: weight, appearance, health, social comparison, and significant others. A perception of being overweight and the desire to maintain weight and a youthful appearance were described as the most significant triggers of body dissatisfaction. The influence of social comparison and the perception of significant others' expectations on body dissatisfaction were present across all participants' lives. Cognitive (e.g., constant rumination and self- acceptance), behavioural (e.g., health and appearance related behaviours), affective (e.g., negative and positive body-related emotions), and social outcomes (e.g., social physique anxiety) of body dissatisfaction were found. The importance of better understanding women's body dissatisfaction experiences across the life span is discussed. The importance of recognizing individual differences among women and their body dissatisfaction experiences is also emphasized.

### Résumé

La présence d'antécédents d'insatisfaction de l'image corporelle chez la femme peut mener à des troubles émotifs qui perdurent tout au long de sa vie. Au cours d'une vie, l'environnement social de la femme peut la protéger des perturbations de l'image corporelle ou, au contraire, peut les exacerber. Il existe peu d'études au sujet de l'insatisfaction de l'image à long terme chez la femme plus âgée. C'est pourquoi cette étude phénoménologique avait pour but d'explorer et de comprendre les expériences d'insatisfaction de l'image corporelle chez la femme. Plus spécifiquement, les objectifs ciblent les déclencheurs personnels de l'insatisfaction et les conséquences de cette insatisfaction. Des entrevues ont été réalisées auprès de sept femmes (âge moyen 55ans) afin de mieux comprendre les effets des perceptions négatives de leur image au cours de leur vie et les conséquences de celles-ci sur la santé. Les déclencheurs de l'insatisfaction de l'image corporelle au niveau de la personne ont été identifiés comme étant : le poids, l'apparence physique, la santé, les différences sociales et la perception des proches. Une perception de surpoids, le désir de vouloir maintenir son poids et la volonté de conserver une apparence jeune ont été les éléments déclencheurs de l'insatisfaction corporelle les plus souvent mentionnés. Par ailleurs, l'influence des différences sociales et la perception des attentes des proches au sujet de l'insatisfaction de leur image corporelle ont été présentes tout au long de la vie des participantes. Ainsi, des aspects en relation avec l'insatisfaction corporelle ont été trouvés, et ce, aux niveaux: cognitif (c.-à-d. les ruminations mentales et l'acceptation du soi), comportemental (c.-à-d. la santé et des comportements reliés à l'image), affectif (c.-à-d. des émotions positives et négatives en relation avec l'image corporelle) et à celui des impacts sociaux (c.-à-d. l'anxiété physique sociale). De plus, l'importance de mieux comprendre les expériences d'insatisfaction de l'image corporelle tout au long de la vie a été discutée, celle de reconnaître les différences individuelles chez les femmes et leur expérience d'insatisfaction sont aussi soulignées.

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## **Review of Literature**

### **Body Image Defined**

Body image is a multidimensional construct that includes one's self-perceived body-related thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours (Cash, 2004; Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, and Tantleff-Dunn (1999) state that body image is best conceptualized as a continuum "with levels of disturbance ranging from none to extreme and most people falling near the middle of the range, experiencing mild-moderate concern, distress, or dissatisfaction" (p. 7). Body image disturbances are measured on a continuum based on the amount of dissatisfaction one experiences related to his/her body (Thompson et al., 1999). Thompson et al. (1999) further explain that higher levels of persistent body image disturbances are associated with clinical problems and/or negatively influence social functioning. As body image encompasses cognitive, behavioural, perceptual and affective constructs, body image disturbances may manifest themselves in one or more of these aspects (Thompson et al., 1999). Therefore, information regarding factors related to the manifestation of body image disturbances among cognitive, behavioural, perceptual and affective constructs is valuable.

Body image disturbances are often explained using perceptual, sociocultural, developmental or cognitive theories (Cash, Santos, & Fleming Williams, 2005; Heinberg, 1996; Hrabosky et al., 2009; Weller & Dziegielewski, 2005). Perceptual theories are based on an individual's view of their own body, whether this view reflects the individual's actual body or not (Weller & Dziegielewski, 2005). Compared to perceptual theories, involving one's own definition of own physical appearance, sociocultural theories involve the influence of society on determining beauty ideals and subsequent body image (Weller & Dziegielewski, 2005). Sociocultural theory suggests that society influences a woman's body image through creating and supporting thin cultural ideals, promoting the body as an object, and the belief that being attractive results in reward (i.e., advantages obtained because of thinness) and unattractiveness results in cost (i.e., disadvantages attributed to being overweight) (Morrison,

Kalin, & Morrison, 2004). Developmental theories explain body image disturbance as evolving due to developmental experiences during childhood and adolescence (Weller & Dziegielewski, 2005). Often experiences such as early puberty, teasing, and negative sexual encounters result in greater body image disturbances (Thompson, 1990, 1996). From a cognitive behaviour theory perspective, an individual's social and personal experiences form body image self-schemas which provide a cognitive template for one's body image emotions and appearance evaluation through predisposition of thoughts, feelings, and attitudes related to one's body (Cash et al., 2005; Hrabosky et al., 2009). Perceptual, sociocultural, developmental, and cognitive body image theories describe the process by which body dissatisfaction develops but little research focuses on the description of the experience of body image dissatisfaction. Since a phenomenological study provides a description of a phenomenon, it is appropriate to use in order to describe body dissatisfaction and the context in which body dissatisfaction occurs.

### **Gender Issues**

Body image disturbances differ by gender. This is demonstrated by the increased prevalence of dissatisfaction among women compared to men, the manner males and females perceive and conceptualize their own bodies, the effect of body image concerns on females' quality of life compared to males, and the stability of dissatisfaction found among most women over their life span (Cash & Hicks, 1990; Feingold & Mazzella, 1998; Muennig, Jia, Lee, & Lubetkin, 2008; Tiggemann, 2004; Wardle & Johnson, 2002; Ziebland, Robertson, Jay, & Neil, 2002). These differences highlight the importance of research focused on females' experience with body image disturbances across a life span.

Women are more dissatisfied with their physical appearance throughout their lives than men (Tiggemann, 2004). Although both males and females experience body image, it is more salient for women - who tend to report greater body dissatisfaction than men (Abbott & Barber, 2010; Carlson Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, 2004; Davison & McCabe, 2006; Feingold & Mazzella, 1998; Pliner, Chaiken, & Flett, 1990). Abbott and Barber (2010) found adolescent

females report greater importance of physical appearance, invested more time on appearance, and have greater dissatisfaction with appearance compared to males. As women report a greater occurrence of body dissatisfaction than men, it is important to understand factors associated with body dissatisfaction among women.

Women's perceptions of their own bodies also differ from men's perceptions of their own bodies. Society often influences a female's body weight concerns resulting in a desire to be thin, unlike men who are less worried about being overweight because it is more acceptable for a man to be big, large, muscled, or strong and less likely for these characteristics to be attributed to being fat (Cash & Hicks, 1990; Ziebland et al., 2002). Society holds different expectations for males and females such that they are evaluated on different dimensions: women for aesthetics such as appearance and weight, and men for function, such as muscle size and bulk (Abbott & Barber, 2010; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Increased internalized cultural appearance standards place an individual at greater risk of body dissatisfaction (Matz, Foster, Faith, & Wadden, 2002; Schwartz & Brownell, 2004). Women are more likely to accept, internalize, and react to cultural standards (Carlson Jones et al., 2004). Women's acceptance of cultural ideals and their subsequent influence on body satisfaction can be explained using objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Women conceptualize their body as differentiated sites and they are more attentive to these specific sites; while men conceptualize the body as one entity with value placed on functionality (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2003). This tendency to conceptualize the body as differentiated sites results in "greater body-focused negativity" (p. 682) among women (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2003). Women are concerned with cultural ideals, which focus on the importance of a female's appearance leading to an unachievable ideal and body dissatisfaction (Abbott & Barber, 2010; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). Increased body dissatisfaction among women compared to men can therefore be explained by the differences in sociocultural standards for men and women, and women's acceptance and internalization of the ideal female body defined by society.

Additionally, body image influences a woman's quality of life more than it affects quality of life among men. In reference to body image concerns, Muennig et al. (2008) state "overweight women lose 7 times more quality adjusted life years than overweight men" (p. 501) indicating some health effects are related to women's perception of their bodies. Cash et al. (2004) have also found women report a significantly lower body image quality of life compared to men. As body image significantly influences a woman's quality of life, research regarding body dissatisfaction across a life span is worth investigating.

Unlike men, whose body dissatisfaction actually decreases with age (Feingold & Mazzella, 1998), a women's body dissatisfaction has been found to remain stable across a life span (Feingold & Mazzella, 1998; Peat, Peyerl, & Muehlenkamp, 2008; Pliner et al., 1990; Tiggemann, 2004; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001) and only decreases with very old age (Tiggemann, 2004).

### **Age**

Although women's body dissatisfaction has been found to remain stable across the life span, literature regarding appearance importance is conflicting. Appearance importance refers to how important the physical body appearance is to an individual with respect to other domains of the physical self such as form and function (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). Some literature indicates that both body dissatisfaction and appearance importance remain stable across a woman's life span (Johnston, Reilly, & Kremer, 2004). Webster and Tiggemann (2003) found that body dissatisfaction and body importance did not differ among younger, middle aged and older women. They also found that body dissatisfaction was related to self-concept and self-esteem, and it was the strength of this relationship that reduced with increasing age. They attributed this decrease in association between body dissatisfaction, and self-esteem and self-concept, to increased use of cognitive control strategies (such as reappraisal of ideals and lowering expectations) by women as they age. These strategies serve as protective factors against the effect of body dissatisfaction (Webster & Tiggemann, 2003). Further studies indicate that the importance of appearance, including body shape and weight, actually decreases over time (Peat et al., 2008; Tiggemann, 2004).

Improvement of cognitive control strategies by processes such as lowering expectations, and making more realistic comparisons to age appropriate others, has been linked to the ability to become more accepting of appearance (Peat et al., 2008). Therefore these strategies may serve as a protective factor against body dissatisfaction through decreased appearance importance although dissatisfaction still remains constant with age (Peat et al., 2008). Finally, Reboussin et al. (2000) attribute the decrease in appearance importance with age to older adults valuing body function rather than appearance, although body dissatisfaction remains stable across the life span.

As research is limited and often contradictory in this area, investigation of body image among women in their mid-older adult years is valuable to more fully understand the influence of age on body image. Body dissatisfaction is an issue prevalent among women, at all ages and life-stages, therefore investigation of factors related to this phenomenon is necessary. Factors associated with body image that have been identified include; weight, physical appearance, cultural and media expectations, and social factors.

### **Factors Associated with Body Image**

**Weight.** A woman's weight influences body dissatisfaction in a variety of ways. A woman's current weight, weight history, "normative discontent", and an "anti-fat bias" in society are associated with greater body dissatisfaction.

A woman's current weight is associated with body dissatisfaction (Anderson, Eyler, Galuska, Brown, & Brownson, 2002). A trajectory of increasing weight and increasing BMI have been associated with poorer body image (Schwartz & Brownell, 2004). The degree to which a woman is overweight is also associated with body dissatisfaction, with greater weight and obesity leading to increased risk of dissatisfaction (Anderson et al., 2002). Empirical evidence suggests that overweight women report more weight-related anxieties and preoccupation, more negative body experiences and distress, lower self-esteem, lower satisfaction with life, and more dieting and binge eating than normal weight women (Cash, Counts, & Huffine, 1990; Milkewicz Annis, Cash, & Hrabosky, 2004). Literature suggests increased weight is associated with poorer

body image, however other factors such as weight history, also influence body dissatisfaction among women.

Regardless of current weight, a history of overweight is associated with increased body dissatisfaction. Cash et al. (1990) found formerly overweight women had more weight related anxiety and perceived their bodies as ‘fatter’ than woman of normal weight. Additionally, weight cycling (i.e., weight gain and loss) is related to body image dissatisfaction (Brantley et al.; Jakicic, Marcus, Lang, & Janney, 2008; Jeffrey et al., 2000; Wiltink et al., 2007). A qualitative study by Qazi, Jeanes, and Keval (2008) investigated reasons for dieting among women who “yo-yo diet”. They found body dissatisfaction to be a main theme among these women along with pressures from sociocultural and media influences. Similarly, “phantom fat” has been associated with poorer body image (Sarwer, Thompson, & Cash, 2005; Schwartz & Brownell, 2004). Phantom fat also known as “vestigial body image”, refers to continued body dissatisfaction experienced by formerly overweight individuals although they are no longer overweight (Schwartz & Brownell, 2004). Women who experience phantom fat continue to experience body dissatisfaction following weight loss similar to those who are currently overweight (Sarwer et al., 2005).

Although overweight and obesity often lead to a negative body image, body dissatisfaction is not limited to overweight and is prevalent in women of all sizes. This phenomenon has been referred to by many as “normative discontent”, highlighting the commonality of women’s dissatisfaction toward their bodies (Cash & Henry, 1995; Millstein et al., 2008; Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1985). Therefore, information regarding aspects related to normative discontent is valuable to understanding body dissatisfaction among women.

A final factor related to weight status among women and subsequent body image is an “anti-fat bias”. An anti-fat bias involves associating negative characteristics with being overweight leading to dislike and stigmatization of those who are overweight (Crandall & Biernat, 1990; Schwartz & Brownell, 2004). This bias is present in our society and has created stigma and discrimination against those who are overweight increasing risk for body image

disturbances (Puhl & Brownell, 2001; Schwartz & Brownell, 2004). An anti-fat bias is different from other forms of stigmatization as overweight and obese individuals express similar levels of dislike as non-overweight individuals do toward overweight people (Puhl & Brownell, 2001). This bias also occurs among those who are trained to deal with such biases (Chambliss, Finely, & Blaire, 2004). Chambliss et al. (2004) found exercise science students possessed negative attitudes and biases toward obese individuals indicating that an anti-fat bias exists among exercise professionals who are trained to help those who are overweight and obese. Individuals with a history of overweight or obese are often victim to stigmatization and teasing throughout their lives. A history of more perceived stigma and adult teasing among overweight women is associated with poorer body image and body image disturbances (Matz et al., 2002; Milkewicz Annis et al., 2004). Therefore, awareness of the impact of stigmatization and anti-fat bias toward those who are overweight is needed when investigating body dissatisfaction.

**Physical appearance.** Along with body weight, physical appearance is a major source of body dissatisfaction among women. Dissatisfaction with one's physical appearance leads to a poorer body image among women as beauty and appearance are often associated with status (Tiggemann, 2004). Research has found specific body parts to be sources of dissatisfaction for older women. For example, Janelli (1993) found women 60 years and older identified body weight, legs, eyes, hands and fingers as the aspects of their physical appearance that they were most dissatisfied with. Similarly, among a sample of women aged 28-63 Giesen (1989) reported older married women perceived their diminished attractiveness as a result of physical changes accompanied with aging such as; facial contour changes, gray hair, and wrinkles. Also, negativity is reported to accompany the loss of a youthful appearance with age (Gosselink, Cox, McClure, & De Jong, 2008). In summary, changes associated with aging may result in women developing greater body dissatisfaction (Janelli, 1993; Tiggemann, 2004).

**Culture and media.** Social pressures to conform to society's ideals tend to influence a woman's body image. Sociocultural theory perspective attributes

discrepancies between a female's ideal body and perceptions of her own body to the social pressure placed on women to live up to an unrealistic physical ideal, which is reinforced and transmitted by social influences (Spitzer, Henderson, & Zivian, 1999; Tiggemann, Polivy, & Hargreaves, 2009). Specifically, females are expected to conform to a certain level of physical appearance and attractiveness, as well as an overly thin ideal body weight that many find impossible to attain (David & Johnson, 1998; Dittmar, 2009; Dittmar & Howard, 2003; Halliwell & Dittmar, 2003, 2004; Spitzer et al., 1999; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). This influence is often transmitted via the media.

Mass media has been identified as a main source of social influence on beauty ideals (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Morrison & Sheahan, 2009; Tiggemann, 2002). Media such as television, beauty and fashion magazines, and video games, have been linked to body image dissatisfaction (Martins, Williams, Harrison, & Ratan, 2009; Tiggemann et al., 2009). The effect of media can be explained using the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) which “..contends that basing self-evaluations of physical appearance on universalistic targets such as celebrities has negative implications for body-image.” (Morrison et al., 2004, p.17). Based on Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, Morrison, et al. (2004) describe social comparison as the comparison of self to others in the absence of objective criteria in an effort to self-evaluate one's own opinions and abilities. Comparisons of physical appearance tend to be in an upward direction (against someone who is superior on the dimension) which lead to decreased self-perceptions of attractiveness (Morrison et al., 2004; Wheeler & Miyake, 1992). Internalization of the media's representation of the female body creates an unachievable ideal for most women leading to dissatisfaction (Grabe et al., 2008). As media is a main source of unachievable social ideals for women, it is important to acknowledge media's influence on body dissatisfaction across the life span.

**Social support.** Social support is defined as “a broad concept that refers to the help and care that others can provide and the effects of that care on coping, health, and psychological well-being.” (Ryan, La Guardia, Solky-Butzel, Chirkov, & Kim, 2005, p.145). It involves the presence or absence of psychological support



from significant others (Kaplan, Cassel, & Gore, 1977) with a deficit in social support predictive of body dissatisfaction (Stice & Whitenton, 2002). The significant others in one's social support network may help females develop a more positive body image through positive support (Bearman, Presnell, Martinez, & Stice, 2006; Stice & Whitenton, 2002). Positive support from a romantic partner has been linked to a more positive body image (Weller & Dziegielewska, 2005). Although literature indicates social support influences a woman's body dissatisfaction, this literature is limited and has not been fully explored across a female's life span.

Significant others, including family, peers, and romantic partners have been identified as influential to the way a woman perceives her physical self and believes others view her (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2006; Markey, Tinsley, Ericksen, Ozer, & Markey, 2002; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2005; Paquette & Raine, 2004). Through portraying and perpetuating the mass media and other cultural standards, significant others can influence a woman's perception of her body (Paquette & Raine, 2004). Paquette and Raine (2004) indicate:

*Partners, family, and friends—women's social networks—also perpetuate sociocultural messages by supporting media's representation of social norms for acceptable bodies. By amplifying social pressure for women's bodies to be a certain way, women's relationships with others and with themselves reproduce a form of social control that enforces and reinforces an unrealistic and unhealthy social norm. (p. 1056).*

Family, peers and romantic partners have all been identified as influential factors associated with a woman's body image.

**Family.** Family has been identified as a source of influence on a woman's body image (Green & Pritchard, 2003). Sociocultural theory states that children learn from society and the culture in which they are raised (Markey et al., 2002). Parents are a part of this sociocultural environment influencing what constitutes the ideal female figure to a child at a very young age (Markey et al., 2002). Parental comments regarding encouragement for their daughter to control her weight and body size have been indicated as a strong predictor of body

dissatisfaction (Kluck, 2010). Although some research indicates the role of the father as an influence on his daughter's internalization of the female ideal, many studies have emphasized the importance of the mother's influence on adolescents' body image and less influence from the father (Cheng & Mallinckrodt, 2009; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2005; Sabiston, Sedgwick, Crocker, Kowalski, & Mack, 2007; Shomaker & Furman, 2009). Family influence is apparent in the formation of body-related perceptions and ideals in childhood and adolescence, however the effect of these influences into adulthood is less understood.

Studies show that family has a long-standing influence on a woman's body image beyond adolescence (Green & Pritchard, 2003). Among a sample of women aged 21-61, sisters were among the most significant influences to mediate the impact of media on a female's body image (Paquette & Raine, 2004). Family pressure to diet has also been found to predict body dissatisfaction in adult women (Green & Pritchard, 2003). Although family has been identified as a potential influence on body image, further research is needed regarding adult women and their family's influence on body dissatisfaction. Along with family, friend and peer influences have been associated with a woman's body dissatisfaction at all ages.

**Peers.** During childhood and adolescence, peers have a relatively strong influence on women's body image (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2005; Sabiston et al., 2007; Thompson et al., 2007). Also, adolescents who are disliked, as well as those who are described as popular, have been found to display greater body dissatisfaction and negative body related cognitions (Rancourt & Prinstein, 2009). Nonetheless, the influence of peers on body dissatisfaction seems to remain beyond adolescence and is found among women of all ages. Friends are reported as a main source of social support among older women (Gurung, Taylor, & Seeman, 2003). Paquette and Raine (2004) report:

*Women in this study talked mostly about the influence of sisters, friends, and co-workers. This expression of women's agency not only came in the form of comments about one's body but also in the form of rewards, attention and friendship for weight loss, competition, or sanction for weight gained.*

*However, women exert social control over other women in a way that is most often not perceived as controlling. By surveying and policing each other's weight and through rewards and sanctions they give one another, women perpetuate social norms of thinness. These monitoring processes are pervasive and strongly influential because they are seen as, and meant to be, gestures of caring, friendship and sisterhood. (p. 1052-1053).*

This study emphasizes the complex nature of females' social influence on other women (i.e., their peers). In summary, some literature has found peers and friends to be a main source of influence on a women's body dissatisfaction, however this research is limited. Therefore more research is needed to understand the long term influences of peers and friends on a female's body image.

**Romantic partners.** Support from a romantic partner can be directly related to body dissatisfaction and anxiety associated with appearance (Weller & Dziegielewski, 2010). A woman's body dissatisfaction is influenced by her perception of her partner's view of her body as well as her perception of social support from her partner (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2006).

Among a sample of adult women, Paquette and Raine (2004) found the majority of the participants reported body-related comments from past or current partners. The interpretation of partners' body-related comments influenced women's body image. Furthermore, a woman's perception of her body differs from the perception her partner has regarding her body. Markey and Markey (2006) found young women were more dissatisfied with their own bodies than they believed their significant others to be. They were also more dissatisfied with their own bodies than their significant others actually were. Rozin and Fallon (1988) also found women's perception of their partner's views to be inaccurate, with women believing men to prefer much thinner women than men actually preferred. These discrepancies are important to investigate as women's body dissatisfaction is influenced by her perception of her romantic partner's view of her body (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2006). As romantic partner standpoints are highly influential to a woman's body dissatisfaction, it is valuable to understand how a woman perceives her partner's view of her own body.

Weller and Dziegielewski (2005) reported romantic partner support to be associated with greater satisfaction and less anxiety related to a woman's physical appearance. Those who received negative comments or influences from their romantic partner were more likely to report body image disturbances. Weller and Dziegielewski also reported that the type of support from the romantic partner determined level of body image, with esteem support (e.g., a compliment) being most beneficial for coping with stress and anxiety related to body image compared to detail-oriented and introspective emotional support. This study included women age 17- 45 years, however the average age of participants of this study was 20.8 years, and 30% were 18 years. As most of the sample was at the younger end of the age range, the authors recommend further investigation of the romantic partner's influence on females of varying ages. This study demonstrates the importance of the romantic partner on body image dissatisfaction, and further confirms the need for more research in this area. Qualitative research enables women to further explain how and in what context these significant others influence their body image.

### **Conclusion**

Body image has been thoroughly investigated in young females, but little is known about adult women's experiences with a lifetime of body image disturbances. Qualitative studies have reported that women continue to suffer from body image disturbances beyond the reproductive years (Johnston et al., 2004) and that a woman's relationship with body image is complex (Clarke, 2001; Johnston et al., 2004). Adult women have reported internalizing sociocultural standards of body image, while others report body acceptance through reflection and empowerment (Paquette & Raine, 2004), and altered priorities and awareness regarding body image (Johnston et al., 2004). Few qualitative studies exist in body image literature regarding body dissatisfaction across a life span. Little is known regarding what the experiences of women with a lifetime of body image issues are and how they are experienced. In order to gain a description of the essence of the experiences of women who struggle with body image across their life span, a phenomenological study is beneficial as it provides a textural and

structural description of an experience. This implies a phenomenological study provides a description of body image from the perception of these particular women, as well as how body image is experienced by these women.

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A Lifetime of Body Image Dissatisfaction among Women

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The primary author's roles in this study included; recruiting the participants, conducting the interviews, coding the data, conducting the analyses and writing the manuscript under the guidance of the co-authors. Modifications were made in response to the co-authors comments.

### **Abstract**

A history of body dissatisfaction may lead to lifelong emotional problems among women. Throughout life, a female's social environment may protect her from body image disturbances or exacerbate them. There are few studies investigating older women's experiences with long term body dissatisfaction. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand women's experiences with lifelong body dissatisfaction. More specifically, the objective of this study was to explore and better understand the personal body dissatisfaction triggers and outcomes of women's persistent body dissatisfaction. Seven adult women (Mean age = 55 years) were interviewed to better understand their lifelong body image struggles and health implications. Personal body image triggers were identified as: weight, appearance, health, social comparison, and significant others. A perception of being overweight and the desire to maintain weight and a youthful appearance were described as the most significant triggers of body dissatisfaction. The influence of social comparison and the perception of significant others' expectations on body dissatisfaction were present across all participants' lives. Cognitive (e.g., constant rumination and self- acceptance), behavioural (e.g., health and appearance related behaviours), affective (e.g., negative and positive body-related emotions), and social outcomes (e.g., social physique anxiety) of body dissatisfaction were found. The importance of better understanding women's body dissatisfaction experiences across the life span is discussed. The importance of recognizing individual differences among women and their body dissatisfaction experiences is also emphasized.

**Key Words:** body dissatisfaction, women, life span, triggers, outcomes

## **A Lifetime of Body Image Dissatisfaction among Women**

### **Introduction**

Body image is important to one's physical and mental wellbeing (Dittmar, 2009). Body image refers to the "multifaceted psychological experience of embodiment, especially but not exclusively one's physical appearance." (Cash, 2004, p.1). It is a multidimensional construct that involves one's positive and negative self-perceived body-related thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to one's physical appearance (Cash, 2004). A negative evaluation of the body results in what is termed body dissatisfaction (Abbott & Barber, 2010). Among women, this evaluation is usually based on their appearance and weight (McCabe, Ricciardelli, & Ridge, 2006). It is estimated that most women have experienced body dissatisfaction at some point in their lives (Abbott & Barber, 2010; Davison & McCabe, 2006; Feingold & Mazzella, 1998; Grogan, 1999). Although body dissatisfaction has been found to occur in middle- aged and older women (Gosselink, Cox, McClure, & De Jong, 2008; Grippo & Hill, 2008; Mangweth-Matzek et al., 2006; McLaren & Kuh, 2004; Siegel, 2010; Tiggemann, 2004; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001) there is limited research focused on understanding and describing longer term experiences of body image from the perspective of the participants. A history of body dissatisfaction, such as experiences of body dissatisfaction across the life span, may lead to poor psychological and physical health problems among women (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Dittmar, 2009). It is therefore important to understand lifelong experiences of body dissatisfaction from the perspective of adult women.

### **Body Image Experiences**

Literature suggests that body dissatisfaction is present beyond adolescence and persists across a woman's life span (Grogan, 1999). Perceptions of body dissatisfaction have been found to emerge as young as 7 years old (Grabe & Hyde, 2006) and continue to exist in adolescents, college-aged women, and women beyond reproductive years (Johnston, Reilly, & Kremer, 2004; Slevec & Tiggemann, 2010; Swami et al., 2010; Webster & Tiggemann, 2003).



Literature focused on younger female populations identifies body image dissatisfaction as prevalent among younger females (Abbott & Barber, 2010). Emerging evidence suggests that many women also experience this phenomenon beyond adolescence (Gosselink et al., 2008; Grippo & Hill, 2008; Mangweth-Matzek et al., 2006; McLaren & Kuh, 2004; Siegel, 2010; Tiggemann, 2004; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001; Webster & Tiggemann, 2003). However, little research exists regarding body dissatisfaction across the life span from the perspective of those who have experienced the phenomenon. Research regarding a woman's lifelong struggle with persistent body dissatisfaction is needed.

### **Antecedents of Body Image**

Weight status and related constructs such as a history of overweight, increasing body mass index (BMI), current weight, trajectory of weight, degree of overweight, obesity and its age of onset, history of weight cycling, and phantom fat have been associated with body dissatisfaction in women from childhood to beyond reproductive years (Allen, Byrne, McLean, & Davis, 2008; Austin, Haines, & Veugelers, 2009; Clark & Tiggemann, 2008; Docteur, Urdapilleta, Defrance, & Raison, 2009; Mirza, Davis, & Yanovski, 2005; Schwartz & Brownell, 2004; Wardle & Cooke, 2005; Wardle, Waller, & Fox, 2002).

In addition to weight-related issues, appearance-related concerns also increase the risk of body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). These appearance-related concerns are often associated with cultural expectations and ideals that are transmitted by the media such as fashion magazines and television (Tiggemann, Polivy, & Hargreaves, 2009). Cultural expectations of appearance and attractiveness are often unrealistic for women since they create an unachievable ideal body (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). Internalizing cultural appearance standards and a greater investment in appearance places an individual at increased risk of body dissatisfaction (Schwartz & Brownell, 2004).

Along with weight and appearance factors, social influences have been associated with body image among women. Specifically, social influences tend to either protect or exacerbate how a woman views her own body (Paquette & Raine, 2004; Spitzer, Henderson, & Zivian, 1999; Tiggemann et al., 2009). Significant

others, including parents, romantic partners, and peers, have been identified as an important source of social influence on a female's body image (Paquette & Raine, 2004; Green & Pritchard, 2003). Parental and peer influences are significantly associated with a female's perception and formation of body image and body satisfaction (Kluck, 2010; Markey, Tinsley, Ericksen, Ozer, & Markey, 2002; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2005; Shomaker & Furman, 2009). Although research is limited regarding family influence on woman's body image beyond adolescence, it has been found that family continues to influence a female's body perceptions and therefore satisfaction into adulthood (Green & Pritchard, 2003). In addition to, and often part of the family, the romantic partner is a significant influence on a female's body esteem, sexual esteem, and body satisfaction (McKinley, 1999; Raciti & Hendrick, 1992). However, more research is needed to better understand how various significant others affect a woman's body image. Based on previous research, women's perceived amount of social support from significant others may relate to their experiences of body image (Stice & Whitenton, 2002). For example, low social support has been associated with negative body image (Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007). Furthermore, teasing is directly related to body dissatisfaction (Ata et al., 2007; Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, Haines, & Wall, 2006; Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Story, 2003; Menzel et al., 2010; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). Consequently, a female's social relationships may either absorb and protect her from body image disturbances or exacerbate them.

### **Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioural Outcomes of Body Image**

Body dissatisfaction puts an individual's self-evaluation and psychological wellbeing at risk and may lead to negative affect (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2006) and a variety of negative emotions (Quinn & Crocker, 1998). For example, body image dissatisfaction is significantly correlated with depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem even after controlling for body weight (Sarwer, Wadden, & Foster, 1998). Furthermore, body image may be associated with numerous behavioural outcomes. For example, Neumark-Sztainer et al. (2006) investigated five-year longitudinal associations between body image and health

behaviours among adolescents. They found those who reported higher body dissatisfaction also reported dieting to a greater extent compared to those who reported higher body satisfaction. Body dissatisfaction was also associated with unhealthy weight control behaviours, binge eating, lower physical activity, and lower fruit and vegetable intake (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006). Taken together, several longitudinal and cross-sectional studies have indicated that body dissatisfaction is associated with physical and psychological health conditions such as: obesity, depression, low self esteem, disordered eating, and body dysmorphic disorder among adolescent and older women (Beck, Casper, & Anderson, 1996; Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Didie, Kuniega-Pietrzak, & Phillips, 2010; Dittmar, 2009; Grabe, Hyde, & Lindberg, 2007; Johnson & Wardle, 2005; Polivy & Herman, 2002). However, most of the research in this area is based on post-positivist quantitative methodology studies in which relationships are assessed but the study design precludes any exploration of the meaning of body image to women. Therefore, research focused on a better understanding of ways in which body image dissatisfaction is experienced among women across the life span is needed using constructivist perspectives and qualitative methodologies.

Quantitative research indicates the occurrence of body image and its influence on wellbeing. However, few studies describe how body image originates, its impact and its meaning from the perception of the women who experience it. Therefore women's experiences with body image have not been thoroughly examined. Phenomenological research attempts to describe what a phenomenon is and how it is experienced from the perception of the participant (Creswell, 2007). This study attempted to describe the experiences of women who identified with a lifetime of body dissatisfaction. Therefore, a phenomenological approach was used to achieve a rich description of the meaning of the experience of body image from the perspective of these women.

### **Purpose**

Although literature on body image dissatisfaction is well documented, and research indicates body dissatisfaction persists regardless of age, body dissatisfaction has not been thoroughly explored from the perspective of women

who have lifelong experience with the phenomenon. Therefore the purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe women's long-term experiences with body image dissatisfaction. The objective was to gain an understanding of a lifetime of body dissatisfaction through the description of triggers and outcomes related to the personal body dissatisfaction experiences of women who self-identify as body image strugglers. Weight history and related factors, the internalization and salience of cultural expectations regarding appearance, and the role of significant others (parents, siblings, romantic partners and friends) in perpetuating or protecting them from body image dissatisfaction was explored. A better understanding of the mental and physical health outcomes was also explored.

### **Method**

The methodology of this study followed that of Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology. Moustakas' describes transcendental phenomenology as a process where the researcher views the phenomenon with a fresh outlook, without any previously held opinions or beliefs regarding the phenomenon. The main focus of Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology is the description of the experience of the participants and less on the interpretation of the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) explains the process of Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology as identifying a phenomenon, bracketing to eliminate biases, and collecting data from those who have experience with the phenomenon of interest. The researcher is interested in "what" has been experienced and in what context these experiences have occurred or been influenced (Moustakas, 1994). The data collection procedure relies on the statements of the participants to describe the phenomenon, not those of the researcher (Moerer-Urdah & Creswell, 2004). This approach was well suited for this study as the objective was to describe and understand the essence of a lifelong struggle with body dissatisfaction from the perspective of women who have experienced it. Transcendental phenomenology provides a description of a phenomenon and how it is experienced from the perspective of those who have experienced it.

**Participants**

The participants in this study included seven English-speaking women (Mean age = 55 years). This sample size was appropriate based on previous phenomenological studies (Groenewald, 2004; Moerer-Urdah & Creswell, 2004; Riemen, 1986) and recommendations (Dukes, 1983; Cresswell, 2007). A sample size of 5-10 is considered appropriate for phenomenological research (Smith, 2004). Smith and Osborn (2003) explain that a small sample size is suitable because phenomenological research makes “no attempt to test a predetermined hypothesis of the researcher; rather the aim is to explore, flexibly and in detail, an area of concern” (p.55). The participants were purposefully selected if they described themselves as a “lifetime body image struggler” and if they were between the ages of 50 and 65 years. The participants were ineligible if they reported one or more of the following: any clinical diagnoses (past or present) including either physical and/or psychological health illness or disorders, current or past (within the last year) medications for psychological diagnoses, or a history of abuse. These criteria were implemented to prevent the participation of those who had body image disturbances related to underlying clinical diagnoses.

See Table 1 for a description of the participant characteristics.

**Procedure**

Upon approval from McGill Ethics Board, participants were recruited via local advertisements in newspapers, and posters in community centers, and fitness centers. Interested participants who met the initial criteria were asked to contact the lead author. Once initial contact was made via telephone or email, the potential participants were screened to ensure they meet the inclusion criteria. The first woman who met the study criteria, and provided consent, participated in a pilot interview. The purpose of this pilot interview was to test the interview guide and to provide the lead author with interview experience. This interview data was not included in the main study.

Prior to their first interview, each participant was sent a consent form and demographic questionnaire asking the women to identify their weight and height,

age, income, ethnicity, marital status/relationship status, and number of children. This information was collected for descriptive purposes.

### **Interview Guide**

Each woman participated in an individual one-on-one interview that lasted between 60 and 120 minutes (Mean time = 68 minutes). As the essence of the experience of body dissatisfaction was the ultimate goal of the study (Moustakas, 1994), a full understanding of the phenomenon of body image from the point of view of the participant was explored using semi-structured interviews. Each interview began with the development of rapport with the participant. Based on Creswell's (2007) recommendation, general questions about each woman's lifestyle were asked first, followed by specific questions regarding body image experiences. General questions included: how do you feel about your body at this point in your life? This question was also asked for each decade of the women's lives (i.e., childhood, adolescence, 20's, 30's, 40's, and 50's). Specific questions included: how do you feel about your body shape/weight and appearance? Can you tell me about a time(s) when you felt particularly good about your body? Can you tell me about a time(s) when you felt particularly bad/negative about your body? How has culture or society affected your body image? What has body image meant to your life? All specific questions were preceded by: Can you tell me who or what influenced these feelings? The interviews were concluded by asking the participants if they had anything to add or clarify. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Nvivo software was used to store and organize the data.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed that of Moustaka's (1994) transcendental phenomenology. First each transcript was read through at least once. Then each transcript was re-read while taking notes and making comments in the margins. In a process of horizontalization, listing and preliminary grouping of each statement relevant to these women's experience with body image was conducted. Second, reduction and elimination of statements was done based on whether they contained a "moment" relevant to understanding these women's experience with

body image and if the statement could be abstracted and labeled. The third step involved clustering and labeling the significant statements, which resulted in the core themes. Fourth, themes were checked by application against the complete transcript of the participant and determined if they were expressed explicitly. If not, were they compatible? The theme had to be either compatible or expressed explicitly to be included. The fifth step involved using the themes to develop a textural description for each participant including verbatim quotes. Sixth, using the textural description and imaginative variation a structural description was developed. The seventh step involved construction of a textural-structural description for each participant. Lastly, as recommended by Moustakas a composite description of meanings and the essence of the experience for the entire sample (based on the individual textural-structural descriptions) was created.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was accomplished by the four criteria described by Morrow (2005) as: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility was achieved by prolonged engagement with the participants accomplished through the screening process, building rapport, and during the 60 to 120 minute interviews (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005). Credibility was also accomplished by peer debriefing. Specifically, a peer reviewer was provided with 2 transcripts and was asked to code them based on the categories and themes from the study. When disagreement occurred in the coding, there was a discussion between the peer and lead researcher until consensus was reached. Member checking, regarded as the most important task to ensure credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), was also conducted. All participants were mailed a copy of their transcripts to review. The participants were asked to provide feedback regarding the accuracy and representation of the data in the transcript. All participants responded with feedback (1 participant added a statement, 1 participant modified a statement, and the remaining confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts). The participants were also sent a copy of the findings to ensure that the coding process captured an accurate description of their experience.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings can be transferred to other settings (Morrow, 2005). A thick description of the phenomenon contributes to transferability by providing a detailed description of the phenomenon and the context in which it occurs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was enhanced by providing an in-depth description of the participants' experiences, raw data (i.e. verbatim quotes), participant profiles (Table 1) and participant themes (Table 2) allowing the reader to see and judge the potential transferability of the results.

Dependability refers to demonstrating that the findings would be consistent if they were repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the current study, dependability was accomplished by keeping detailed records of the research processes that were reviewed by the research supervisor and peer reviewer in the debriefing process.

Finally, confirmability refers to the degree to which the results are unbiased and objective. Credibility was achieved by describing the participants' experiences with the phenomenon (body image) using verbatim quotes and statements and by member checking to ensure that each participant felt that her experiences were accurately reflected in the transcripts and coded data. Bracketing (Moustakas, 1994) was also used to enhance confirmability. Based on recommendations (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the lead author wrote in a journal to reflect on her own experiences with the phenomenon of body image prior to the first pilot interview and again prior to the first main study interview. The journal was used to keep notes reflecting personal experiences during the data collection and analysis.

## **Results**

For the purpose of this study, participants were given pseudo-names to ensure anonymity. Table 1 provides participant characteristics and Table 2 provides a summary of body image themes. These themes included: body image at every age, dissatisfaction with weight, desire to maintain weight, family history of overweight, appearance importance, acceptance with age, fear of physical changes associated with aging, desire to maintain youth, desire to maintain style,



significant others as body image triggers, changing ideals to focus on health while remaining dissatisfied with appearance and/or weight, health appearance relationship, feelings of not belonging in one's social environment, exercise, dieting/food monitoring, teasing and stigmatization, importance of control in maintaining weight and weight related behaviours, social comparison, and past female media ideals. These themes are explained in 5 categories (personal body dissatisfaction triggers, and cognitive, behavioural, affective, and social outcomes).

In line with the central research question, all participants described body dissatisfaction as present across their life span, beginning with a specific memorable moment or development period and continuing to the present day. For example, Betty expressed *"I can remember, I can tell you exactly when my (body related) thinking changed"* and *"the areas that I've always been concerned with are always going to be the same."* Fiona described her experience: *"My body image has been negative through my life."* Helen stated *"I do still worry about how I look."* Body dissatisfaction was discussed in terms of personal triggers, and the specific resultant cognitive, behavioral, affective, and social outcomes of dissatisfaction.

### **Personal Body Dissatisfaction Triggers**

All participants described weight, appearance, health, social comparison, and perceptions of significant others expectations as personal body image triggers.

**Weight.** Weight was described as a personal body image trigger by all 7 participants and was the major body image trigger for 6 participants (Ana, Betty, Claire, Dee, Eleanor, and Fiona). Eleanor stated *"I've always wanted to be the skinny mini. I've always been envious of those really, really skinny...I want to be thinner."* Areas of dissatisfaction related to weight included overall weight, the stomach area, and the lower torso region.

Dissatisfaction with one's weight, both a perception of being overweight and underweight, led to body dissatisfaction. Claire perceived herself as underweight in childhood leading to body dissatisfaction. Ana and Fiona identified with body dissatisfaction because of a lifetime of perceiving themselves

as overweight. Betty, Dee, and Eleanor described a history of weight fluctuations, with higher weights associated with greater body dissatisfaction. Five participants (Ana, Betty, Claire, Dee and Fiona) perceived their current body dissatisfaction as directly related to being overweight. Fiona stated *"I don't like my body...I am a fat baby, who moved to a fat child, who moved to a fat teenager, who moved to a fat adult."* Helen had never experience being overweight, however she described a fear of gaining weight as she believed it was directly related to body dissatisfaction: *"it all stems back to wanting to make sure I'm not like the rest of my family (overweight)... already the pressures of feeling that you had to be thin were already there, prevalent when I was younger."*

**Appearance.** All women described body dissatisfaction related to appearance. The participations described concerns for an attractive appearance (i.e., beauty) as a personal trigger of body dissatisfaction across their life spans.

Ana described her body dissatisfaction in the past as solely, and directly related to her weight. However, her present appearance dissatisfaction was described with very specific references:

*I would love to be a completely different bone structure and I'm not... I look at my body and go gee I wish I was taller, gee I wish that I had slender wrists...I often look at my body and think you know, my legs are so stumpy.. Yah I pretty much go through each part going, hmm..*

Betty described a lifetime of dissatisfaction with her appearance related to her body and it's shape. She described her dissatisfaction as beginning in youth and continuing as she accumulated undesired physical changes associated with aging. She stated:

*When I was quite young I developed that cellulite look, you know that, almost that puckered kind of thing and that's something I've never been able to get rid of. So now that I'm older...things are sagging and loose and whatever, no matter how much you exercise certain things can't change.*

Betty explained that her dissatisfaction remained: *"When I look in the mirror I look at my imperfections as opposed to the perfect norm that we have today."*

Claire described her appearance dissatisfaction in youth as a result of her awkward and unattractive appearance (e.g., *"I don't think I was a particularly attractive kid either, I don't think I was pretty and it does, it really has a huge influence on how you feel about yourself"*) and her height (e.g., *"I hated being tall"*). Claire's perception of herself as too tall, unattractive and awkward changed in adolescence when she seemed to grow into herself and became attractive. She stated *"Around 18 to early 20s... I was no longer thin and gangly...you know people had growth spurts and that so I didn't feel so much like this giant amongst little people."* Claire described a desire for an attractive appearance as present across her life span: *"it was always there, always at the forefront...by golly you always had to look the best- the best that you could. There was always that emphasis, always that pressure. A lot of pressure."*

Dee described a concern for appearance across her life span: *"I always felt I had to be perfect...it's a style that you want to achieve that you want to look good, and it doesn't change from when you're 20 or 50 or 60."* Dee felt that appearance dissatisfaction remained prominent across her life and stated *"I still haven't given up my quest (for physical perfection)."*

Eleanor described her appearance concerns in youth: *"I always worried about my hair"* and *"I guess being top heavy (chest size) was always an issue with me."* Her present concerns were described in terms of the desire for a youthful appearance *"I've always felt myself to look younger than I am. And to me that's always been important."*

Fiona described a desire to be *"beautiful"* in youth, however she described her current appearance concerns as:

*changed tremendously because I am older now and I have gray hair. I have allowed my hair to stay natural. And that was a choice that I made because...I am taken very seriously (at work) ... because I'm the voice of reason and experience. And so in that way I have come to a space where I don't feel the pressure to be sort of young and beautiful.*

Although Fiona described more concern with being perceived as wise and respected, she does mention her current dissatisfaction with physical changes

associated with aging: *Things (physical) happen as you age that you don't like.*" She continued *"now I'm realizing yes there are more lines in my face, the fat has collected in certain ways."*

Helen was the only participant who did not describe weight as her greatest concern because she felt that an aging appearance was her greatest trigger of body dissatisfaction. She described dissatisfaction with an aging appearance and a desire to maintain youthfulness: *"Aging in general, absolutely. I know when the gray hair comes in and then you know the wrinkles start and you're realizing hey I am not as youthful as I use to look"* Helen continued:

*it's difficult when you get older you want to try to stay young, and it's a struggle because you look in the mirror and you can see it's not happening, so you hope or you wish that you can still be 20 or 30...it's hard to keep that youthfulness.*

The desire to remain attractive as well as the desire to maintain youthful were both discussed by participants.

**Health.** Most participants (n=5, Betty, Claire, Dee, Eleanor, Helen) described an increased concern for health with age. Health was also associated with body dissatisfaction. For example, Claire attributed her present day body satisfaction to good health: *"I don't have pain, I am active, I am still able to do what I want to do, and I think that's where you start to think that's pretty good."* Although 5 participants described the increased value of health with age, only Betty compared the value of health to the desire for her physical ideal:

*It is interesting because you really prioritize what's important. Is it important that I have flabby thighs or that I can't make my bed in the morning? ... As soon as you start to feel better you start to forget how valuable the fact that you can function again is... as we get better, well we start to forget.*

Betty explained that when healthy; body dissatisfaction was triggered by appearance concerns but when unhealthy; body dissatisfaction was triggered by health concerns.

**Social comparison.** All women discussed comparing their own physical body to other women's physical bodies as a trigger to body dissatisfaction. Some participants (n=2, Dee, Eleanor) even defined body image as a social comparison. For example Dee defined body image as *"what you think...you look like compared to what you see other people look like."* These comparisons were directed at other women in the participants' social environment (known others and strangers): *"I'm always looking around and comparing myself. I'm standing on a subway platform and think -gee am I the fattest person on this subway?"* (Ana). All participants described a general social comparison to all people (both known others and strangers) around them in a variety of contexts. However the majority of social comparison described was an upward comparison to women of similar age (often peers or friends) who were thinner than themselves. Some participants (n=2, Eleanor, Helen) described a downward comparison: *"I think compared to other people I know I've done okay (with weight) considering"* (Eleanor). However these downward comparison comments were limited and spoken with trepidation.

Women in the media were also described as a source of comparison in childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood: *"I am thinking of the magazines, you take a look and you're always comparing yourself"* (Claire). Fiona stated:

*I watched a lot of TV as a kid so all the girls on the soap operas who were so beautiful and unimaginably thin, and dress so beautifully. And this was you know, one of my deepest desires was to be able to fit into clothing and look beautiful.*

Not achieving this ideal led to Fiona's body dissatisfaction. Twiggy was mentioned as a source of comparison in the 60's by 5 participants (Ana, Betty, Dee, Eleanor, Fiona) and a 6<sup>th</sup> participant (Claire) mentioned Farrah Fawcett and Christie Brinkley. Feminine ideals represented by female figures in the media were described as highly influential to the participants' negative body image experiences in childhood through to young adulthood. The participants, however no longer mentioned social comparison to women in the media as a personal trigger of body dissatisfaction.

**Significant others.** All participants perceived significant others, namely parents, romantic partners and peers, as triggers of body dissatisfaction.

Helen described the positive influence of her parents: *“great parents obviously...They always tell me how great I am even though I maybe haven’t done anything.”* Dee also perceived her mother as a positive influence. None of the other participants mentioned parents as a positive influence on their body images yet parents were mentioned as negative influences on body image.

Specifically, Ana and Fiona described their mothers as negative triggers of body dissatisfaction. Ana described her mother’s comments regarding her weight as *“always negative. She still is always negative.”* Fiona described her relationship with her mother: *“we were eating partners. I wasn’t going out with any boys when I was a teenager and so she and I would have little eating fests.”* When Fiona experienced weight loss she perceived her mother as sabotaging her efforts: *“there she was trying to, in a way, interfere with that. She would smoke when I was exercising.”* While Fiona’s mother has since passed away and was no longer a direct trigger to body dissatisfaction (although the effects were lingering), Ana claimed her mother was an ongoing current and direct influence on her body image.

Betty and Fiona described their fathers as triggers of body dissatisfaction. For Fiona, her father was a direct influence on the perceptions of her body: *“he didn’t take my feelings as seriously as I wanted him to do. ...He was a big negative influence (on my body dissatisfaction).”* When discussing other negative influences, her father’s past impact on body dissatisfaction was reiterated: *“I had gotten my father out of my life to a large extent, and I didn’t need someone else who was making comments.”* Betty and Fiona also described how their fathers indirectly influenced their body images by directing comments to their mothers: *“my dad made some comments and I was quite hurt for my mother. Because he made some comments about her weight”* (Betty). Fiona also stated *“he ridiculed her and I saw that....I felt that he was behaving negatively toward her, and if it was negative towards her- he was negative towards me because I looked like her.”*

All 7 participants described their male romantic partners as both direct and indirect triggers of body dissatisfaction. Three participants (Betty, Claire, and Helen) described their current husbands as positive influences on their body image. Most participants (Ana, Betty, Dee, Fiona, and Helen) described a negative influence from either a current or ex-husband.

The women who described their romantic partner as a negative influence described him as more influential to their body image than those who described him as a positive influence. For example, although Claire identified her husband as a positive trigger, she described his influence as lacking impact on her body dissatisfaction. Claire explained why this may be: *“well he loves me warts and all. So maybe his take on it, or opinion doesn’t weigh as much because it’s biased already. But it ought to be the most important.”* All participants (Ana, Betty, Dee, Helen) who had experienced divorce perceived their ex-husband as triggering body dissatisfaction:

*He was very conscious of looks, appearance, and it was a very difficult relationship because I felt I always had to be...perfect. So that just exacerbated whatever I was hanging on to. Whatever negative self-image I had. So that didn’t help. I know when I first got married I put on a bit of weight and...that was an issue with him. So it became my major issue. I always struggled with that plus with his attitude. He was, he always liked to instigate, sort of look at other women and compare me.* (Dee)

Ana and Fiona discussed the direct negative influence of their current romantic partners. While Fiona discussed this influence as being inconsistent, Ana explained that her second husband makes daily comments regarding her weight:

*we have had lots of fights...he is probably more (judgmental) than anybody else I know... It makes me angry though...because part of it is that he should love me no matter what... It doesn’t inspire me to be confident and feel successful, if anything I feel so discouraged and I feel like this is futile, and I feel not happy.*

Three participants (Ana, Betty, Helen) explained a more indirect negative influence from their romantic partners who are now ex-husbands. Betty described

her ex-husband as a negative influence on the way she felt about herself as he would *“undermine my confidence and my self-esteem, and then things that he would say to me about my personality or my person, would undermine that, and then that translates into how you feel about yourself (physically).”* Helen stated *“when you’re not loved, or cared for, or respected, then you have no great sense of self worth. Hence you just feel really bad about who you are and what you’re doing. That was probably my worst (body image).”* The women described their ex-husbands as questioning their sense of self-worth indirectly resulting in body dissatisfaction.

In addition to family members (parents and siblings) and romantic partners, all participants mentioned peers as influencing body dissatisfaction. The influence of peers across the life span was described in terms of teasing and social support.

Fiona and Eleanor described teasing as a trigger of body dissatisfaction. Eleanor stated *“oh the boys, they made stupid comments.”* She perceived comments made by her male peers when she became more developed for her age (specifically developing breasts) as triggering body dissatisfaction. Eleanor perceived teasing from boys as influential to her body dissatisfaction in youth only. Fiona described teasing as beginning in childhood and remaining a trigger of body dissatisfaction throughout her entire life:

*You know embarrassment has been something that has followed me through my life because of the weight and people’s, and my perception of other people’s attitude toward me, and my belief that they have a negative attitude toward women who are heavy.*

Furthermore, six participants (Ana, Betty, Claire, Dee, Eleanor and Helen) described current and past female peers as sources of social support throughout their lives which resulted in decreased body dissatisfaction. Helen stated *“Friends take you for who you are which is nice.”* Betty felt women foster a positive image for each other through camaraderie and information sharing. Similarly Claire described the importance of female social support as a positive influence on body dissatisfaction:



*I think it's the old misery loves company. We're all fat together. But as women yes we do sometimes sit around and talk about, and sometimes joke about it (body dissatisfaction), and actually laugh about it...and also have a real big moan about it, you know, whine and complain. But when you have someone to do that with you, it's a comfort as a woman to have that around you.*

For most women (n=6) female peers were identified as very important sources of social support for coping with body dissatisfaction in adulthood. Fiona's absence of described female social support may be attributed to her description of being a person "*who tends to make just one or two close friends*" and her experiences as a victim of teasing by peers.

Peers of the opposite sex were also described as influential to body image during adolescence and young adulthood only. Claire described her positive body image in adolescence as influenced by "*mostly peers. All of a sudden you got guys paying attention, it's the whole teen thing.*" Claire and Betty described positive attention from boys regarding their appearance as positively influencing their body image.

In summary the women described perceived weight and appearance as the most influential triggers to their body dissatisfaction. Social comparison and significant others were also highly influential triggers described by all participants. These triggers were identified as beginning in childhood, and were described as present across the women's lives resulting in a lifetime of body dissatisfaction. A combination of triggers, in other words a "*perfect storm*" (Ana) of factors was perceived as resulting in a lifetime of body dissatisfaction.

### **Body Dissatisfaction Outcomes**

Body dissatisfaction was perceived as resulting in cognitive, behavioural, affective, and social outcomes. These outcomes were described as regular and often daily occurrences which encompassed all facets of the women's lives.

**Cognitive outcomes.** Cognitive outcomes of body dissatisfaction were described as constant rumination and a shift in thinking toward self-acceptance.

All of the women described body dissatisfaction as occupying their thoughts. The women admitted that these thoughts have occupied too much of their time and yet felt that they could not stop thinking about it:

*All the time. ALL the time. I wake up, I go to bed at night thinking about how I ate that day, and I wake up in the morning wondering how I am going to make the day go through. (Ana)*

Eleanor also stated “*It’s always been in the back of my mind.*” Similarly Dee described body dissatisfaction as “*always on the top of my mind. So it (body dissatisfaction) never really left me.*” All of the participants described constant rumination regarding body dissatisfaction across their lives.

Along with a constant rumination, self- acceptance was described by some (n=3, Claire, Dee, Helen) participants. Claire described her current body image as “*a mind shift. Maybe it’s more accepting*” She continued:

*I think as we age and become maybe wiser, or a little more in-tune with ourselves you start to know that that standard isn’t a realistic one. Whereas maybe when you were younger you didn’t think about that. You just thought about how you didn’t measure up, whereas now you just know that’s impossible. It’s just an impossibility.*

For Claire and Dee, the extremes of dissatisfaction and satisfaction were blurred as they tried to accept their physical bodies and the aging process in spite of being continually dissatisfied with their appearance and weight:

*for sure they (body dislikes) don’t leave you, they stay with you but you learn how to cope with them...you just have to accept it because you’ve been dealing with it a lifetime and you get 60 and think – I’m tired. I’m tired of this nonsense...I don’t know if it’s more positive, its more of an acceptance. You just think you know I’m going to make this work because what are the alternatives? (Dee)*

Claire further explains that although “*I’m not really happy with how I look, I’m more okay with my body right now, at this point in my life, than I probably ever was before.*” The women discussed the inability to control the process of aging, the time consuming nature of controlling one’s weight, and an increased value for

health as reasons that forced them to accept their appearance and weight although they maintained that *“you do still care”* (Claire) what your body looks like.

Cognitive outcomes of body dissatisfaction were described as a constant rumination and a self-acceptance regarding one's body.

**Behavioural outcomes.** The participants described body dissatisfaction as motivating and inhibiting behaviours:

*It has been both the motivating factor and the, it's both a carrot and the source of great sadness. It's a mountain I've never quite climbed. I've gotten pretty high up but never reached the summit. And even though I've gotten to a level that was quite satisfying it was never enough for me. And it's something that's the hardest challenge, the hardest challenge and very rewarding at the time that I was feeling...it was very elusive.* (Fiona)

All participants described body dissatisfaction as inhibiting behaviour.

Examples of inhibited behaviours were described as; wearing a bathing suit (n=7) *“I've never been comfortable getting into a bathing suit”* (Eleanor), sex life (n=1) *“you don't feel particularly sexy when you're fat...one cancels out the other, like if you're overweight your not going to be sexy”* (Ana), participation in sport (n=3, Ana, Betty, Helen) *“I am not very athletic - I won't do any kind of physical sports”* (Ana), *“high school I was very self-conscious...so I really got shy and didn't participate in very many (sports)”* (Helen), purchasing and wearing certain clothing (n=7) *“I think certain clothing issues that I avoid, I have avoided...ways of dressing”* (Betty), and trying new activities because of fear of failure (n=1, Claire) *“I didn't dare, dare take that chance”* (Claire). Body dissatisfaction was described as inhibiting multiple behaviours at all ages. Feelings of self-consciousness or perceptions of unattractiveness related to body dissatisfaction were described as inhibiting these behaviours.

Body dissatisfaction was also described as motivating specific behaviours. These motivated behaviours included; exercise (n=7) *“I like to get out everyday for a little bike ride at least”* (Eleanor), monitoring food intake and dieting (n=7) *“I was always on one diet or another”* (Dee), *“I do watch what I eat”* (Helen), emotional eating (n=3, Ana, Dee, Fiona) *“I have turned to eating in order to deal*

*with emotions that I wasn't ready to confront*" (Fiona), and spending time and/or money on weight loss and appearance enhancement efforts (n=7) *"I spend a lot of money on face creams and stuff"* (Eleanor), *"my hair do's changed. Started coloring...changed a lot of things and felt better about myself"* (Betty). Body dissatisfaction was described as directly motivating both healthy and unhealthy behaviours. These behaviours were perceived as efforts to change one's physical body or appearance (e.g. diet and exercise, appearance enhancement efforts) or coping mechanisms for body dissatisfaction (e.g. emotional eating).

In summary, body dissatisfaction was described as directly motivating and inhibiting behaviours related to reducing dissatisfaction and enhancing appearance.

**Affective outcomes.** Participants discussed the affective outcomes of body dissatisfaction in terms of positive and negative emotions.

Positive body-related emotions were related to physical aspects of each participant's body she liked or was satisfied with. Nonetheless, these positive attributes were often described with a sense of trepidation: *"I like my toes, I use to like my toes, I use to try to find ways to tell myself that I like different parts of my body... telling myself and feeling positive about my face"* (Fiona). Positive body-related emotions were described more vaguely, and with greater difficulty by participants, compared to body dissatisfaction. Furthermore, positive body-related emotions were more often a result of overall satisfaction with life rather than simply dependent on satisfaction with one's physical body. For example, Helen attributed her current body satisfaction to: *"a combination of a whole bunch of stuff because I love my job, I love my family, I love my new husband. So I think it's just being in that whole big realm of niceness and greatness right now."* Claire and Helen perceived being happy with their family situations and positions in life as fostering greater body satisfaction. Fiona also described feeling like a good person and inner-beauty as influencing increased body satisfaction at different times in her life.

While differing on the specific positive physical attributes, most participants reported an attractive appearance and periods of time where they

achieved their ideal weight as encompassing body satisfaction and subsequent positive emotions. The women attributed these moments of body satisfaction to younger, more attractive, thinner selves. These periods of body satisfaction occurred in adolescence (n=2; Betty and Claire), young adulthood (n=3; Dee, Eleanor, and Fiona), mid-adulthood (n=1; Ana), and currently (Helen). For example, Dee perceived past body satisfaction as directly related to her successful weight loss and maintenance during her 20s and 30s: *“you are sort of immersed in it and think oh I’m glad I achieved this and I’m feeling good about myself and people are noticing it and umm who doesn’t like that?”* Differing from all other participants, Helen described herself as currently experiencing her greatest body satisfaction. When asked to identify a time when she was most satisfied with her body, Helen answered:

*I am more comfortable with who I am and where I am at- right now. So I’m gonna probably say now. I guess it’s just the freedom of knowing, you know what? Life is behind me. Look at what I’ve done, and look at what I have to look forward to.*

In summary positive body related emotions were quite difficult for all participants to describe, explain and remember, although each woman could describe a certain time or specific attribute that they related to the concept of decreased body dissatisfaction.

Body dissatisfaction was perceived to influence negative feelings regarding the participants’ lives in general. For example, Ana stated that body dissatisfaction has had a *“big impact on me because I think its made me feel not as confident. Because it’s the very first thing that I think about when I think about myself.”* Likewise Betty stated *“its (body dissatisfaction) been a big influence because it directly affects your self-esteem.”* At age 60, Dee described a lifetime of body dissatisfaction leading to negative affect: *“I’ve always, always struggled, I’m the heaviest I’ve been ever. And it’s always an issue.”* Dee also described regret related to the importance she attributed to body dissatisfaction: *“I think it’s played too much of a role actually...I think I’ve wasted too much time on body image and having said that I don’t think it’s changed.”* Fiona described her

inability to lose weight and conquer her body dissatisfaction as a: *“great regret in my life that I haven’t been able to do it.”*

All participants described negative feelings associated with body dissatisfaction. These feelings were described by participants as: sadness, depression, disappointment, frustration, anger, embarrassment, humiliation, self-consciousness, fear, regret, discomfort, discouragement, desperation, and defeat. For example, Fiona described body dissatisfaction experiences: *“Makes you sad, you know? It makes you, it’s quite disappointing...disappointed about my feelings about my weight”*, she also described negative affect related to behaviours: *“I’m ashamed of some of the quantities of food that I’ve eaten in my life.”* Claire described her current body image feelings related to her weight: *“the weight is gradually going up. And you’re thinking I’m really trying here not to let that happen. And so you get discouraged about it, about yourself.”*

In summary, positive and negative affective outcomes of persistent body dissatisfaction were discussed by participants.

**Social outcomes.** For 4 women (Ana, Claire, Fiona and Helen), body dissatisfaction resulted in feelings of not belonging in one’s social environment. Fiona explained *“as a woman in my age group, I understand that I am not a typical woman ... I’m very aware that I am not part of the gang, part of what other people look like.”* Ana and Fiona both felt their overweight led to not feeling like *“a functioning person in society”* (Ana). Claire described her childhood as *“growing up feeling like the odd ball, or a bit of a misfit”* and feeling like an outsider because of her thinness and her above average height. Helen grew up in a family of mostly overweight individuals, as a healthy weight child Helen felt ostracized for not being overweight: *“I never really felt as welcomed...I never really felt like I was a part of the group because I wasn’t like them.”* Negative body image was therefore described as influencing feelings of not belonging in one’s social environment.

Body image was also seen as impacting all areas of some women’s (n=3, Dee, Eleanor, Fiona) social lives: *“if I had to go on a business trip with my husband my number one focus was okay how much do I weigh? And how much do*

*I have to lose before the trip? That was the whole thing.*” (Dee). Similarly, Eleanor stated *“with the wedding coming up I want to be thinner.”* Fiona described how her body image has caused her to struggle with maintaining social functioning: *“I make myself do social things, it is something that I do, I force myself to go in public, to socialize with friends, and to go to work everyday, and interact with other people.”* The participants described work, social events, and everyday social activities as impacted by body dissatisfaction.

Social outcomes of body dissatisfaction encompassed feelings of not belonging in one’s social environment. Body dissatisfaction was also described as impacting the women’s social lives, including desires to lose weight or enhance appearance for social events.

In summary, body dissatisfaction outcomes were perceived to involve cognitive, behavioural, affective and social consequences. The participants described these outcomes as persistent across the life span and discussed their impact on multiple areas of their lives.

### **Discussion**

All participants reported body dissatisfaction as prevalent and persistent across their lives. Weight, appearance, social comparison and perception of significant others’ expectations were identified as personal body dissatisfaction triggers across all of the women’s lives. Body dissatisfaction was perceived as resulting in cognitive, behavioural, affective, and social outcomes.

The lingering perceptions and effects of body dissatisfaction among middle aged and older women have been identified (Gosselink et al., 2008; Grippo & Hill, 2008; Mangweth-Matzek et al., 2006; McLaren & Kuh, 2004; Siegel, 2010; Tiggemann, 2004; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). For example, body dissatisfaction has been reported to be stable across young, middle, and older adulthood (Grippo & Hill, 2008; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). Siegel (2010) proposed body weight dissatisfaction to be pervasive across the life span while concluding that women between the ages of 22 and 65 years did not differ significantly in body weight dissatisfaction. As it relates more to aging, Gosselink et al. (2008) found pressure to attain standards of beauty were present in women ranging from 17 to 91 years

of age. The participants in the present study described the lingering effects of body dissatisfaction as influencing their sense of self worth.

Body dissatisfaction was described almost exclusively in terms of one's weight and physical changes associated with aging. Similar to existing research (Hurd, 2000; Kozar & Damhorst, 2009), most participants described weight as their greatest appearance concern. Overall weight, and stomach and lower torso fat and shape were described as key areas of weight dissatisfaction in the current study, and reflect common areas of dissatisfaction among women over 30 years of age (Kozar & Damhorst, 2009). For the participants in the current study, dissatisfaction with weight began in childhood and continued across the life span. The participants were either dissatisfied with their current weight or they feared gaining weight and expressed a strong desire to maintain their weight.

All participants described an attractive appearance as important in youth and suggested that appearance was a continued and consistent concern with age. Participants in this study described a concern with an aging appearance to include wrinkles, graying hair, sagging skin and cellulite. These findings are similar to those found by Giesen (1989) who identified facial contour changes, gray hair, and wrinkles to be associated with body dissatisfaction among older women. This stability of appearance importance and body dissatisfaction across the life span has been described in other research (Johnston et al., 2004; Lewis & Cachelin, 2001). However, these findings are conflicting with research reporting appearance importance to decrease with age often resulting in improved body dissatisfaction (Feingold & Mazzella, 1998; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). Similarly Reboussin (2000) suggests that older adults may value body function rather than body appearance, and that in a woman's mid 50's body related attitudes tend to improve. Johnston et al. (2004) suggest that these conflicting findings may be due to studies often grouping women into one of two categories: "older" or "younger". The authors further explain that body image research must "question age in itself as an explanatory variable" (p.405) because "each woman's experience is different and not readily predictable" (p.407). Assuming that body dissatisfaction across the life span occurs according to age may result in the failure to describe



the experiences of women. This is because it is possible for women's body-related experiences within an age group to be complex, varied and contradictory (Johnston et al., 2004). The qualitative nature of this study permitted these women to describe themselves in-depth and on a variety of levels without having to be categorized by age. Rather they could express themselves and describe their lifelong body dissatisfaction experiences from their perspectives.

All participants in this study described comparison to others as triggers of body dissatisfaction. As proposed by the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), when comparisons involve others who the individual perceives as socially superior this is termed an upward comparison and may result in increased negative affect (Bessenoff, 2006). A downward comparison involves comparison to those one deems inferior in a certain regard resulting in increased positive affect and sense of self-worth (Bessenoff, 2006). The participants described mainly upward comparisons leading to the predicted negative affective outcomes (Stormer & Thompson, 1996; Tiggemann & Polivy, 2010). Furthermore, and consistent with the current findings, Kozar and Damhorst (2009) found that women age 30-80 years who reported a greater degree of upward social comparison also reported greater body dissatisfaction.

Although the women in this study perceived social comparison to be a major body dissatisfaction trigger across their life span, the sources of this comparison differed throughout specific developmental periods. The participants described female media ideals as sources of comparison in youth but did not mention them as a source of comparison beyond young adulthood. For example, many of the participants mentioned the influence of Twiggy in the 1960s and 1970s as influential to their perception of an ultra-thin ideal. On the other hand, comparison in older years was identified towards other women in society (both known and strangers). Bessenoff and Del Priore (2007) proposed that comparison toward women in the media decreased because of a lack of similar available comparisons with age. As women age there are fewer same-age comparisons available in the media (Bessenoff & Del Priore, 2007; Kozar & Damhorst, 2009). This may

explain why the participants reported current upward comparisons to women with whom they interact rather than in the media.

In the current study, the most influential significant others were described as parents, peers and romantic partners. Similar to previous research (Ata et al., 2007; Markey, et al., 2002) parents were identified as influential to the participants' development of body image at a young age. However, direct parental influence was described as less pervasive as the years continued, and virtually non-existent beyond adolescence. A history of perceived negative familial influence has been associated with body dissatisfaction among adult women (Pole, Crowther, & Schell, 2004). More research regarding the impact of family on a woman's body image beyond adolescence is needed.

Male peers were also identified as both positive and negative significant triggers of body dissatisfaction in adolescence. Positive attention and popularity with the opposite sex led to decreased body dissatisfaction among the participants. A lack of attention from the opposite sex was also described as leading to body dissatisfaction. This is similar to previous research which found adolescent girls' perceived popularity with male peers predicted body dissatisfaction (McCabe, Ricciardelli, & Finemore, 2002).

One participant also described a life time of teasing and stigmatization because of overweight. Previous research identifies teasing as directly related to body dissatisfaction (Ata et al., 2007; Eisenberg et al., 2006; Eisenberg, et al., 2003; Menzel et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 1999). Research demonstrates that people are treated differently based on their appearance and body shape, with those considered less attractive at increased risk of being a victim of teasing (Rosenblum & Lewis, 1999). This teasing is usually identified in youth but may have a continued affect on one's body dissatisfaction into adulthood (Heinberg, 1996).

Taken together, family members and male peers were strong triggers of body dissatisfaction that developed in youth and was maintained throughout adulthood. Program strategies and interventions that focus on fostering positive social

experiences in youth are essential to limiting the negative influences that may result in lifelong body image struggles.

Female friends were identified as a strong positive influence on body image across the life span. The women identified female friends as an important source of social support, specifically emotional support. Emotional support is defined as a functional aspect of social support that provides love, caring and empathy (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991). The women identified relationships with other women as positively influencing their body image through sharing personal experiences with body dissatisfaction. The women also perceived informational support as improving their body image. Consistent with previous research (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991), informational support was described as the provision of resources and education related to healthy eating, exercise, weight loss and body image. Previous research has found both informational and emotional support benefited women through connection with others of similar experience and through the sharing of information related to these experiences (McDonough, Sabiston, & Crocker, 2007; Sabiston, McDonough, Sedgwick, & Crocker, 2009). Through informational and emotional support, most women felt social support from other women encouraged positive affect regarding their bodies.

In adulthood the romantic partner was described as influencing the participants' body dissatisfaction. The influence was manifested through direct comments made regarding the participants' physical body as well as comments regarding the participants' weight and/or appearance related behaviours. Participants also described romantic partners' negative behaviour and/or comments towards them that they perceived questioned their self-worth indirectly and therefore also their body image. Paquette and Raine (2004) found women's perceptions of their romantic partner's values and interpretation of their comments regarding the women's bodies influenced body image. Similarly, McKinely (1999) found that partner approval was positively related to body-esteem among women aged 38-58 years. McKinely (1999) further indicated that women who have a disapproving partner and whose bodies do not reflect

society's ideals may be at greater risk of body dissatisfaction. Although romantic partners may influence a woman's body dissatisfaction both directly and indirectly little research investigates this influence in detail. Therefore as romantic partners appear to influence women's body dissatisfaction it is important to further investigate this influence.

All the women in this study described periods in their lives where diet and exercise were influenced by body dissatisfaction. All participants described dieting across their life spans and some (n=3, Ana, Dee, Fiona) participants described emotional eating and overeating. Previous research has found dieting (Allaz, Bernstein, Rouget, Archinard, & Morabia, 1998; Millstein et al., 2008), restrained eating (Paa & Larson, 1998) and disordered eating (Hetherington & Burnett, 1994; Stokes & Frederick-Recascino, 2003) to be present in women of this age group. The women also described healthy diet and exercise behaviours used to lose or maintain weight as well as lower body dissatisfaction. Eating and exercise have both been identified as correlates of body image (Campbell & Hausenblas, 2009; Cash, Jakatdar, & Flemming Williams, 2004). Similarly, McCauley, Blissmer, Katula and Mihalko (2000) found exercise improved perceived physical appearance among older adults. Therefore, exercise and healthy eating are important for the reduction of body dissatisfaction among older adult women.

The participants in this study described avoiding social situations because of body dissatisfaction. Social physique anxiety is a subtype of social anxiety that is a result of the perceived possibility or presence of physical evaluation (Hart, Leary, & Rejeski, 1989). Stress associated with the perceived negative physical evaluation causes individuals to avoid situations where they feel this evaluation may ensue (Hagggar et al., 2010). Some participants specifically described avoiding physical activity and sports during adolescence because of their body dissatisfaction. Sabiston et al. (2007) identified behaviour avoidance as one of 10 coping mechanisms in response to social physique anxiety among adolescents. Only one participant in this study described avoiding social situations because of body dissatisfaction beyond adolescence. Interestingly this was the same

participant who described a lifetime of stigmatization and teasing associated with body dissatisfaction. As physical activity results in both physical and psychological benefits, exercise avoidance is detrimental to one's overall wellbeing. Also, as social support has been shown to benefit one's body image (Bearman, Presnell, Martinez, & Stice, 2006; Stice & Whitenton, 2002), and social interaction with those of similar experiences has been found to foster a more positive self-image among women (Sabiston et al., 2009) those who avoid social situations may miss out on the possibility of encountering this support and decreased body dissatisfaction.

Although this study provides insight into a lifetime of body image dissatisfaction, there are some limitations. All participants were Caucasian and of higher SES, the majority of the participants were currently married and had experienced motherhood. Furthermore, most of the women had experienced divorce ( $n=6$ ). Lastly, the participants were women who volunteered to participate and were therefore comfortable discussing the sensitive issue of body image. They were also recruited based on their own self-identification as a lifelong body image struggler. Other women of this general population may not identify with body dissatisfaction or may not be as comfortable discussing these issues and would perhaps offer other factors that influence their body images.

This study contributes to qualitative research regarding female perceptions related to body dissatisfaction among women aged 50-65 years. This study provides a unique contribution to body image literature as it describes body dissatisfaction triggers and outcomes from the perspective of women who have a lifetime of experience with the phenomenon. Body dissatisfaction was described by the women as mostly associated with appearance and weight concerns. Body dissatisfaction was perceived as triggered by significant others and social comparison at all ages across a woman's life. These findings indicate one's perception of appearance and weight is important to women and influential to body dissatisfaction at every age of a woman's life. A lifetime of body dissatisfaction is perceived to lead to negative emotions by this population. To conclude with a quote from one of the participants who emphasized the continued

existence of body dissatisfaction beyond youth, something that she once, like many others today, thought didn't exist:

*I remember when I was – let's say 18 or 20 and I use to look at people in their 40s and they all seemed to be kind of out of shape and flabby and I use to worry about that, I use to think well hmm I don't wanna get like that. But then I thought to myself they all seem to look the same way so I guess people don't care about that anymore. How wrong I was! Because yes you grow older and your body does change, you do still care. You feel, you do still care about how you look and how you feel in your body. We tend to take a heck of a lot for granted when your body is young and fit and you think you look good- you look good. And Mother Nature is a real you know...she kind of gets in there and things start to happen. (Claire)*

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## Tables

Table 1

*Participant Profiles*

Participant		ANA	BETTY	CLAIRE	DEE	ELEANOR	FIONA	HELEN
Age		52	59	54	60	55	53	54
Current Weight (lbs)		214	not disclosed	195	180	139	not disclosed	124
Height (in)		64	65	68.5	66.75	62	63	64
Current BMI		36.7	NA	29.2	28.4	25.4	NA	21.3
Highest weight	Weight (lbs)	214	155	197	180	146	284	140
	Age (yrs)	52	13	53	60	47	25	27
Lowest weight	Weight (lbs)	155	130	115	115	103	141	117
	Age (yrs)	41	34	17	20	21	32	31 & 48
Ethnicity		White/ Caucasian	White/ Caucasian Italian	White/ Caucasian	White/ Caucasian Polish	White/ Caucasian Jewish	White/ Caucasian	White/ Caucasian
Income		200,000+	200,000+	75,000 - 99,999	25,000–49,999	not disclosed	100,000 – 124,000	75,000-99,999
Marital status		Married (2 <sup>nd</sup> marriage)	Married (2 <sup>nd</sup> marriage)	Married	Divorced	Married	Married	Married (2 <sup>nd</sup> marriage)
Children		2 children 2 step-children	1	2	1	3	0	2 children 2 step-children
Body dislikes		<b>1. weight</b>  “I am heavier than I have ever been”	<b>1. weight</b>  <b>2. changes associated with aging (cellulite, loose and sagging body parts)</b>  “My biggest challenge over my lifetime has been the buttock and thigh area”	<b>1. height (past)</b> “I hated being tall”  <b>2. underweight (past)</b> “I was horribly skinny”  <b>3. weight</b>  “It’s not just one area of my body Its throughout-just being heavy.”  “of course the stomach area is always... the muffin top thing”	<b>1. weight</b>  “I’ve always, always struggled, I’m the heaviest I’ve been ever. And it’s always an issue”  “I was a rolie, polie, little piglet and that’s when my problem started. At 10.”	<b>1. hair</b> <b>2. chest size (too large)</b> <b>3. weight</b> <b>4. aging</b>  “I was always worried about my hair”	<b>1. weight</b>  “I don’t like my body”  “My body image has been negative through my life.”  “I have never felt...good in my skin.”	<b>1. aging</b> “Aging in general, absolutely. I know when the gray hair comes in and then you know the wrinkles start and you’re realizing hey I am not as youthful as I use to look”

Body Ideals	<p><b>1. thin/ lower weight</b></p> <p><b>2. Attractive appearance</b>  <i>"completely different bone structure"</i></p> <p><b>3. height</b>  <i>"I wish I was taller"</i></p>	<p><b>1. thin/ lower weight</b></p> <p><b>2. muscle strength and tone</b>  <i>"I'm re-looking at the areas that need to be strengthened"</i></p>	<p><b>1. maintained weight</b>  <i>"the weight is gradually going up. And you're thinking I'm really trying not to let that happen"</i></p> <p><b>2. Appearance</b>  <i>"you do still care about how you look and how you feel in your body"</i></p>	<p><b>1. thin/ lower weight (past)</b>  <i>"120, 125 (lbs)"</i></p> <p><b>2. maintain weight and style</b>  <i>"I always felt I had to be perfect"</i>  <i>"you still want to maintain your weight, your style as well. Cause that's what its all about, it's a style that you want to achieve that you want to look good, and it doesn't change from when you're 20 or 50 or 60"</i></p>	<p><b>1. Youthful appearance</b>  <i>"I've always felt myself to look younger than I am. And to me that's always been important... I spend a lot of money on face creams and stuff"</i></p> <p><b>2. Extremely low weight/thin</b>  <i>"oh it would be nice to be thinner"</i>  <i>"I've always been envious of those really, really skinny."</i>  <i>"I've always wanted to be a skinny mini"</i></p>	<p><b>1. Beautiful and thin (past)</b>  <i>"one of my deepest desires was to be able to fit into clothing and look beautiful"</i></p> <p><b>2. Thin/lower weight</b>  <i>"It would be great to be an old lady who is skinny"</i></p> <p><b>3. Wise and respected</b>  <i>"I am older now and I have gray hair. I have allowed my hair to stay natural...I am taken very seriously (at work) because I'm the voice of reason and experience. And so in that way I have come to a space where I don't feel the pressure to be sort of young and beautiful."</i></p>	<p><b>1. Youthful appearance</b>  <i>"I try to pretend or think that I'd like to still look like I'm in my 20s but I'm not"</i></p> <p><b>2. Maintained weight</b>  <i>"you always want to maintain, remember what I looked like when I was in my 20"</i></p>
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Table 2

*Participant Themes*

Participant Themes		Ana	Betty	Claire	Dee	Eleanor	Fiona	Helen
Body image at every age		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dissatisfaction with weight		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Desire to maintain weight				✓	✓			✓
Family history of being overweight			✓				✓	✓
Appearance importance		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Acceptance with age				✓	✓			
Fear of physical changes associated with aging				✓		✓		✓
Desire to maintain youth				✓		✓		✓
Desire to maintain style					✓			
Significant others as body image triggers		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Changing ideals to focus more on health while remaining dissatisfied with appearance and /or weight			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Health- appearance relationship: appearance importance dependent on health			✓					
Feelings of not belonging in one's social environment (outsider)				✓			✓	✓
Importance of Exercise		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Experience with dieting or monitoring food intake		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teasing and Stigmatization							✓	
Importance of control in maintaining weight and weight related behaviours		✓			✓			
Female ideals in media	Twiggy	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Farrah Fawcett			✓				

**APPENDICES****Appendix A***Telephone Screening Questionnaire*

Department of Kinesiology and Physical  
Education  
Health Behaviour and Emotion Lab  
475 Pine Avenue West  
Montreal, Quebec  
H2W 1S4  
P: 514.398.4184

**A Lifelong Struggle with Body Image Dissatisfaction among Women****Telephone Screening Questions**

**Researcher:** Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study.

This study is focusing on women's experiences with lifelong body image struggles and factors that influence these experiences (such as weight related issues, culture and media, and significant other influence- family, peers, romantic partners). The study involves 2 one-on-one interviews which will discuss these topics.

There are certain criteria that must be met for participation. Potential participants must not have a history, past or present, of any psychological disorder/illness and must have never been diagnosed with a mental or psychological disorder/illness.

To ensure that your participation is appropriate I would like to ask you a few Yes/No questions. You are asked to simply reply yes or no, no explanation or elaboration is required for any of the questions. Is that ok? If you need me to clarify feel free to interrupt me at any time.

1. First, are you between the ages of 50 – 65 years?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. Has a doctor ever diagnosed you with a physical illness or disability ?

☐ No, (continue to next question)

☐ Yes, (continue to end section)

3. Has a doctor ever diagnosed you with a mental and/or psychological health illness or disorder?

☐ No, (continue to next question)

☐ Yes, (continue to END section)

4. Have you ever been prescribed medications for psychological or mental health problems?

☐ No, (continue to next section).

☐ Yes, (continue to END question).

5. Just a reminder that once again this is a Yes/No question, so please reply with a *yes* or *no* answer. Have you experienced any physical/emotional/verbal and/or sexual abuse as a child or adult?

☐ No, (continue to next section).

☐ Yes, (continue to END question).

**Participant Answer : Yes**

I am sorry to inform you that we can not accept you as a participant. This is because I am a student researcher who is not qualified to conduct an interview of this nature with participants who are at any increased risk of distress due to previous experiences with abuse or illness. Although you do not qualify for this study I would like to thank you for your interest, your time is very much appreciated. If you would like further information regarding the participation requirements I would be happy to put you in contact with my supervisor who can answer any further questions you may have **END**.

**Participant Answer: No**

Since you have not identified with the previously asked questions, you meet the criteria to participate in this study. I have a consent form with further information on the study, as well as a questionnaire that asks you some background information. I would like to inform you, that if you decide to participate, your name will remain confidential and will never be revealed, all information will be kept under a pseudo-name and therefore you will remain anonymous. If you are still interested I would like to send this information to you and set up a first interview.

**Participant Answer: yes still interested**

Could you please provide me with your address or email address so that I can send you the information?

If you would rather fill these forms out at the first interview that is also fine.  
Do you have any questions or concerns?

Thank you for your time and I look forward to meeting you.

## Appendix B

### *Informed Consent*



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### **A Lifelong Struggle with Body Image Dissatisfaction among Women**

### **CONSENT FORM**

**Researcher: Kara Egelton, Master's Student**

**Contact Information: 514.550.4654; [kara.egelton@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:kara.egelton@mail.mcgill.ca)**

**Supervisor: Dr. Catherine Sabiston**

**Contact Information: 514.398.4184 x 00890; [catherine.sabiston@mcgill.ca](mailto:catherine.sabiston@mcgill.ca)**

#### **Background**

In spite of the well-known and prevalent body image concerns that many women experience, little is known about women who struggle with body image beyond adolescence. The results of this study will provide information regarding women's lifelong experience with body image and the factors that influence these long term struggles. This study may contribute to a growing body of knowledge on body image and provide a basis for future research to inform and aid women of all ages who suffer from body image struggles. This study is part of a Master's thesis that is underway at McGill University.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to describe and understand women's long-term experiences with body image concerns. The factors that influence body image will be discussed, and may include weight history, cultural expectations, and significant others (parents, siblings, romantic partners and friends).

#### **What is involved in participating**

Your participation in the study will involve 3 one-on-one interviews. The first interview will be approximately 60 to 120 minutes, the second and third follow up interviews will be 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews will be conducted at your convenience in a location where you feel comfortable. Questions asked will be related to your experiences with body image concerns, and factors which have influenced your body related struggles. You will also be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, in order to obtain information regarding your current

weight and height, age, and other relevant sociodemographic information such as ethnicity, marital status/relationship status, and number of children.

**Benefits and Risks to Participants**

There are no foreseeable benefits or risks associated with your involvement in this study.

**Confidentiality**

Information collected in the interviews will be used for research purposes only. The identity of individual participants will not be revealed at any time. The information obtained from your participation will be used in the preparation of academic research, and as partial fulfilment of a Master's thesis including publication of a manuscript/journal article. This information will also be presented at academic conferences. The researcher conducting the interviews will store your data and information under a pseudo-name, therefore you are ensured confidentiality and your name will never be revealed. The transcripts/data and related information will be stored under password protection. The raw data will only be available to members of Dr. Sabiston's research team and Dr. Sabiston will review all data. Upon completion of the study, Dr. Sabiston will keep all data records under password protection, and all paper transcripts and mp3 files locked in a cabinet for five years after which she will destroy them as outlined in the McGill guidelines.

No persons other than the members of the research team will have access to the interview transcripts, audio- tapes, or demographic questionnaires. This information will be stored under password protection for a minimum of five years as required by McGill University. After this time, the academic supervisor Dr. Catherine Sabiston will destroy all study documents.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate in this study and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time with absolutely no penalty. You may refuse to respond to any item(s) in the interview process. You are not waiving any legal rights by signing this consent form. There are no known conflicts of interest on the part of the researchers or McGill University.

**Contact information**

Questions or concerns regarding treatment or rights of research participants, may be directed to the Research Ethics Officer for Human Subjects by telephone: 514-398-6831

Questions or concerns regarding procedures of this study, may be directed to KaraEgelton by telephone: 514.550.4654; by email: [kara.egelman@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:kara.egelman@mail.mcgill.ca), or

Dr. Catherine Sabiston (thesis supervisor) by telephone: 514.398.4184 ext. 00890 or email: [catherine.sabiston@mcgill.ca](mailto:catherine.sabiston@mcgill.ca)



**Consent to audiotape**

In order to ensure information is accurately and thoroughly transcribed after the interview, the use of an audio recording device is necessary. Do you consent to the use of audio recording during your interviews?

☐ **Yes I consent to my interviews being audio recorded.**

☐ **No I do not consent to my interviews being audio recorded.**

**Consent**

Your signature below signifies that you accept the terms of this study and wish to participate,

**Print name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

*Demographic Questionnaire***McGill**

Department of Kinesiology and Physical  
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Montreal, Quebec  
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**A Lifelong Struggle with Body Image Dissatisfaction among Women****Demographic Questionnaire: Background information**

1. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ years
2. What is your current height in feet and inches? \_\_\_\_\_ Or feet and centimetres? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your current weight in pounds? \_\_\_\_\_ lbs,  
or in kilograms ? \_\_\_\_\_ kg
4. What is the most you have ever weighed (as an adult) in pounds?  
\_\_\_\_\_ lbs, or in kilograms ? \_\_\_\_\_ kg  
What age were you \_\_\_\_\_ years.
5. What is the least you have ever weighed (as an adult) in pounds?  
\_\_\_\_\_ lbs, or in kilograms ? \_\_\_\_\_ kg  
What age were you \_\_\_\_\_ years.
6. As an adult, how much does your weight usually change? Please  
choose one of the following:
  - ☐ Very steady weight (little to no weight gain or losses per year)
  - ☐ Fairly steady adult weight (weight changed by less than 2 lbs per year)
  - ☐ Fairly unstable adult weight (weight changed by 2 to 5 pounds per year)
  - ☐ Very unstable adult weight (weight changed by more than 5 pounds per year)

**7. How do you describe yourself? Please check all that apply.**

- ☐ **White/Caucasian**
- ☐ **Black**
- ☐ **Latin American**
- ☐ **Arabic**
- ☐ **Aboriginal/First Nation**
- ☐ **West Asian (Afghan, Iranian)**
- ☐ **Chinese**
- ☐ **Korean**
- ☐ **Filipino**
- ☐ **Japanese**
- ☐ **Southeast Asian (Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, Vietnamese)**
- ☐ **South Asian (East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan)**
- ☐ **Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_**

**8. What is your marital status? Please check a box.**

- ☐ **Single**
- ☐ **In an exclusive relationship**
- ☐ **Married**
- ☐ **Separated**
- ☐ **Divorced**
- ☐ **Widowed**

**9. Do you have any children?**

- ☐ **No**
- ☐ **Yes**

**If so, how many children? \_\_\_\_\_**

**10. What is your household income?**

- ☐ **Less than \$24, 999**
- ☐ **\$25, 000 - \$49, 999**
- ☐ **\$50, 000 – \$74, 999**
- ☐ **\$75, 000 – \$99, 999**
- ☐ **\$100, 000 – \$124, 999**
- ☐ **\$125, 000 – \$149, 999**
- ☐ **\$150, 000 – \$174, 999**
- ☐ **\$175, 000 – 199, 999**
- ☐ **\$200, 000 and over**

## Appendix D

### *Interview guide*



Department of Kinesiology and Physical  
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### **A Lifelong Struggle with Body Image Dissatisfaction among Women**

#### **Interview Guide**

##### **Pre- Interview:**

Demographic Questionnaire  
Consent form

##### **First Interview:**

Receive questionnaire & consent form  
Introduction and Building a Rapport  
Introductory Questions  
Central Research Questions  
Specific Questions

##### **Introductory Questions:**

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your current lifestyle ?  
Prompt: about your family, your friends, things you like to do/how you spend most of your time?

##### **Central Research Questions:**

1. How do you feel about your body at this point in your life?  
Prompt: what are your thoughts about your body?  
Prompt: How do your thoughts about your body relate to how you feel about your body?
2. Have your feelings about your body changed from when you were a child/adolescent/young adult/  
newlywed/ as a new mother/as your children grew up? (if applicable)  
Prompt: Have there been certain times that your body image/sense of your body has been worse or better than it is today?
  - I. In childhood, what influenced these experiences?
    - i. Who influenced these experiences
  - II. In adolescence, what influenced these experiences?

- i. Who influenced these experiences?
- III. What influenced these experiences when you were in your 20's?
  - i. Who influenced these experiences?
- IV. What influenced these experiences when you were in your 30's?
  - i. Who influenced these experiences?
- V. What influenced these experiences when you were in your 40's?
  - i. Who influenced these experiences?
- VI. What influences/influenced these experiences in your 50's (and 60's if applicable)?
  - i. Who influences/influenced these experiences?

**Specific Questions:**

1. How do you feel about your body shape/weight and appearance?
  - i. What/who influences your feelings/perception of your body?
2. Can you tell me about a time(s) when you felt particularly good about your body?
  - i. Now can you tell me about a time(s) when you felt particularly negative or bad about your body?
  - ii. What influenced these thoughts/feelings?
  - iii. Who influenced these thoughts/feelings?
3. How has culture or society affected your body image?  
Prompt: How has it influenced your thoughts or feelings regarding your body?
4. What has body image meant to your life?  
Prompt: How has it influenced your life? What role does it play?
  - i. Has it stopped you from doing things?
  - ii. Has it propelled or motivated you to do things?
  - iii. How important is body image to you?
5. Do you have anything you would like to add or clarify?
6. Do you have any questions for me?

**Second Interview:**

Review of first interview transcript

Concluding Questions

**Concluding Questions**

1. Do you believe this description reflects your experience with body image across your lifespan?
2. Do you have anything to add, elaborate on, clarify or modify?

## Appendix E

*Interview Transcripts*Transcript 1: *Ana*

*(Introductory and identifying information removed to ensure confidentiality)*

**how do you feel about your body at this point in your life?**

Oh pretty disappointed...

**Disappointed?**

Ya, ya it's ah certainly not what I would aspire to have. So when I often feel that, that kind of disappointment around, I know that , I know that if I ate better and exercised more that I wouldn't have this body... but... I don't seem to be able to do those things that I know I'm supposed to do. Umm and so ya, like I was looking at my legs and starting to see the veins and stuff like that. Sort of from the neck up its fine but from the neck down is the problem (laughs).

**So you would say your body image struggles are mostly with your body and not your appearance, like your facial appearance, is what your saying?**

Correct. Correct. Yes.

**So thoughts toward your body are mostly disappointment, are there any other ways you would describe it?**

Frustration, anger, umm trying to rationalize as well, look for parts that are probably you know.. well that's not so bad or like I think I'm really fortunate that I don't for my age, don't look THAT old, I don't have a lot of wrinkles or anything like that. But I think a lot of that is genetics too. I would love to be a completely different bone structure and I'm not. So sometimes its sorta like, I don't know why you wish for things that you can't possibly change. But you know, you do, I look at my body and go "gee I wish I was taller, gee I wish that I had slender wrists, gee"...like my best friend she's like her wrists are like this big, and she's very slender, and it's like ugh.. you know? So anyways I often look at my body and think you know, my legs are so stumpy and what not, but anyway.

**Very part specific?**

Ahh ya, I do. And I look at , and I think "gee I wish that I had a flat stomach, gee I wish that, you know, I had a more slender neck, and I wish that I didn't have so

much weight around my chin, and I wish I didn't have... my feet look puffy." Ya I pretty much go through each part going, hmm.. (laughs)

**Would you say these are daily thoughts?**

Ya pretty much, pretty much, everyday. Some parts I notice more than others, so usually my stomach and what not. So I notice that probably more than anything else.

**Okay. Alright so I am going to ask you about different time periods. We've kind of gone over a little bit about right now. If it's hard for you to remember a time period maybe you can remember a specific event, such as adolescence. Just to cover all the spots. So in childhood, can you tell me just exactly what you just did, just your thoughts or feelings as far as you can remember.**

I didn't give it a second thought at all. It's funny because I've umm had a chance, you know, you happen to notice, you look back at photographs or whatever and I use to think of myself as always fat. I've always been fat. And I saw a picture of myself and I thought (I must have been maybe grade 6) I wasn't at all. I was not at all. I was not even overweight not in any stretch of the imagination was I.

**But at that time you thought you were.**

No. I don't think I ever really, not until grade 8 or grade 9. That's when I started to become conscious of the fact that.. I was. Up until that point- never had any, not a thought about weight, never thought of myself as being heavy, never had any issues of being heavy. But when I recollect I think of myself as ALWAYS, and its like okay , no I wasn't always.

**When you look back at the pictures, was there a specific even that you think happened in grade 8 or 9, that triggered it?**

I often reflect on that actually. And I think it was grade 8 going into grade 9 and I've always been a very shy kid and umm I'm not really gregarious, or whatever I'm not at all an athlete, both my younger brother and my younger sister were VERY athletic and my dad would coach them in all kinds of things, I was like the worst athlete EVER, ever. There wouldn't seem to be a sport that I did well. And Umm so I read an awful lot. And I think it was in grade 8 that I discovered harlequin romances and I most have spent the entire summer I hardly left my room and I was eating chocolate and I remember it was, and my mom would you know way back then you would go for physicals and it must have been like 20 or 25 pounds and it was this alarm of "I need to lose weight". It was at that point my parents, like I remember them bribing me that I would get a whole new wardrobe if I could fit into a size 12 and all of those sorts of things and I think it was about grade 8 into grade 9, and then I lost a little bit of weight in grade 10. I

started to hang out with this girl who I think was probably... had bulimia. Anyway she had done, she had lost a lot of weight and she was very conscious of the way she looked and I think there was some kind of umm just hanging out with her, I sort of tried to exercise, I remember that was the first time I had tried yogurt – and that was like grade 10. My age way back then it wasn't a common thing to have those little yogurts and stuff. And I lost a little bit of weight in grade 10, umm, but still didn't date, it wasn't like oh my goodness, all of a sudden you know, you're incredibly popular and everything just falls into place, because you are not fat, and umm that didn't happen.

**And were you expecting it to?**

Ya I think so. I think so. I kinda thought that somehow I would be this incredibly different person.

**If your body, your outside..?**

Ya, ya. That you would just be...and life would be different and all this stuff. And you would all of a sudden be like – not shy anymore. Which you know, in reflection doesn't much sense at all, but I suppose some people do. I know one of my girlfriends her sister did that. And she just her whole personality changed, she became this partier and just was a whole different person. But I didn't (laughs). So that's what I remember. And then I was married for seventeen years and ahh finally decided that it was not.. good. And then my husband left, and I asked him to, and it was just not great. And that's when I lost weight, and that's probably the least amount of weight, and that's when I met my second husband. And umm, and then since then I have gained it all back.. plus more (laughs). And now I am heavier than I have ever been.

**Would you say that when you were young, and you first gained weight ( you said in grade 8 or grade 9) and then you lost it. What would you say influenced the weight change? Both when you gained and lost. Was it, because you felt that you were not athletic? Because you had to find something else?**

I think it was, I think I'm a bit of a romantic and I love reading and I love escaping. And I think, I've thought a lot about this, I think it was that grade 8 girl looking for romance, and having the boyfriend and all that kind of stuff, and I found it in harlequin romances, which oh my goodness, are not real life. (laughs). And I think now how vulnerable you are at 13 and you just think, oh isn't this just oh...it's like fairy tale. I bought into this whole thing, and needless to say, life is not like that (laughs). But it's a great way of escaping and having this little fantasy world, and I remember, like I remember my parents saying "were going to take the bedroom door off" and force me to interact with the family. My mother was like " those are just the stupidest books to be reading, and they are just trash and they are garbage" but I just couldn't get enough of those stupid things.



**Did they ever mention your weight gain, and so they were they concerned? They would say your reading too much and not getting enough activity?**

Yup, yup. And then that's when. I think it was over that summer, I think my body changing as well, like all kinds of things happening all, it was sort of like a perfect storm at that point. So I'm sure my whole body was changing, the hormones, I... instead of I guess, I picked a not very healthy way.. by eating chocolate bars and reading harlequin romances.

**And how did you react to your parents?**

Umm angry, like at one point you know they tried to bribe me with a whole new wardrobe and it was a size 12, umm, embarrassed, humiliated, I was the oldest, nobody else in the family had, well my mother had weight problems too, not my dad, not my brother and not my sister. But, umm and then sort of I guess, I tried to not recognize that there was a problem and tell myself that you know I'm this great person anyways, its what's inside that matters, and all those other things, and I really don't care about having a new wardrobe, and all of those sorts of things.

**Did you feel that you were compared to your sister?**

We fought horribly, we always did, always did. We're closer now. She is three years younger than I am. We don't look alike, we never ..nothing close to the same. I often was responsible for her, when I went out to play with friends I had to bring her with me. We had to share a room until we fought so much my parents gave us our own rooms.

**So it would have been (probably at that age) that your family had the biggest influence?**

Oh absolutely, absolutely. My mom would make home made doughnuts, home made pizza, we had steak on Friday, we roasts every Sunday. She was a stay at home mom and umm cooked and cooked and cooked. Always home, was there, I always had my breakfast, she always made us lunches, she was there when I got home from school, we rarely ate out, rarely ate out.

**So did she try to change the way you ate, or did they mostly just make comments?**

Umm mostly, it was the chocolate and the candy. Because I would babysit and it was my money. So I would spend my money on that.. and so I would sneak it. Or and I remember too, like I said she baked all the time, so she would make up tons of chocolate chip cookies and put them in the freezer and I would even eat them frozen. I would sneak down and I would take a few out of the cookie tin in the

freezer and then that's always still the big joke in my family about how I would eat frozen cookies.

**Oh really, so you would do it in secret but they knew?**

Oh ya, yes yes, so I became a secret eater.

**So there wasn't much influence at school?**

Umm I have friends that I have had actually, we just got together last month, the four of us, and I knew one of them all the way through high school, the other two I met in grade school, since grade 6, and my one friend has also always had issues with weight and her mom was really brutal with her, and umm she had just lost 85 pounds and she since gained, like she lost in 8 months, and she even had the whole tummy tuck...everything, everything, and I saw her again, as I said, it must have been May, she was here in May and she had gained a chunk of it back already. And I just think man you have lost 85 pounds, and she still didn't make her skinny. But ya, that's A LOT to lose, and to go through the pain of a tummy tuck and everything, like that's a major surgery, so but anyways my other two friends were always and still are, the four of us got together, and the two of us were heavy and I am by far the heaviest of the four of us. My girlfriend took pictures. I have a picture of the four of us together maybe 18 or 19 years old. And then we re-did exactly the same photo with the same posing and everything now, so were what 40, almost 40 years later, and umm I'm just huge compared to the others, just huge. Actually, my girlfriend, I got the picture and I tucked it away. I didn't even wanna, like, this is so horrible, I didn't even want to have anybody see it. But anyway, the two that never had weight issues still don't have weight issues.

**So in adolescence were they more of an influence on your body image?**

Ya they have, but they never gave me any grief. The one friend, who I am not friends with anymore who I met in grade ten and we were friends for a bit, she had an impact on , that's when I started to do some exercising, id exercise in my room at night, and umm , as I said eating the yogurt, you know, I lost a little bit of weight then with her, but my other friends have always just been my friends,

**So they had more of a positive influence on your body image?**

Ya well, my one girlfriend who was heavier and lost all that weight, we would talk. But it was almost like you know we were together in this sort of thing, somebody who understood you.

**Was it a positive thing then, because she understood you? Or was it more of a feeding each other?**

I think we feed each other's bad habits. I think we made each other feel okay about the fact that we don't eat healthy. Cause it was like ya what counts is were good people, and were great parents, and ya look at all the wonderful things we do, we just happen to be fat.

**Were there any other influences during childhood and adolescence?**

Well my parents got divorced when I was 16. And I didn't have a really close relationship with my father anyways and then when he left I really had not much. He passed away fairly young, at 60. And he'd always had not great health issues, which has always been something that my current husband is not happy with my weight because I have a horrible family history with problems and so on. He's just like look at your family.

He's worried about your health.

Ya hes like I don't even care about that part, it's just not healthy. So, and my daughter has spoken to me about it "you need to take care of yourself, I want you to be around".

**So they are concerned about your health.**

Yes. So I guess my childhood, at 16, and then I went to university and got married at 21 and umm never really lived at home after that. So I really quite happy to be away from home.

**Did you feel differently about your body before and after you got married to your first husband?**

Umm, I was always somewhat conscious of feeling heavy, but when I look at my weight now, compared to what I was then, man if I could be that weight I would be thrilled. So I always, cause I knew that we were gonna have this conversation, so I've been thinking a little bit about it and I always made myself far worse than I ever really was and umm so, married at 21, and I look at my wedding pictures, and I was certainly not this heavy, absolutely not at all, and I know with my first child I gained..maybe 20 pounds.

**And how old were you when you had your first?**

I was 23. And my son was not big, he was like 6 pounds 10 ounces, so he wasn't this horribly big fat baby or anything, but he was healthy and everything was great and I had a really healthy pregnancy. You know a 20 pound weight gain, but I was pretty careful around those things, and I guess maybe I was more active or whatever. Like I was never slim, never, and I was probably a little overweight but, not to the extent I am now.

**So did having your first child really affect the way you felt about your body?**

Umm well that's when I got stretch marks and stuff like that. And it was sort of like, I never thought I had a great body to begin with but it always seems to just be getting worse and worse and worse and worse. And then when I had my second child, I guess I was 27 when I had her, and hers was a more difficult pregnancy, and I ended up where she was induced and she was way way overdue, and she was born, the umbilical cord had already deteriorated, it was, actually I was very fortunate that she made it, really fortunate. So my own pregnancy part it wasn't so bad, it was more traumatic for my daughter, and her skin was so dry, she actually looked like a snake. That's how overdue she was. But umm I had horrible problems with hemorrhoids, horrible, horrible, horrible problems. so I was in a lot of pain near the end. As far as body image, you know I don't remember being obsessive about getting my body back in shape, because I guess I never felt I ever really had a body in shape to begin with. It's not like "oh my God I'm losing my figure" I don't really remember a lot about that except to think that I always, you know felt heavier. But now I think you know if I could fit into the clothes that I could fit into then I'd be thrilled. But all the way through there I always thought I was somewhat heavier and so I guess I felt I never had a body to worry about losing.

**So it just kind of progressed?**

Ya.

**Did you find that anyone influenced the way you felt during your 20's ( your husband , friends, family?)**

Umm, my first husband never, ever complimented me at all on the way that I looked or anything like that. He was never heavy. I remember he would run and do marathons, and what not, umm he never really said anything one way or the other really. He was almost umm, ya, he was never positive or never negative.

**He was absent?**

Ya. Completely absent (laughs)

**Kind of an indirect influence. Did you notice that?**

Ya. I guess so, I never really thought of it like that. But I certainly was very lonely, it was not a very good marriage, I think maybe I didn't want to move back home, I think that's why I got married. But umm it wasn't a great marriage, he never really seen his kids. Ya he wasn't involved. I always wondered why he even bothered getting married as well. So it was more, we didn't really do an awful lot together, not a lot of interaction, he never really said anything one way or the

other. And its not like he would say “ oh come running with me”. He liked to do it by himself. He would never have wanted me to do it with him.

**So he wanted to do his own thing, and wanted you to do your own thing?**

Ya , ya.

**Did your family have much influence, your sister or brother?**

No no, not at all. Because they are younger than I am. And when I got married I moved, and so I had no family out there at all. I did have my in-laws and I had my mother-in-law, and she was lovely, LOVELY person. She was the sweetest person ever and I socialized with her a lot. She was always there, she was my saving grace, for having the babies and stuff, she would come over and she was just wonderful. She was there, she was a nurse, so she was in labor and delivery so she was there when both the kids were born, so she knew all the doctors and everything and it was her first grandson, and her first grandchild period. And for my daughter, it was her first grand-daughter. And she only ever had boys , so she was just over the moon, always supportive, never, ever, ever anything about my weight. And if anybody she was probably the only one who ever complimented me, that would look nice, or go shopping, or buy stuff, very, very supportive.

**So she was positive influence?**

She was a very positive influence actually. Ya very positive.

**So did your mother have much influence during that time period?**

OH she is always negative. She is still always negative (laughs). I call her once a week cause I have to (laughs). She is not a happy person and umm she just went to weight watchers and lost 40 pounds, and has since gained 15 back.

**So do you think her unhappiness with her own body was what was being..**

And I think so, and I think the fear of her weight and she was never heavy. Ive seen her wedding pictures, she was like 98 pounds. She was really tiny, really tiny, and she is not very big boned to begin with. I just remember as a kid, she was always heavy.

**Oh she was, so as a kid did you have a fear of becoming heavy because of your mother, did you feel it was inevitable?**

I think so, I almost thought of it was being inevitable. And my grandmother was very heavy, her mom was always big, she was always overweight, like I would say were very similar in body. Very, very similar. Whereas my sister is more like

my dad, very athletic, much leaner, she was like a tom boy. My brother on the other hand was actually, he never was heavy, but he is now.

**So you kind of felt like it was an inevitable path you were going down?**

Ya.

**So did much change in your thirties, you had your two kids, they were growing up?**

I think what changed, we ate out all the time. My first husband was a shift worker, and I remember I always had the commute, often had the kids, we would eat at swiss chalet, always eating out. Its funny my daughter tells the story now, I always had a very controlling mother, so I decided I would be the opposite, so I decided I would let my kids do their lunches and whatever they would like to have, and my daughter was saying how she would pack herself cold Kentucky fried chicken and French fries and the teacher would comment "oh my God, in grade 1 what are you doing packing your own lunch?" I would buy these lunchables and think they were the coolest things and its funny, my daughter, she would love to, she is not married she is living with somebody, says if she ever has kids she is going to be making their lunches, and its like completely the opposite, you cant win right? SO I think in my thirties, it was a lot of instant meals, meals on the run, those sorts of things, because I had two small kids, I was doing a lot of driving back and forth, I was taking a lot of courses through the summer to upgrade myself, so..but probably just being busy was somehow keeping it in check. I remember joining a fitness thing because I car-pooled in college, I already had my son when I went back for college, and the group that I was with, we joined this little fitness thing, and they were a good influence on me and I would go and exercise, and through my thirties it was just so busy working and having two kids, I just kind of...

**Just focused on the kids? What were your feelings or thoughts about your body?**

Depressing, pretty depressing. But umm, and I guess just ive always been overweight, so like whats new, whats different. And I tried so many different things, I remember I tried Jenny Craig in my thirties, went to Jenny Craig, did that whole thing, that didn't work, umm I tried so many things, so many different things, thousands and thousands of dollars I've tried. But Jenny Craig was probably in my thirties. So every once and a while I would get so disgusted I would say you know "do something!" and I would try that.

**Did you feel anyone was influencing you to do these things?**

Probably more me I guess

**Any friends or co-workers?**

No I'm pretty private about those sorts of things, I never talk about my weight much. I never let people know that I am joining things, like I really have been very private about that kind of stuff. I did do the weight watchers at work, I don't know, two or three years ago. I guess three years ago maybe I did weight watchers at work but it didn't work.

**So basically it would be your own thoughts that would trigger a change in behaviour but your feelings would stay the same?**

Yes, yes.

**Were there any positive influences during this time? Your mother in law still?**

I guess a little bit. She never really gave me a hard time about my weight or anything. She was heavier as well. By the time she passed away she was very tiny and weight was not an issue. But through the earlier parts, she and I went to Mexico together on holiday and ya. I would say my forties, was when I had the big change.

**Why is that?**

Well that's when I got divorced. I started, I had a next door neighbour who didn't have any weight issues but she just wanted to be healthy. And so she convinced me that she and I could start walking, it was actually a great thing to have somebody at 530 or 6 in the morning standing out there in the snow waiting and we would go, we would go and actually it did start a place for me around exercise. And that is probably one thing that I do, do, and do make an attempt to do is the exercise, umm and so she started me off, and then when I moved I kept going on my own and kept the morning run but always always do that. And I met my second husband and we kept going with that.

**So you became active after your divorce?**

Yes.

**And did you find that was a way of coping?**

I felt like it was a whole opportunity to start my life over, I felt in control, and I felt like it was a very positive direction. I felt like I had made a decision for myself, the best decision that I had ever made and I really felt quite empowered.

**And did you feel differently about your body because you exercised?**

Ya, I did, and I lost weight and I could go into regular stores and buy clothes and it didn't have to be the penningtons. I had so much more choice. And when I looked in the mirror. I remember going into Danier and you know, clothes that were size 12, and I could walk into Danier and the clothes fit. I cant remember ever having been able to do that, I cant do it anymore, but it was a nice feeling. And umm my current husband would buy me clothes, and loves to buy me clothes, and umm he says a lot about my weight.

**So when you were dating he would buy you clothes?**

Yes

**And then when you were married?**

A little bit, and then I started to gain weight, and gain weight, and then I actually was very very ill. We were married one year, I ended up having a thrombosis in my brain, and ah, one of those you know you have the worst headache you have ever had, and I ended up going to the doctor, she sent me to the hospital and I was very fortunate they saw the blood clot. Actually it was 9-11, it was exactly, I went in the night before then that morning what they did to get rid of the blood clot was they put an incision in your femoral artery in your groin, and then they put a tube all the way up and around as a drip to bring the clot down, cause the Tylenol or whatever there wasn't enough time, it works to slowly, so unfortunately what happened was infection set in, so I had a staff infection, so I got numerous infections, and then more blood clots, I was in the hospital from just after labor day, September 9<sup>th</sup>, so I was in just before that, and I was in the hospital 'til after thanksgiving, then I was off for the rest of the year because I had a lot of problems.

**Did that affect the way you felt about your body, the whole process of being ill?**

Ya and then I never got back since.

**Because you gained weight or because of the fact that you were ill?**

Well I started to pick up the bad eating habits, I couldn't exercise anymore, I could hardly get up the stairs, it took a toll on my body because I had quite a few blood transfusions, and what not, an it's like I lost the whole rhythm to things, and I would eat when I couldn't exercise, Its like I kind of lost my whole routine. It just kind of went. So, ya.

**So you mentioned your current husband comments on your weight a lot. How does that affect your body image, and how does it make you feel?**

Oh angry, we have had lots of fights, lots of fights.



**So how does he approach the topic, and how do you interpret it?**

He, I can see where he is trying hard not to say something, but you can still see that he would for sure love to say something. He said something to me at lunch today cause I had thought that I would get some more time off which I didn't end up getting cause I ended up working far more than I thought I was going to... (interview interrupted by noise)  
I forget what you asked me.

**Just how he approaches you and how you interpret it.**

I always interpret it negatively, though he thinks he is trying to help, its his way, my husband has weight issues as well and he has lost, actually one of the funny things that attracted me to him, even though I had been losing weight when I met him, was that he is heavier, and I thought "well here is a person who is going to understand". You know? That isn't going to judge my weight, that isn't going to be...umm yet he is probably more... (pause)

**Judgmental?**

than anybody else I know.

**Do you think it is because he is judging himself?**

He gets very frustrated. I think, I think, I do, I wonder, I wonder if because I was healthier, he was hoping that I would pull him along as opposed to it being the other way. But he's lost 85 pounds. He was so heavy that there wasn't a scale that he could stand on to weigh himself, he got, he use to have a very high stress job and travel the world like he was always away, he would be in Saudi and England, and this, and he'd be eating dinner at 10 o'clock at night and um it was horrible, and umm so anyways it was so bad that he finally, and again something so gradual. I see pictures of him a few years ago and I see pictures of him now and its like wow, he really has lost 85 pounds.

**And how does that make you feel about your own body image and how you're doing?**

Envious (laughs). Ya and I mean , he still has a lot to lose, he's by no means like you know 10 or 20 pounds overweight, he is still quite overweight. But um, and he gets angry with me because I'll buy the chips, and ill buy the chocolate, and ill buy the ice cream, and he's like, he got so angry with me, like he said "don't do this, don't do this because I care about losing weight, and I care about this, and I'm going to eat it if it's in the house".

**So are his concerns purely health or also appearance?**

They are both. They're both.

**And for you, is he concerned about just health or appearance?**

Both, both. I mean it was certainly very scary for him how sick I was. You know it was very, it had to be horribly traumatic for him that I was so ill. And I mean my family history is pretty bad, as far as health but I mean he loves to buy clothes and stuff like that. I mean it's so funny, he always tempers it like today, umm we had lunch in the food court and I got the French fries, and I got the milk shake, even though I was thinking I was gonna have a protein bar, but then of course he came home early and said "lets go for some lunch" well we only have x amount of time lets go over to the food court. I did take the grilled chicken, but then, and then I didn't eat all the French fries, but he made a comment on "im kinda disappointed you said you were gonna do some healthy eating over the summer and it doesn't seem to be materializing" he said "you know you are looking really pretty, like its really nice you're looking really pretty and you are taking the time to look nice, he said "what happened to that eating healthy?"

**So when he says something like that do you interpret it as him being negative, or do you put the onus on yourself?**

No no he's right. It makes me angry though, and umm you know, it does because part of it is that he should love me no matter what. And you know hes made comments, like we passed this really nice dress shop, and he's made comments like "well one of these days I'll be able to buy you something from there"

**And that makes you feel angry?**

And sad. And kind of you know, it makes you wanna cry. But he thinks he's helping (laughs).

**Is it because it is the person you are romantically with , so you want them to be..**

Ya. Yup.

**So do you find that his comments really influence the way you feel?**

I feel defeatous around it. It doesn't aspire me to be confident and feel successful, if anything I feel so discouraged and I feel like its futile, and I feel not happy (laughs)

**So if you have a day, or a period of time where you feel like you are feeling good about yourself, has there been a time where something he has said has brought your body image down**

Well even just today, because I have been exercising, and I said that to him, I was exercising today, I exercised yesterday, I was at the fitness club on Sunday, and I said but I am doing really well with exercising. And he said “well that’s never been a problem for you, you always do that.”

**So he is concerned with the diet and nutrition?**

Right, right. And I do, you know, well I responded by saying, well you know ( I am very much a control person) and I said, and I cant figure out if it’s the one thing in my life I could control? I think man its raining and it bothers me, its like could I control that its raining? No but it still really bothers me. Whereas you know, if there’s one think I could control it’s what I put in my mouth.

**Do you feel like you can?**

No. not at all. Which is kind of a contradiction in that somebody that is so interested in control, that’s one thing you could control.. and you don’t.

**And do you reciprocate with comments to him when he says things to you?**

No. no, well every once in a while when I get REALLY angry about it, I’ve commented on well you’re only losing weight because of the pills that you take (because he takes these pills that help not absorb the fat) and he’s like well they only work to a certain extent, I eat salads and all that kind of stuff, I couldn’t lose 85 pounds just on these pills, and I am trying and I am making some choices. Like did he chose the chips? No. Did he choose the milk shake? No. (laughs)

**So its kind of like he wants you to do it together?**

Yes, yes. And like I think he is very angry with me, because my bad choices are impacting his weight loss.

**He feels that its sabotage?**

Yes, that’s actually the word he’s used. That I am sabotaging him. Yes.

**How does that make you feel? Angry?**

Yes, And I guess maybe in a certain way he’s right, because I do buy the stuff. And I do have it in the house. I have a lot of control over, I always do the grocery shopping so I have 100% control over the food that’s in the house. So you know, there’s chips because I brought them into the house (laughs)

**Do you find that when you are buying it, that you buy the worst foods when you feel the worst?**

I do sometimes, tend to be more, when I am not feeling great, or when it's like I am going to show you that I am going to do this anyways, its almost like I am going to do it because I can.

**I am going to buy it?**

I am going to buy it and I am going to eat it (laughs) because nobody is going to tell me what to do.

**Do you think his comments are actually encouraging you to do unhealthy things?**

I think so , I think so. I don't think he's helping, he thinks he's helping but I think part of it is that he is so frustrated and he so wishes me to be healthy and he wishes me to look nice, and I know that I would look way nicer if I weighed less. I know I would, and I would feel better about myself and all of those kinds of things and I know that, that is what he wants for me. And its just, he doesn't know how else to explain it, or communicate it, or whatever.

**So what about your children as adults, you mentioned they are concerned about your health, when did that start?**

Umm well, I think my weight has just been getting progressively worse. Umm this is the most that I have ever weighed, ever. And I think partly because I moved from the classroom to an office job, and I'd have to say, and even having a classroom you are limited to when you can eat, and there's not nearly the same amount of food around. Like in the staff room, some staff have more junk than others but lots of times you are so busy you aren't in the staff room, I would rarely eat out lunch, I would always bring my stuff. So I was pretty much I ate what I brought. There wasn't a lot of outside influence. The job that I have now, there's just meetings , after meetings, after meetings, and there's muffins and there's ordering in lunches and there's going to conferences that have buffets, and it's just been 5 years of , and sitting, like I don't have 30 kids that I am running all over the place and doing things, I am sitting at a computer or I am sitting in a meeting or I am sitting in my car driving to a meeting, so it's really, really impactive.

**Was it just your daughter that mentioned it ( your weight) to you ?**

My son hasn't mentioned it to me but he has weight issues himself and he's very unhappy and he's been trying to lose weight but he's not been very successful either, and I would say he put on his weight maybe in his early 20's and he's 29 now. So he remembers, and my daughter saying something about my son had said something to him, she said it must be really hard because he was never a heavy person to begin with, he was always a skinny kid. And so now your you know in your, I guess it must have been 23 when he started to put it on...

**Was it when he was away from home, and in university?**

Ya, well he stayed at home through university but then he moved out umm once he was pretty much finished, and umm its expensive to eat healthy. So he eats a lot of, and he's a horrible cook, horrible, he's a horrible cook. Umm so he eats a lot of carbs and starches and all that kind of stuff. Umm he does not cook well, and he's tried a little bit in the way of exercise but he's pretty overweight. Pretty heavily overweight.

**Do you think there is a family influence?**

Well and he suffers from anxiety, so hes on medication for anxiety. And I think that that's not helped, and that's compounded, he doesn't feel good about himself, he doesn't feel, you know, he's now back at school, and is that the right choice, and all of those sorts of things, so I don't know that he's in the happiest place right now. And I think him not being happy about the way he looks just adds to it all. So my daughter is bulimic and she is very healthy, she is an exercise finatic. She runs marathons, she works out religiously. So a day for my daughter would be: she will have cycled an hour and a half down to the beach, then she'll swim for an hour, and then she'll play two hours worth of beach volleyball and then cycle home.

**So she is very active, how does she have time?**

She is a student, shes just, just last month diagnosed with A.D.D. So and one of the concerns has been around the medication being an appetite suppressant. She has been very good with her weight, she never got hospitalized for her weight or anything like that. Umm she said she started with seld-inducing the vomiting in grade 8. I didn't even know, didn't know.

**Until recently?**

just recently. Maybe 3 years ago, and she's 25. So ya, she'd always been, she never was overweight, like there was one point one summer, and I remember my husband making some, joking, some comment to her, and I think now, "oh my God why would you have said something to her" something like "she's getting a little wide across the beam or something" she was maybe, like the first I've ever seen her having a little bit of weight on, for the most part my daughter has been tiny. But she eats very healthy, my son is even like "oh my God". Like she is the one that will have the tofu, and she always brings her food with her, she's always eating, she always has healthy stuff, she has the rice maker, she goes to the market, they eat fish, they are, both she and her boyfriend are very, they're fit. Like she's in incredible physical shape, like really really really fit. But almost compulsively so.

**So do you think the whole family's lifestyle and habits influenced her?**

Oh absolutely , absolutely. She is almost an extreme reaction to the fast foods and stuff. Like she will not eat that, will NOT. We eat out with her like a lot, she and I will meet for dinners or lunches or things like and she ALWAYS makes very health choices, always. Like she will eat desert, but she'll always have the salad, she usually picks the fish. So its not like it's....like it amazes me sometimes how much she will eat, but then she has just practiced for a marathon or something too. So.

**Do you find that that influences you, with your body image?**

Oh I am so jealous of her. I look and I think there is nobody on the face of the earth that should have a stomach that flat. (laughs). You know? and she's tried to come and do exercises with me and tried to hook me up with personal trainers and those kinds of things. And "mom you know, think about what you are eating, and if you just plan stuff". She tries.

**And do you see it as a positive influence?**

Ya, absolutely. Because I figure for her, its truly from, she just wants me to be healthy.

**Does it affect your body image at ?**

Well I think sometimes that she's embarrassed. Like shes always thinking of getting married, and his mother is very attractive, and she's slim. And like I have these things like "oh my God, I'm sure my daughter doesn't want to be embarrassed that her mother's this HUGE big fat person." That she would like me to look nice as well. SO I think sometimes that I might embarrass her by being overweight.

**And that influences your body image to be more dissatisfied?**

Absolutely. Absolutely.

**And your son?**

Not so much, not so much. He is more worried about his own health, more than he comments on mine.

**Is your daughter a constant influence?**

Not really. Once in a while, and she'll ask if I am still exercising and that kind of stuff but not every time, like we just had lunch on Friday and she's not...no. I mean and we had desert, we shared the desert and that kind of stuff. So...no.

**So your husband is more of a daily influence?**

Absolutely. Yes.

**So basically , what or who influences your body...you've mentioned your husband, are there other things outside of your family that influence your body, things you come into contact with day to day?**

Well my best friend who is very slim, so that affects me. I'm always looking around and comparing myself. I'm standing on a subway platform and think "gee am I the fattest person on this subway?" You know? Waiting for the subway. "am I the fattest person in our department?" which, yes I am. Because a lot of my colleagues are not overweight. I mean nobody is super skinny, I mean there is one person who is, but umm for the most part I would say I am probably the heaviest person out of 25 people.

**So you feel like you are constantly comparing yourself to people around you?**

Oh always, always! Im always! Ya. (laughs)

**I think that's pretty normal for women, so other than your husband, there isn't much pressure from anyone else?**

No...no.

**And your mother when you talk to her she doesn't really say anything anymore?**

Oh she doesn't say anything .. anymore. Lots of implied stuff like.."oh I'm back at weight watchers" sort of thing, but she never says what's on her mind.

**Can you tell me about a time when you felt particularly good about your body?**

Just after my divorce. I think is the best that I've ever felt, and I think that I am disappointed that I let that slide, that I let it go, because I had it and now I don't.

**And what was the reason for feeling good about yourself then?**

Umm it was the exercise, and just the weight itself. To be able to go into a store that's regular, to just be able to buy stuff, to look in the mirror and like what I saw. So and I just think, how did I, if it was so important to me, how did I not sustain that?

**Do you remember when you started to lose the lifestyle?**

I found the adjustment to being married challenging, and three step-children challenging plus I changed jobs where I was working between two schools and I didn't have my own classroom anymore and it was a big year of transition and I found myself starting to gain the weight back even before I got sick, just little bits and it was my old fall back was chocolate, and I would go at lunch time and buy huge chocolate bars and just EAT chocolate.

**And that was in your early 40's just after you got married?**

Yes.

**Did you find your step-children influenced the way you felt about yourself?**

Well its funny because both my step-daughters have weight issues, one was quite heavy when I met her father, and actually both of them were a little chubby. One was in grade 6 maybe, the other 3? So they were pretty young. So anyways, my eldest step-daughter now still has body image stuff, but she's slim, she has lots a lot of her weight but my youngest step daughter even last night there was an argument at the dinner table, she was putting Caesar salad dressing on her sandwich and my step-son said something to her about "you know that's not the best thing" and my husband said something to her. And she said "I live in this body, not you". But It was like a lot of unhealthy choices and I just sat there and thought " oh my God like why are you eating this?" because she is not happy with her body.

**When you see them struggle, how does that influence the way you feel about yourself?**

I do compare myself, and think well at least I don't make those kinds of choices (laughs)

**So you feel a little better?**

Ya, quite honestly , the way I see my step-daughter eat, I'm surprised she's not heavier. And she's not, I don't know, she's broken up from her boyfriend, she's single and not happy about being single. She's in nursing, so again something, very much around health, and so on, I mean she's gonna be a registered nurse so she's surrounded by all that information, but she makes horrible, horrible food choices. And it doesn't help me, because she is the one that will drive over to dairy queen and go buy everybody sundaes. And it's like, we really don't need to do this, but I don't have the will when she says " oh I am gonna go over, you want me to get you anything?" instead of saying "no" it's like "hmm ya.." (laughs)

**Its kind of like you influence each other's habits..**



Ya.

**.. more than how you feel about your body?**

Ya.

**The way you feel about your body is not affected by it.**

Not so much, I certainly, I'm heavier than she is, and I'm conscious of it, I compare and as I said I'm surprised that she's not heavier than she is, but I can certainly see the struggles, and kind of can relate I suppose to some of the ways that she feels. I'm so much more sympathetic to her.

**And do you discuss it with her?**

Umm ya cause she came back from a weekend with her girlfriends, and she talked about how she felt horrible because she had all her friends were "oh my God I ate a potato chip, I ate a potato chip, I'm gonna be so fat!" and she was just like they are insane they are crazy, I don't wanna be like that. And I saw some photos and I thought oh my God I think my daughters thin! Like these girls are ridiculous, ridiculous! Absolutely unbelievable, so they are in their early 20's..insane, obsessed, absolutely obsessed with their bodies.

**So when you said that when you were feeling quite positive about your body, was there anyone that influenced it?**

I think it was all me, it was all me. And its funny because I think in all my series of weight loss efforts, as I said, I did Jenny Craig, I've done weight watchers, I did Herbal Magic, done that too, none of them worked, and so last November my next attempt was...I did the whole counseling thing. So having that personal counselor and work through all that stuff...I've lost zero weight that one, ZERO. And she put together a whole nutrition plan and it's like I just couldn't, just couldn't... get going with it.

**Can you think of a time, when someone was a positive influence?**

No.

**Or has anyone's influence only been negative?**

Yup, if anything the whole counseling only brought it constantly to the fore, but not to positively do something.

**Can you think of a really negative experience with body image?**

Well certainly through my childhood.. like through my teenage years

**With your family?**

And I would say certainly right now, with the stress of my husband commenting and feeling that disappointment. I would say now is extreme.

**When you feel this way now, does it trigger feelings from when you were young?**

Ya I guess, I hadn't really thought about making that connection, like as I said I almost thought that I always had that, but when you think back it hasn't always been the case. You always think about, and you forget about those times...and you always look toward the negative, instead of recognizing the positive.

**So we haven't really talked about culture and society, how has this influenced your body image/feelings?**

Oh I think that I react extremely more than the situation calls for. I remember watching the music videos, I think it was, I forget, anyways it doesn't much matter which female singer it was, but you know, it was like almost pornographic. And I saw my step daughter you know the younger one with the weight issues, and I said that to her, and ya I forget who it was, but she looked like some primitive African doing something or other, and ah its' like it's sad, it's so so sad. All the women who fought for the vote, and who fought for being treated as an equal and this is what were doing? Like this is so so sad, I feel like we've gone back in time. Like terrible, terrible what we've done.

**Are you worried about women or girls that are adolescents or young women?**

Ya, ya!

**Are you worried about yourself?**

It makes me angry and I feel like women are really being taken advantage of and that I mean, I kind of look at my husband who is in banking, and I'm sorry any women who is dressed like that, there is no way that you are going to be treated seriously, no matter how smart you are. It's hard enough to have women being taken that way and not be called emotional and to be respected for your intelligence and you decision making and all those sorts of things. And yet, look at how we dress. Honest to God, you can't have it both ways. And I really, really, really think, young women are harming, like a lot of women who are trying to be taken seriously and it's like "oh my God, like how can you, what do you expect?". It's really unfortunate.

I look at the way that some of them dress, like my step daughter's friends..you know what? That's gonna be on facebook or something somewhere, and I think

“you wouldn’t get a teaching job”. Like I remember my husband and I , I was at a conference and we’re in this bar along the river, and it was lovely, and he said “ I think we need to go” and I said “ why” and he said “ no I don’t think we need to stay here” and I said “no” and of course I’m like “ no ,no no you don’t know what you’re talking about” and they started to get a little bit more lively, and I said “ this is okay” and he said “ no I really think we should go” and sure enough it started with flashing your... and I thought this poor girl... if you’re a teacher, if someone is taking a photograph of you, you’re never will be hired again. Never ever hired again. And all those men...like it was sad, it made me angry. And she was like so being used. Like why are you doing this? Why are YOU doing this?

### **As a woman you are offended**

Yes! Yes! It’s offensive to me. Very offensive. And I mean my husband and I will comment on it, and he says men aren’t gonna be complaining, he said clearly men have absolutely got control.

### **How does that make you feel about your body? Does it make you angry because of women’s movement or personally?**

Well personally, body image wise its almost like I don’t want to be like that. And it’s almost like I’m going to prove I am a feminist by not caring about my body because I am making a statement the other way. Which is not healthy. (laughs) but it’s almost like “ I’m going to show you”. Like I’m not gonna go and be part of that nonsense and in a way my step-daughter came home from that weekend saying “I’m not going to be part of that non-sense either. But my other step-daughter, very much a part of that.

### **Is she the younger or older ?**

Older, she’s 25. The stuff she wears...it’s like how do you really think, like men...and she’s like “ oh I can get my way because men buy me drinks, and men will do this, and men will do that” well ya but they’re not taking you seriously, but she doesn’t seem to care because it costs her no money.

### **Is your husband concerned about his daughter struggling with weight.**

Ya he is more concerned about her because last night at dinner he was like “ why are you doing this, why are you eating like that? I’ts just not healthy.”

### **Are these the same kind of questions he asks you?**

Yup, yup.

**Do you think that culture has influenced your families views about the body, the way your family interacts with food and exercise or just the way everyone feels women should look?**

Yes I think so. My mom is very traditionally in the way women should look, and my sister has always been pretty careful about her weight and I know my mom has made comments around how my sister has never had a weight problem and so on, and I think, you know, I feel like I've let them down by being overweight.

**So they have always encouraged the female stereotype...**

Oh looking nice, oh absolutely. Absolutely.

**Do you find your family now, your immediate family, like your husband, is he concerned with that?**

Oh he is SO traditional. Like he says it's health, and I don't know, maybe it really is, but I think a part of me thinks it's also that. Ya he would love to have a wife who looks nice. So absolutely.

**So that obviously affects the way you feel about your body?**

Oh hugely. Because I know I am disappointing him.

**Does it make you feel defeated mostly?**

Yes, absolutely. Yes.

**In general, how much do you think body image has meant to your life, what role has it played?**

It's made a big impact on me because I think it's made me not feel as confident. Because it's the very first thing that I think about when I think about myself, I don't, for all that I talk about, the feminist part.

**So it's one of the biggest ways you describe yourself?**

Yes, and it does hold me back. And I think gee do I look professional enough? Gee when I am presenting I know that I would look better, you know, if I weighed less. That it would help my presentation, that people would be, like it would just give me more confidence that you know, all these things, would just somehow you know if I....

**The outside changes the inside?**

Ya.

**Is it something you tell yourself?**

I guess I do believe that I would feel more confident if I felt more confidence in my appearance.

**So it has played a major part in your life?**

I would say so , yet at the same point, it hasn't stopped me from doing what I am doing, so in some ways no (laughs)

**So it consumes a lot of your thoughts, feelings and attitudes.**

Yes, absolutely. All the time. ALL The time. I wake up , I go to bed at night thinking about how I ate that day, and I wake up in the morning wondering how I am going to make the day go through.

**Has your body image across your life stopped you from doing things?**

Oh absolutely, absolutely. like when we go away to conferences and stuff like that I would never bring a bathing suit and it's like weather like this, like incredibly sweltering, and I would NEVER, never do stuff like that. Because I am not very athletic I won't do any kind of physical sport sorts of things, I won't risk myself out there doing those things, I just don't feel...

**Is it just sports or any type of exercise?**

Umm I don't know, I don't really do any other stuff. It's not like I join any teams or do any of those competitive things.

**Does it stop you from exercising...**

No.

**In a public place?**

No because I go to the fitness club. I'm a little self conscious in an exercise area, but I still go in the condo and ill go down to the exercise room and theres windows all around. But mostly it's not busy.

**So you feel comfortable?**

Ya it's funny though in the exercise place I never go into the co-ed part. I only ever do the classes.

**So you avoid being around men?**

Oh absolutely, absolutely.

**Do you find being around women more comfortable?**

Yes not nearly as much of a problem

**What you wear is affected?**

I never worry about what I wear it's almost like I go out of my way to look even worse. (laughs)...when I exercise. I haven't spent any money on nice clothes or exercise stuff, or things that match, you know, ratty old t-shirts and crappy pants.

**And that doesn't transfer to other areas of your life?**

No because when I am presenting I do very much try to look very professional, and I know that is one thing that my girlfriend has said, because I've talked to her about my weight or whatever, she goes but you always, always, look really nicely dressed.

And I sometimes think you have to do more so because you have to camouflage the weight and what not, it takes more work to do that than if you can just throw something on and look good.

**Do you think you wouldn't spend as much time on your appearance if you felt better about your body?**

I probably would spend it. I think...maybe even more.

**Has the way you felt about your body propelled you to do things as opposed to stopping you.**

No its probably more stopped me from doing things than really propelled me to do other things. No.

**Other than the weight watchers or Jenny Craig that you mentioned.**

Ya the weight watchers, Jenny Craig, Herbal Magic, counseling. I've done all of those sorts of things.

**So it has influenced more the diet side of things.**

Yes.

**Do you find your body image has interrupted your enjoyment in certain aspects of your life?**

Oh certainly it affects your sex life too. Ya you don't really feel particularly sexy when you're fat.

**Have you always felt like that?**

Ya, ya, I think I'm already more modest to begin with. Im Not particularly daring anyhow. It certainly doesn't inspire you to...and I remember I was watching some talk show, there was the woman who was in Precious, that won the best supporting actress, the mother one, and she is quite a heavy lady, and I remember seeing some talk show or something and she was wearing this really nice outfit, and she was very positive about the whole thing, and I thought "man! Look at her". It just boggles my mind actually.

**What? That she could feel sexy?**

Ya! Ya. And that was the first time, really, and that was just recently, thinking "gee that's not stopping her is it?" (laughs)

**So you've always thought that because I feel this way it's going to affect my sex life?**

Ya, and so one cancels out the other, like if you're over weight your not going to be sexy.

**Do you find that comments from your husband make you feel that way?**

Well like he will try to be positive around you know, when you smile, or you know, the light in your eyes, or just when you feel, actually today at lunch even he said "you know, when you take the time to make nice, that's gotta in turn make you feel better and happier, and then you are all those sort of things, like a chain reaction." But I don't really believe it. (laughs)

**So even if it's positive you don't really internalize it?**

No. (laughs)

**Does he mention that he notices changes in your comfort in your sex life?**

Yes.

**But he doesn't comment?**

No. well I think he simply said something like "if you felt happier than you would feel happier and you would feel more sexy if you lost the weight".

**Do you feel that you can talk to him about the way you feel about your body?**

Oh we've talked about it. I don't really know if there is much more to say. He just sorta like "then lose weight...if you don't like it...lose weight".

**Do you see him as sympathetic.**

Not really, not really. I think he is more frustrated as well. Like I don't think he can quite understand why I don't deal with it. Because he is dealing with his weight issues, and he's like there's no other way than...

**To just take action?**

Ya. Or else obviously you don't want to

**Is that how you would describe his attitude?**

Yes.

**Just frustration ?**

Yes. And I'm like gee, if it was that easy, than there wouldn't be weight Watchers, Jenny Craig and 5 thousand other things for fat people because they would just take care of it. And he is like "yes it is, it's absolutely that simple, if you put your mind to it, and that's something you REALLY want then that's something that will happen"

**So you don't feel like you can really talk to him about it?**

No!

**Not the emotional side of it?**

No.

**Do you feel like your body image is mostly emotional?**

Absolutely. Because I am pretty sure I am an emotional eater.

**I think I have covered all my questions. Is there anything you think is relevant to your body image experience that you think is important?**

No I certainly do find it intriguing, particularly the demographic, the age group that you are looking at, that you know, that I guess really, when I was young it wasn't like bulimia and anorexia, I remember Karen Carpenter kind of in my memories as being one of the first like "oh my God" you know so it wasn't that big prevalent thing, so I never really (until you mentioned it) thought gee do I



have issues with body image so much as have I always had issues with, you know, weight loss, as opposed to really thinking about in quite that way. So I do find it quite interesting that I suppose it's not all of a sudden.. like is it a societal thing? Is it a cultural thing?  
Has it always been there? And you know my age group maybe will give you some information around that. You know?

**DO you think your body image struggle was there before you gained weight?**

I honestly, certainly as I said, until grade 8 or grade 9, I had no awareness at all. And I remember my mom commenting about twiggy, so that as well, and how ridiculously thin, and, but I don't remember like body image per se.

**So it is something that evolved?**

I think so , I think so . I would have to say what I see now in the music videos and the way that girls dress. There's no way that my younger days, at that age, there would ever...EVER. Like I remember the mini skirt but even then, it didn't seem quite the same. There is just something even more than just having a short skirt, you know, like I don't know what it's all about. It's sad. It's really sad, you know? And I just worry about some of these girls closing a lot of doors for a lot of women, not just themselves.

**So would that be your main piece of advice for women who are coming of age?**

That's what say to my step daughters. More so the younger one, the older one she doesn't want to listen and I'm afraid I'll insult her. But the younger one, already I guess because her head is kinda already there around...it's not a good place to be going, and you're going to regret that. I don't know. I don't understand it. I don't understand it. My own daughter is not like that, she doesn't dress, I've never seen her dress quite that ...way.

**Do you think they have had a different influence that has led them to dress the way they do?**

Yes. Yes. I think so. They have a much different influence.

**From their mother?**

Yes. Yes. And I think what's...being excepted and being liked, their mom has had a series of boyfriends. Ya she kinda goes from man to man...

**What things do you think would have helped you over your journey with body image?**

That's a really good question.. what would have worked? Certainly nothing has so far.

**More so for how you feel about yourself..**

The way I feel about it? I guess something that would make you be more accepting and be more positive. I suppose some way of thinking you are positive and happy about things, and being more in that as opposed to negative or disappointment or anger kind of place.

**Do you think it would have been most helpful coming from yourself or someone else? If you really had a very supportive person there that really encouraged positive body image..**

I think so. I think that would of, because I think it's helpful to have that. I think ultimately, because I know in that whole counseling part, I said you know my husband won't exercise with me and then she said "but ya ultimately it has to come from you anyways because you can't always depend, because at some point they are going to be sick, or they are going to move or whatever, and you need to build that within you, you can't always have that as an external thing, you're the one who has the power and the control" but then again, that's still an outside person who is helping you work through those things.

**So she was talking more about behaviours than how you feel about your body?**

Right. So I think it really does, the whole mind set around that positive way of looking at things. That glass half full as opposed to half empty really, and I think maybe if I had more of that when I was younger, then I would have been able to overcome things in a way that wouldn't have had me eating emotionally or feeling badly about myself. I would have had other ways to be able to I guess support things or there were certain triggers, and my reactions. I would have had alternative ways of dealing with things. It seems to be my only way of dealing with it, is often food.

**Do you feel like if you had more supportive parents, you would have had a more positive view of yourself from an early age?**

Yes.

**More involved, and would have encouraged you toward people who were more positive toward your body image?**

I think so and given you the strategies for coping that would have been more affective, as opposed to...like I really don't have a lot of tools you know to be able to deal with those things. And I look around at other people through work or

whatever, and just the way that they , you know, cause life can be challenging and it has problems to it all the time. Like there just not going to go away and so if you come up with other strategies for dealing with things, then it just puts you in a more healthy place. And I think when it comes back to body image as well like ya you can say what counts is what you think, and the kind of person you are, you are kind and you are thoughtful, it doesn't really matter what you look like. Well that's not true either, and that kind of coping isn't really cutting it. Cause that kind of rings hollow as well.

**So are you saying honesty with yourself and having someone who is supportive?**

Yes. I think, that's what I would say. I think certainly building it within yourself and being that strength of, that positive mind set, and then having support around you, particularly at a young enough age where you can learn how to cope and come up with strategies and be happy with yourself. Cause then you've got a strong foundation. So I think maybe not so much at an older age, but at a younger age because it really influences an awful lot how you go forward.

**Do you think it influences the way you expect people to treat you?**

I think so. And experience too. You know the friends that you have, the class that you are in or the teachers that you have. All those sorts, so many things. And I think how sensitive you are just as a person. I mean the same things can happen to different people, and some people their resilience is there, and other people it just shatters them. So you know there are so many things. Right? Cause I talk about breaking that whole cycle of poverty , you know, because that's one of the biggest factors in making a difference. Because otherwise kids who are born into poverty will always stay in poverty. But the resilience too, some kids tend to be more successful, that seems to be one of the things too. Just.. resilient.

**What do you think is important to ask women of your age group about body image?**

I guess maybe even defining body image and what is that mean? And in what context, and what's that kind of ..so when you say the term body image, what comes to mind?

**For you what would that be?**

At first I thought it was just all the physical stuff. So I think body image of, you know, a nice figure and whatever, but then I thought well it goes deeper than that, it goes to your feelings about how you imagine or view yourself. So it's the emotional component as well as the physical part. And that whole package of image, and then I also thought about , it also means what's real and what's perceived. So as another piece of what does that mean? And so because it's

almost like it's what you imagine. And so I was trying to wrestle with that whole thing around how would I define body image? And am I blurring it when I talk about concerns with health and weight and exercise. Are those all part of that or is it simply you know ...what exactly is that? Is it a narrow thing or is it much broader? Those are the things that I would probably be in there.

Transcript 2: *Betty*

*(Introductory and identifying information removed to ensure confidentiality)*

**What is body image to you?**

I think it's the way you perceive yourself physically. It's influenced by a lot of factors, but I think it's the way you see yourself because I see myself very different than other people see me. And that I think is really the crux of the problem with women. When I look in the mirror I look at my imperfections as opposed to the perfect norm that we have today, which I think is a rather unhealthy body image myself. Having come from, you know, I am going to be 60 in December. So I have a fair number of years to compare what people found attractive and what they have find attractive today. But regardless of that I still focus on the areas that have always been my concern and I still do. Even though I have attained what I consider my ideal weight, or there about, within a few pounds, you know? It doesn't really matter, I still...

**It's always been the same things that have bothered you?**

Right, and still do. Because some of those things are... you cant change them. You just can't and as you get older umm things are sagging and loose and whatever, no matter how much you exercise certain things can't change. And I'm not the type of person who would ever turn to not eating because that's just something I like, and it's very cultural for us and social, but I've had to learn how to eat properly over my lifetime compared to the growing up years.

**Perfect. How would you say you feel about your body at this point in your life, presently?**

I think right now I am focusing on getting stronger, because I really felt quite in the last year and a half almost disabled... mildly, disabled. Because I wasn't able to do the things that I normally do and I didn't have the strength. And that part really made me look at my body differently.

**More of a functional body ?**

Yes. Poor function and not even worried so much about the appearance because I literally couldn't do a lot of the things I wanted to do. So now that I am getting over that I'm re-looking at the areas that need to be strengthened but I am also re-looking at those areas that are always a problem you know, for me.

**Interesting. It took a backseat.**

It took a backseat to ill health.

**Health became more interesting because you lost it?**

Yes.

**That's interesting.**

It is interesting because you really had to prioritize what's important. Is it important that I have flabby thighs or that I can't make my bed in the morning? You know that kind of thing, so that all changed for about a year, not quite a year.

**And you feel those thoughts are starting to come back? The appearance thoughts?**

Ya they do a little bit. As soon as you start to feel better you start to forget how valuable the fact that you can function again is. I think still maybe that I'm looking at it a little more realistically, a little more, in a more healthy view. You know?

**And do you feel more positive then?**

I do, and I feel more grateful and more blessed. Lets put it that way. Because It doesn't matter what you look like if you have to lay down every 2 hours because you cant do. Or if you have to ask somebody to lift something for you, or carry your grocery bags, you know what I mean? Those are things that are so fundamental to us. And all of a sudden the rest of it really is not that important at that time. But as we get better, well we start to forget. So there's that, but I think the areas that I've always been concerned with are always going to be the same so I have to decide how I am going to address them. You know? Cause there is always only so much you can do. So the way I am addressing them right now is I am trying to strengthen myself. Like working out twice a week with a trainer and trying to get in some cardio on my own...limited. And stretching basically. That's my approach at the moment.

**Good. Do you feel better about the areas you can't change when you do these things?**

Yes I think that helps me to say look I am doing everything I can and there are just some things you can't change. So it's more of an intellectual approach to it rather than an emotional one. Which I think is very different.

**So you focus on healthy eating and exercise?**

I do try to eat healthy but I have some bad eating habits like a lot of people do. but I do try, I have changed a lot of the way I eat over the last about 15 years. I've changed a lot of my eating habits, definitely through education really.

**Just knowing more?**

Talking to people, doctors, naturopathy, ask chiropractors, Weight Watchers taught me a lot, I think it's one of the best programs out there. I've done other one's, I've done Jenny Craig, Weight Watchers I think is the best. Education, reading, talking to people, learning about food, I think we have more information now than we've ever had out there. A little bit overwhelming but you know.

**It can be.**

But you know, try and change a few fundamental things, and that helps you to maintain you know, weight and things like that.

**I am going to ask you about different time periods in your life so from childhood up until today. So you can think of specific examples or general feelings. So in childhood how would you describe you felt about your body then?**

I can remember, I can tell you exactly when my thinking changed. I was kind of a bit of a bean pole until about 10 or 11, in there, grew very tall, very fast, never an issue of weight that I can ever remember, active kid, umm always taller than all the kids in my class. Then the minute puberty, I got my first period, which was young, in my family it's young, I was not quite 11 and from then on things started to change. I not only felt differently I...noticed my weight changing. So I remember saying to my brother, I wasn't 12 yet, "I need to go on a diet, I'm getting fat". And he'd go (we were the two oldest of the bunch) "I don't think you're fat". I'd go "well look at this" you know my legs or my bum or whatever, like that. And that was the beginning of it. Because puberty came on with a vengeance. And I gained a lot of weight.

**Did you have a positive view of your body before that, or you just didn't think about it?**

Didn't even think about it. Had no trouble getting clothing to fit me, or anything, nothing. There was no talk in my family about weight issues or anything like that.

**So it was a pretty positive environment for how you felt about your body?**

Ya pretty positive.

**And when things started to change, did family members influence how you felt?**

Not until grade 8. I was in the catholic school and I had at that time for grade 7 and 8, at that time the teacher that I had, and I knew I was getting chunky, the teacher I had was a nun and she was the principal of the school I remember and

she was a very strong personality, very strict, and very ... I don't know how to put it.. a little bit un-smiling. A little bit of a, I don't know how to describe it to you, I wanna say ...mean. Had a little bit of a mean streak, a little bit. I remember we were out playing once. And I said I couldn't play baseball that well or something. And she said "you know if you weren't so big, or you weren't so fat maybe you could run a little faster" or something to that effect I cant remember the exact words and that just reinforced what I already thought. And I was literally crushed. That was grade 8. And after that, in my notes, you will notice by grade 8, and the scales, we didn't really have access to really accurate weight. I wanna say I was maybe pushing 150. 145 or 150 pounds I wanna say, that's just a guesstimate. It may be in my head more than it really was. Maybe in my head. But umm because the scales in those days, they weren't very accurate, you weren't really getting on them as much. But I started to think about weight and I think for some reason in my head I think I was that weight and that's at like age 13 or 14.

**Did you notice things from friends or family?**

Clothing spoke to me, the way I looked in clothing. There wasn't a lot of comments about it from other people, that I remember. Put it that way. But the very fact that she brought that out, you know? And maybe she thought she was joking, but it was a negative comment. So from then on. So that's the early teen years.

**And how were your feelings about your body? Self conscious?**

Oh very self-conscious, embarrassed. I always felt , clothes weren't flattering or anything like that. And your whole idea of how you are as a girl at that age is starting to evolve, you're looking at boys.. you know the whole thing. Ya it was a negative experience. Well then I had to go to the next town for high school on a bus everyday. In those days, we lived in northern Ontario, there was no high school in our town. So we got on a bus and went 60 miles to school and 60 miles home everyday. So I had to face a lot of people I didn't know once I got into my classroom and I was really quite terrified. My self-esteem and my body image and all that was really poor... really, really poor. You know? So grade 9 wasn't a whole lot of fun. (laughs)

**So it was mostly just feelings within yourself?**

And what I saw

**And going through typical adolescence?**

Ya. And I don't remember us girls talking a lot about, I did have a best friend that was particularly thin though, so I probably compared myself to her.

**Like an indirect influence?**



Ya, she never said anything to me but you know? And she was the opposite, she was too thin, so there was this contrast, we were sorta like Mutt and Jeff you know? (laughs) so that to me, I could see that I didn't look like her. You know?

**Did you find you compared yourself a lot to other people?**

Yes. All the time.

**And the media?**

We were very isolated with the media, we had poor television reception, poor radio reception, not a regular daily newspaper. Really cut off. I don't know, were talking the early 60s now. So I don't know if there would be a lot in the magazines at that time. Cause if you think of Marilyn Monroe in the 50's as gorgeous as she was, she was no stick. You know? They claim she wore a size 14, did you know that?

No.

Ya. There's a piece of trivia for ya. Ya I read that once and I thought "I can't believe that" and people thought she was voluptuous and gorgeous. So that's how much it's changed in 50 years or so.

**How about your 20s ?**

I'll tell you what happened when I hit high school prior to my 20s. so this grade 9 thing where I held my breath almost the whole year, I think, I hit grade 10 and I thought this just isn't going to do. I was pretty stubborn girl. In those days there were the fad diets, everything was a fad diet. There was your grapefruit diet, your tomato and egg diet, your... you name it. Right? And us girls, various one's of us were trying all these. And because our families were big and our mothers were busy sometimes they didn't always pick up on what we were doing. But I went on the egg and tomato diet. I cant tell you if that was grade 10 or when that was, it was in the early years of high school. The most unhealthy thing you can think of. Just think about that.

**Is that all you eat?**

Mostly, for weeks. I lost a lot of weight, but I think I gave my immune system a real shock because I always seemed to be sick with flu and colds after that. But I lost in that time frame somewhere between grade 8 and 10 ill say, I probably lost 20 pounds, at least. But not in a healthy way. The only healthy thing I did was, my dad would talk about how they did calisthenics in the armed forces, and he had a book and it showed you some exercises. So I would get up early and do maybe 15 minutes of those exercises. So that was the only positive thing. Nobody

knew anything, there was no aerobics, there was no walking, there was no talk about cardio, and you had phys-ed at school and that was it. But we walked a lot in a small town, you had no buses or anything and you walked. Which was good. So anyway, did that, lost this weight, well life started to change, littler clothes, boys are looking at me, couple of boys are asking me out, by the time I'm 16 (my father wouldn't let me go out until I was 16, no way). So life is starting to get, you know, making more friends at school. And I maybe attributed that to the weight loss.

**So you were feeling more positive about yourself?**

Definitely yes. You could even tell my hair do's changed. Started coloring, putting in...well in those days we didn't know what we were doing, peroxide and water, like you know, anyway changed a lot of things and felt better about myself. But that was a bit of an up and down thing through high school.

**The weight?**

Yes. I don't think I gained back all that weight again, but it definitely fluctuated. I did gain weight back and everything it was an ongoing thing.

**Did you find your feelings changed with the weight?**

Yes.

**It was really dependent on that?**

Yes. Unfortunately.

**Is there anything you want to add about your teen years?**

I would say that I didn't come in to my own. I would say confident, or happy about myself as a teenager until about grade 12. And those days we went to grade 13, as you know. My father wouldn't let me stay in the town where I went to high school. My family's Italian and your not staying overnight anywhere. Okay? So I hit grade 12 and I badgered him, I said there are things I wanna do after school and I just cant do it. I couldn't do sports after school or anything. So it hit grade 12 and he said alright you can stay at your friends. Well, social life just blossomed for the next two years. so that was great, had a great time, great friends. I still have those friends today, some of them, a couple of them anyway. So that reinforced, yes I was a likeable person, I could maintain good friendships. I always had friends though, I always had a lot of friends, I love people. And I have been blessed with that. So I had friends, school, academically I always did well. That kind of thing, so really changed by the time I was finishing high school and some of that was way outside the whole body image thing. I was starting to except you know this is who I am, even though I'm carrying too much weight, but

I still can have a very fulfilling life. So the weight was never obese, do you know what I mean, I was overweight but I never reached any obese levels. So that was high school.

**Even when you were feeling more fulfilled did you still have the negative thoughts about your body?**

Yes. I would always compare myself with the girls that had the really trim figures, you know, and that. I would be quite envious of that. Quite envious you know, without telling anybody that, cause you know, who wants to say that? But ya quite envious of those girls, and wondering how is it that they are like that and I'm not? You know?

**Was it that it seemed so easy for them?**

Ya. I never saw them doing exercises or you know watching particularly what they ate, you know that kind of thing.

**So it was a lot of indirect, from comparison, the way you felt.**

Yes. Right.

**What about in your 20's?**

I went into nursing from high school. So I left small town Northern Ontario and came into Toronto. Which was huge. I absolutely loved it and I flourished. I did well and I enjoyed it. I had lots of friends and it was good, but I still remember my nursing uniforms I put them on, and they're like pulling at the domes you know this kind of thing. And I'm going I can't believe this, you know, and I felt quite doughty to be honest. You know? I had this concept in my head that I had to cut my hair short to go into nursing. Nobody told me that I had to do that, but I had this idea. So I went there with short hair and got into my class and saw half the girls had all this long hair and everything. And I thought forget this, I never cut it for the next three years you know? And all of that. So there was this whole thing, where I don't know, I had to conform to certain rules that somehow were mostly in my head apparently. You know?

**Trying to do what you felt you should be doing?**

Ya. What you felt was right but wasn't always flattering for me. You know?

**Because of what was in style or because you thought...**

I did because I thought it was the right thing to do. If you think about it - it was not in style because 1969 was the era of hair. Right? Long hair. Everybody was growing their hair, man I was right on board with that, I never cut it. I had hair

half way down my back by the time I graduated. But you see what I mean the image of my self was contorted somehow. I really don't know why. I think part of it was living in an isolated small community. I didn't have any resources, there wasn't a lot of beauty information or style information. You shopped basically from catalogues and the next town had a few stores. And that was it. So quite isolated in the input that you had, what was fashionable, what was acceptable, you know, what are women doing to make themselves look better? That kind of thing. No, very little health information. I mean we only had a doctor periodically in town, like more or less a transient.

**So there was a lack of information in all areas?**

Yes. Lack of information everywhere.

**Did you find that you, your mom, did you have sisters?**

Oh there was six of us. I had 3 sisters and 2 brothers. I was the oldest girl. There was my brother, then me. So whatever they learned, a lot of it was through me. My mom was pretty sheltered kind of in her life, she had, she always loved people and got a lot of information from people but, and she read a lot but I don't think she read a lot of educational material. She read for pleasure, do you know what I mean? So her resources were pretty limited too.

**Did you notice how she felt about her body? What was important to her?**

I think she always struggled a little bit too. Although I don't think weight became a really big issue for her too until she was, she was very short my mom, I say 40ish, you know? And having multiple babies, and yes she gained a lot of weight. Ya she did. So that was a concern too because you look at your parent and think "well that's gonna be me too"

**Did you think it was inevitable that you would be like your mother?**

I thought it might be. If I didn't do something, ya.

**So you still felt like you were in control?**

I think once I hit nursing and I was in nursing, my information was so vast at that point. So yes. I knew that there were things that I could do. Although still not compared to what we know today, still not, the focus was not really on that kind of health. You know what I mean? You had to be pretty obese for anybody to worry about ya, at that stage of the game. You know?

**Did they really address obesity?**

Most of my nursing was pediatrics so yes they did with kids. But most of that was slow, that was slow in coming too. But they established a department of nutrition and all that kind of thing. And specialists in that. But a lot of times the obesity they dealt with was because of a syndrome the child had, that's why they would be there. It wasn't the fact that they were just fat for the sake of overeating and lack of exercise, it would be connected with some disease. You know what I mean? In those days.

**In your 20s were you married?**

I married, the first time I married I wasn't quite 24.

**And how did that influence the way you felt about your body? Was there much influence?**

Yes. It was a very difficult marriage. It was fraught with a lot of problems. So emotionally, there was emotional abuse, there was some physical abuse, and umm verbal abuse. So it really undermined any self confidence that I had developed up until that point and so being young I was pretty naïve still even having lived in the city for almost 5 years, so yes that undermined my whole self- esteem, self-image thing. And I was married for almost 10 years.

**Into your 30s?**

Yes until I was about 34. I guess.

**So your feelings toward your body were pretty negative?**

Yes I would say , pretty much.

**Were there any positive influences?**

With body image?

**Over those years? as you said your husband was a negative influence...**

He wasn't so much negative about my body, at all. He never really was, no. It was just the whole situation and the problems that were inherent there. It wasn't really that he would you know? Insult my body, no. he was very accepting of that. Other problems undermine my confidence and my self esteem, and then things that he would say to me about my personality or my person, would undermine that, and then that translates into how you feel about yourself. It was a difficult decade that's for sure.

**How about as you left your 30's ? Did you have kids then?**

I did not, I actually had a miscarriage in that marriage. After was married about 9 years and that was one of the whole issues that brought the thing to a head. Because he did not want the child after the pregnancy after saying all the years up to that point that we would have kids together. So that was like a watershed experience for me because that made me realize, you know when I went through that, this was never, ever gonna work. You know? I had to get out of it, and then the next year I was out of it by 6 months after I had a miscarriage. That was it for me.

**And then you were heading into your 40s?**

So by that time I am 34. Well I met my present husband within about a year and a half of that. Not really looking but he just showed up. Even though I wasn't really ready to marry again, I was in a good place in some ways, about ME. How I was feeling about me. But I was still trying to recover from that other marriage, but what I did was. You could imagine going through a divorce and all that, and a separation... you lose weight, most women do. (laughs) Whether you want to or not, you can't eat. So I lost weight, I was seeing my friends quite a bit because they were very supportive, and I started to exercise. And I tried going to my first gym which was Super Fitness unfortunately that's when I had my first back injury. I injured, and I don't know if it was stress or I was doing things wrong at the gym, who knows? Or nursing. Most, a lot of nurses have bad backs... I hurt myself. But at that time my weight was probably the lowest that it had been as an adult at that point, and I put it in the notes, the year, I even remember what I weighed. So that was probably the lowest as an adult. A mature adult. So then I met my husband. And my life at that time was very, very positive, and the rest of that, you know. Just my self-esteem and everything, he was just.. very good for me and that kind of thing.

**So you were feeling quite positive about your body, and did you find he reinforced that?**

Yes. Ya he did.

**Did you find you had much influence from your colleagues as nurse, the way you felt about your body?**

I think women in general, you work with a lot of women in nursing. You talk about this stuff a lot. You know? What people are doing if they do feel they have a problem, food, you talk about food a lot, and cooking, and lifestyle, you know people that are maybe struggling with weight, what they're doing, you share a lot. Nursing is a very team profession. And that's what I love about it. And we shared everything. So we did share a lot of information about that. Now, as for getting resources for that, even then- I don't remember anyone saying you know I'm going to Weight Watchers, or I'm you know? So were talking about at that time (I graduated in 72) so about the 70s and early to mid 80s is what I'm talking about

now, and even then, the information out there was really limited. You know? You'd go to the gym and they might show you a few things of what to do and you're on your own. You know? Mean while people are doing all kinds of things to injure themselves. They don't have a clue what they're doing. Right? When we went walking it was mostly for companionship, talking and fresh air. We knew it was good for us but we weren't really walking to build our cardio up. Do you know what I mean? We just didn't have the information that we do now.

**Did you find you walked a lot?**

I didn't have a car all those years. when I was married there was a car between us. So I did a fair bit of walking, I used the Toronto transit and I walked a fair bit. And then I had a very good friend when I was going through the separation, she was an excellent friend, and she would phone me up because I was feeling quite down. And she would say "what are you doing?" I'd go "nothing" she'd go "I'll be at the subway at such and such a stop in 30 minutes, and you're going to be there" and I'll go "no, I'm not coming" and she'd say "no were going to walk for an hour" and she'd hang up on me. So then I had to go right?

**And she'd be waiting?**

And she'd be waiting for me. And that's the kind of friends I had.

**So your friendships have been really important?**

Yes, absolutely. Very important. So that part was good. But I think had we known what walking could do and what the pace of walking could do for you. I think more people...you didn't see them out walking like you do now. You know people with their running shoes on, walking all over the place. People were walking because they had to go somewhere. That's why they were walking. There wasn't the purpose for physical health. I'm glad that's all changing of course.

**When did you have your first child?**

I had my first child when I was almost 37. We got married after one year of knowing each other, one year. And had my daughter 14 months later. So I was a month short of 37. So in those days that was considered, this was 1987 now, you know late'ish. Not today, like people aren't really making...it's quite common. But for your first baby that was considered rather late'ish.

**Did that influence your body image at all?**

It did because I gained 42 pounds when I was pregnant. Crazy. But a lot of it was water. After I had her, I only had 10 pounds to lose somehow, I don't know how that happened. I mean she was a big baby, I guess a lot of it was just retained water and all. But I did eat quite a bit. But the interesting thing was I was quite ill

for the first ...my stomach problems. You know how you have that? So I only gained 10 pounds in the first half of the pregnancy and I gained all the rest in the second. So umm, it did, ya I was pretty big. But you know what...I didn't mind it that much,

**Because of what it meant?**

Ya. I didn't mind that. Afterwards I struggled a little bit. But I was so busy and everything. So I kind of retained that 10 pounds for a while. But eventually I dropped that too. So I just did this fluctuation throughout my adult life you know? At one point, I can't remember exactly how old I was, my daughter was old enough to be trying to do something with me. I'm going to say she was maybe 12 or something, or 13, and both of us, she had gone through puberty and the same thing happened to her that happened to me. She was a very normal weight child, all the way through and then she gained a lot of weight and she's still carrying it. A lot of weight now. We both went to Jenny Craig and Weight Watchers. And she was actually too young, I had to sign something to say I was monitoring her. So I just watched. We did our thing. At that time I lost about 15 pounds and I got down to what I considered my goal weight. And I maintained that for quite a few years. quite a few years, because I was exercising as well.

**And were you feeling quite positive?**

Yes. Yes. Very, very good. I felt strong, healthy, and some people told me I was too thin, because I dropped below, sometimes I would drop below that goal weight because I was busy. I wasn't starving myself, I was exercising, I was actually working out with a trainer for quite a few years. and I felt great. I was down again, to one of the lower ends of that weight, that goal weight. So I maintained that for quite a while, until maybe 2 or 3 years ago and ah with my back problems I put some of the weight, not all of it, back on. And I've just recently sort of dropped that again, maybe 7 or 8 pounds. Something like that. So I do this little thing. But I would say, I'm a reasonably healthy weight now, and what I strive to do is strengthen and tone. Is what I am trying to do at this stage of the game, you know? And part of that is my back. Unless, if I don't keep the core strong I'm not going to be able to manage the back problem.

**And just for health reasons?**

Ya. Ya.

**You've mentioned weight a lot, is that the major part of your body image concerns, or have you ever had appearance concerns other than weight? ... or any shape concerns?**

Yes yes. All my weight is sort of focused (like many women) between the waist and the knees. And my biggest challenge over my lifetime has been the buttock



and thigh area. When I was quite young I developed that cellulite look, you know that, almost that puckered kind of thing and that's something I've never been able to get rid of. So now that I'm older, now you've got the more sagging situation with it. So that's probably my area that's my biggest dislike of the body shape. Is from the hip kind of down to the knee, and the rest I can cope with. It's not perfect but you know?

**It's what bothers you.**

Ya that's what bothers me, it's the thigh and sort of buttock area I'd say.

**Who would you say now influences your perceptions of your body?**

Myself. I think it's just me. Because I get a lot of people saying to me, you know you're in good shape. Particularly like – at your age and this sort of thing. Or you don't need to lose any weight. Like that. Women at church and our bible study and stuff like that. And so I try not to get on the whole thing. I just go “no, I'm not really working on weight loss as much as strengthening and toning, that's what I need to do”. So I just kind of leave it at that.

**Do you feel it really is or you just don't want to be bothered by people?**

I think it is now. I was frustrated because my clothing wasn't fitting me when I had this extra 8 or so pounds, whatever it was. You know? Fluctuating maybe 7 and close to 10 pounds. Kind of thing. And umm of course your clothes aren't fitting. So this is all frustrating. You know? You're running around getting alterations and buying new clothes and all that. So that was bothering me the past couple of years but I did manage to drop you know most of that this spring. So that isn't bugging me as much as one, the tone, and two I had fallen off my good eating habits. That bugs me a lot. When I fall off the healthier eating habits.

**So is it more the habits that bother you, or do your body changes bother you as much as they use to? Are your feelings as negative?**

I think, I still think the feelings are negative. I really do. But a lot of it is that you get angry with yourself because you know why you are in that position and you say “it's fine if I have, you know, my treats now and then” but you can't have them everyday. You see? And so you know that already, but you are doing it anyway. So this is. There is that frustration again.

**So did you feel like when you were younger it was lack of education, and now there is education, but you are getting frustrated?**

Well I have the education but I am not doing what I am supposed to do even though I know what I am supposed to do. so yes, that is what makes me angry (laughs).

**So you don't feel pressure from anyone to look a certain way?**

No I don't. I don't feel any pressure from anybody.

**Do you find you still compare yourself to other people?**

Sometimes I do. I do.

**Can you remember a time when you felt particularly good about your body, would that be when you met your husband?**

Yes. I would say yes to that. There are periods of time that you remember that you felt well, and you felt that you looked well. Like when I got married the second time, that kind of thing. Some of the outfits I wore for particular occasions, you do feel...especially if people tell you "you look so nice" or your photograph looks so nice, and all that. I would say during those years when we were going together and first married and all that. You know? I did feel like that. After I had my daughter was a difficult period of time because it wasn't just the weight, it was my adaptation to new motherhood was very difficult for about three or four years for a lot of reasons I won't get into it but I think I still was getting over all the problems I had lived through in the first marriage. Being a pediatric nurse, I thought every time my child coughed or sniffed she was ready to go to the hospital. It was just, things were not in good perspective, that kind of thing. So those were the difficult years, so I think that I didn't feel good about myself... period. For those few years, whether it was weight or anything else. It didn't matter.

**So you had all these other concerns?**

A lot of stress and high anxiety. I think actually I had undiagnosed post partum depression and that was not well recognized in those days. In retrospect I think I really had that. I had lots of symptoms of that. So that was unfortunate because it wasn't picked up by anybody.

**What about culture or society?**

Family background? All my family background is from Italy. All four, my parents and grandparents. Three of the grandparents were born in Italy, one in Canada. My mother was born in Italy and my dad was born in Canada of Italian parents. The culture is very loving, very warm family background but food is very important and lots of it! So, my sister and I talk about this a lot. My sister has struggled with her weight all her life, like more weight than me. She's got a different body shape than me. And she said "until you get educated, with (Weight Watchers or something) you don't even know you are eating too much". Like your portion sizes are out of whack. It was accepted that everybody would have a

second serving. That was just...you didn't even discuss it you just get up and get it.

**Is it the same for men and women?**

Yes pretty much. I ate as much as my brother, I mean a boy, a teenage boy. I ate as much as him. Can you imagine? You know that's a lot of food! (laughs). And my mother, my grandparents, I mean you always cook a lot. My grandfather's...here's an Italian saying for you..."if you don't have leftover food how do you know everybody had enough?" So unless you've got leftover food you don't know that somebody still might be hungry. They didn't have enough. So how do you like that culture for weight...you know? I mean and the food was good and everything. Its not like some people say " my mother was a terrible cook". No. no terrible cooks in our family. So there's that. I think most people of European background might say the same thing, you know? But it was good food, but there was lots of it, and at times we ate maybe instead of having one larger meal in a day. Maybe you would have 2 large meals in a day. That kind of thing.

**Food was the biggest influence of your family background?**

Well like today even, most of your occasions center around food. Like your gatherings. It was always.. they were proud of the spread they could lay out. It was their way of showing hospitality. Food and drink, there were no alcoholics or anything like that in my family. But you always had to have a lot of everything if you had people. And people went to people's homes more in those days, like you could expect every Sunday, you were either going to someone's house or someone was coming over. Most weekends. And then like birthdays, and christenings, all of that. You know? So food was a big focal point.

**Do you feel that your family (past or present) had views on how women should look?**

I don't think there was a lot of discussion about it or expectation. But I do remember when my mom gained that weight in mid life. I remember, and my dad always carried a bit of extra weight too... I would say my dad made some comments and I was quite hurt for my mother. Because he made some comments about her weight, when she had bought a new dress, and the way it looked and she was very upset with the way it looked, and her weight and all this sort of thing. And I always remember where we're living when these things happen, so I know how old I was. So I was under 12. And that happened, so my mom would have been at that time, probably, when she is gaining this weight, probably in her mid-to late thirties now. You know? So there was that and I felt very, very bad. And I remember being very upset for my mother because my dad also carried weight, because he was short as well. So I thought to myself, why are you saying something to her, you've got weight on you. You know? But other than that and mom trying to watch and to lose and that kind of thing, there wasn't much

discussion of that. Now my sister came along after me, 5 years later, and once she got into all her weight problems. I was leaving home to go to school so I didn't really live through them with her all that much. But she gained a lot of weight at puberty and carried a lot of weight and there were those issues with her self-esteem. Her self-esteem was in the boots, like way down in her boots. So there was that. That came out then during those years.

**Do you feel like you can talk to your sister now about those issues?**

Ya oh ya. We do. she's learned a lot she still struggles with it. She just went through losing 25 pounds again, like this kind of thing. But she's educated now she knows what she has to do. She's been to Weight Watchers numerous times, but she struggles a lot it impacted her life a lot. The weight problems so. I'd say most of us girls, of the four of us, two of us feel like we dealt with it more, three of us of the four, my other sister only started dealing with it you know? Maybe 10 years ago, in her 40ish. She didn't really struggle with it as much, but the rest of us did. And the boys seem to be able to maintain their weight quite normally, they're big on exercise and the rest of that.

**Were they always more active in sports?**

Yes. Yes.

**Did you feel your family values or society impact how active you were?**

Yes. Because I remember asking to participate. I wanted to figure skate, I know you are a figure skater, I wanted to take lessons when we still lived in North bay and I had that opportunity, and my mother said "we can't afford it". So unless you could do it for free you weren't doing it. So we had free swimming lessons, we skated on outdoor rinks and at school and whatever you did at school and that was it. Nobody got any lessons for anything. It wasn't until much later, the sixth one, I think, the fifth or the sixth kid got lessons. And that was it, the rest of us didn't get lessons. So I was a bit resentful about that actually. Because I thought that's something I'd like to do and we played outside though in those days, kids as you know played outside. We got our exercise that way but being the oldest girl in an Italian family as soon as you came of an age where your mother needed help, that was your responsibility. So I helped a lot at home. Cooking, cleaning and looking after the kids from the time I was 10 or 11. So that was my responsibility, my father made it clear that was my responsibility. You can be a little resentful about that too. (laughs).

**So overall how much as body image meant to your life, how has it influenced you and what role has it had?**

I think its been a big influence because it directly affects your self-esteem. And we see it all the time now you know, when people lose the weight or get healthier,

become a more accepting size of themselves, you might say, their lives change. And I think its been a fairly big factor, but because I didn't deal with the amount of body weight that you may see in other people in your study, I never hit what I consider would be an obese level. I definitely had weight on me, there is no doubt about that. At one point I was wearing size 16's. you know? But I'm not somebody wearing you know? 22, 24 or whatever. Like I never hit that. But I would say it definitely impacted how I felt about myself. You know?.

**Has it stopped you from doing things? Anything you avoided because of the way you felt?**

I think certain clothing issues that I avoid, I have avoided. Ways of dressing. Activities, maybe certain activities thinking "well maybe I wonder if I can do that, maybe I don't have the stamina for that" or that kind of thing. And once I began with the back issues that was another whole issue of why maybe I shouldn't or couldn't do something. It has been kind of two fold. But ya I think it holds you back. I think it does.

**Do you think it has also motivated you to do anything?**

It motivated me to get healthier. Absolutely. In terms of what I'm eating and my activity level. That kind of thing, trying to get stronger. I wish that I had, had that information when I was a teenager because I think my life might have been different. The encouragement, the ability to do it. The thing of it is too, by the time I figured out what to do I could afford it. But maybe I wouldn't have done those things because I wouldn't have been able to afford it – in the past. I mean to hire a trainer that sort of thing to come into your home – this is not inexpensive. So maybe I wouldn't have been able to do these things, or had the motivation to do them on my own. Don't know. I think life would have been slightly different, I don't know about a lot, but slightly different. Ya.

**Do you think your life would have been very different if you had of felt positively about your body image throughout your life?**

Yes I think I would have taken on more challenging things in my life. I think I've held myself back. Like a lot of people have said to me "you have a lot of talents that you are not using" and I know that's true. But I wonder what holds me back. There is a level there of confidence that's not happening still. You know? And I don't know if that is tied in with the past body image thing or not. I don't know.

**Do you feel like it has interrupted your enjoyment in things?**

Maybe sport. Maybe sports. You know? Or... I'm thinking maybe sports, that's all I can really think of. Most things I'll do, do you know what I mean?

**It doesn't interrupt your?**

No, no. I would say not, unless I feel physically I can't manage it. Most things I'll try, I'll do. So I don't think there is that. Maybe when I was younger I might have said you know "I can't do that" or "I won't do that". Most things I do, especially if I have friends that are doing it with me. You know what I mean?

**And when you are out with your friends and doing something you enjoy do you feel thoughts of body image interrupt that?**

No, not really. Unless I feel physically weak. I can't do this because I don't have the strength. No, no I don't, body image I don't think comes into that.

**Probably the last few things, are what do you think are important things to ask women about their body image?**

To get them to share?

**Or what do you believe is important for other people to understand about your experience with body image?**

The only thing I can think of is that I think just what we've mentioned. I think it holds people back depending on the level of obesity they are dealing with or weight gain. I think it definitely holds people back. I know women who are retiring and shy. When I say retiring, they are inward, they're quite, they're shy, they don't come forward and say "I can do that". They don't develop their potential I feel because they feel unworthy. That's my feeling. When someone's healthy and strong provided they are given the right encouragement, and they are not abused (that's big). I don't think most people would hold back, but I think the body image thing does cause them to hold back. So I think that the thing you have to encourage from people is, your talent and your worth and your intellect are not contingent on the way you look. Your physical appearance. In our society today how do you get that message through to people?

**Very difficult.**

Very difficult, very difficult. I see women at bible study that are in abusive situations, varying degrees of. And that. And those women are so...it makes me so sad because they are like literally in a protective shell, and some of that is maybe because of the way they've been told they look. But I mean I saw glimpses of myself during that decade, but the thing that saved me, I was a professional out in the working world, I had all that support going on, tons of friends, and an excellent family. Although I didn't share with them about what was going on. So for me I got through that but these women that don't have the supports...it's a big factor. But I think if you think that you don't look good, or people won't like you or warm up to because of the way you look you're already in a losing battle. You know? You are starting behind the eight ball. Where do you go from there?

Unless you've got someone holding your hand and walking beside you. I just don't see it happening for people. In this society that were in right now, its just warped, its just warped. You know for girls. Particularly for women. Not only the body image thing but the whole garbing, clothing, we've got the extreme of women covered from head to toe, you can only see their eyes and then we've got women walking around half naked! I still can't adjust myself to it, I can't adjust my thinking to it. You know my daughter and I have had many disagreements on this. Doesn't my friend look gorgeous in these pictures? Ya but there's too much of her showing. You know? What is it with you girls? Everybody's got cleavage and this showing. So they're giving the message that maybe even that these girls that think maybe I may not be perfect (like beautiful body wise) but I've got attributes that I am going to share to compensate for that.

**That's a good point. And the ability to buy certain types of clothing, do you also mean more expensive clothing or just the idea of showing too much?**

Showing. I know girls, not a lot of the girls that my daughter was having for friends. She was in a sorority and everything. I would have to say that most of those girls are fit in terms of their size and everything but the few that were not, still didn't mind dressing what I consider...provocatively. Which blew my mind because if I was that size I would want to be hiding more than showing more. That's just my bringing, upbringing and that. And I think a lot of the girls, yes, feel like If I buy something really expensive, I'll look even better. I don't know. Our world is a bit warped at the moment with all of this- which is a bit disconcerting as I watch. I've got a young niece, she's gorgeous, she could be model material, she's 10. My sister's on it like crazy, careful about everything. You know? And ah this beautiful young girl, I wonder, what is she thinking when she see's what's on TV and everything.

**Yes. And even clothes for kids.**

That's what my sister, my sister has been on that kick since, she went to buy clothes for her daughter when she's five and six and she said, you know bare midriff and all this and she said "are you kidding me?" you know, she won't have any of that. I'm so grateful for that. But she said you can't...and now she's 10 and she's five feet tall. So now you've got to go into clothes that are bigger for a child who is still 10. So there's your challenge, trying to find stuff that looks appropriate for her age. So it's a real challenge today. I find.

**So it's a challenge being a mother because of this?**

Yes. Exactly. It is. Very much so.

**Is there anything you would like to add or clarify.**

I must say I am glad for some of these programs that are on right now, like these dove programs and all that. I'm glad of that. Because somebody out there has to be telling women that it's alright the way you are. You know? And yes if you're unhappy to a degree there are healthy things you can do about it. But you are worthy as you are and I don't think that they can do this enough. They need to have more, more programs, more mentoring. My sister and my niece are going to some kind of dove sponsored program with another mother and her same age daughter for that very thing. They go to like a class, and they talk about this whole...that might be something interesting to find out about. I can get more information, they go to a class and they talk about... and I think its about things like body image, and acceptance and different things. I'll try to find more out about it. But I think they need lots more of that.

**Do you think that would be a good thing to put in schools?**

Absolutely. In the guidance and counseling health program they have. Yes. And I wouldn't be surprised if they are bringing some of that into the health classes now. But kids need to know, they are learning about foods which I think they need more of, but what's an appropriate intake for a day. What's appropriate- size of portions, variety of foods, what off-sets if you are eating more, what can off-set that...like types of healthy exercise and I'm hoping that's the kind of thing that's in the school now. I think that's the only way this is ever going to...you know? And the quality of our food too. Those kinds of things I think. I think we need more and more education out there, especially starting from like grade 1. Right away. Because the kids can only start controlling what goes in their mouth when they are old enough to understand. The parents are feeding them, you know? You eat what your mother puts on the plate. And you don't know any different. I mean one lady I talked to recently she said " my nephews being raised on McDonalds." I'm fit to be tied. It's not my child you know ? she is a bit of a health conscious person and she said that's what he eats most days. Can you imagine? So that's what's going on out there. He doesn't know any different. He's a child. He eats what his mother gives him, so until he starts to understand the connection between food and health...

**Do you think it's a joint responsibility between home and school?**

Yes exactly. And doctors and nurses and all the health professionals yes. I do absolutely. But these programs that I'm talking about if they could have those in schools. Or even make it an option. Let the parents know -these classes are available. Because we can offer to people but we can't force them, you know? To take that information in. I think that would be great, I think that's the only way to get around this.



Transcript 3: *Claire*

*(Introductory and identifying information removed to ensure confidentiality)*

**How would you define body image, what is it to you? What do you think of when you think of body image?**

What I think of body image is basically how you feel about yourself, you know. How you think of your body, how others perceive you but also how you perceive yourself.

**And what would you say, at this point in your life, what are your feelings toward your body?**

I would probably say, oddly enough, because I'm not really happy with how I look, I'm more accepting about how I look than ever before

**Why do you think that is?**

I think it's a mind shift. Maybe it's more accepting, it's more – I think it's your attitude all around it. I remember when I was – let's say 18 or 20 and I use to look at people in their 40s and they all seemed to be kind of out of shape and flabby and I use to worry about that, I use to think well hmm I don't wanna get like that. But then I thought to myself they all seem to look the same way so I guess people don't care about that anymore. How wrong I was! Because yes you grow older and your body does change, you do still care. You feel, you do still care about how you look and how you feel in your body. We tend to take a heck of a lot for granted when your body is young and fit and you think you look good- you look good. And Mother Nature is a real you know...she kind of gets in there and things start to happen. And you work out and you work out. I think the thing is, it's less now, you look around and people aren't well and you think "at least I feel well- I don't have pain, I am active, I am still able to do what I want to do." and I think that's where you start to think "that's pretty good".

**Do you think you start worrying more about health?**

Definitely, definitely.

**And would you say that anyone has an influence on these positive feelings?**

I think that's within myself but it's been a very long process.

**Good. I am just going to ask you to go through different time periods. So we will start with childhood and ask you about how you felt then and things that influenced that. So you can think of specific events or general feelings.**

Okay. I've got lots to talk about there.

**Perfect.**

When I was a kid (I am a tall person) I was very tall and big for my age. I was all my life and so I did not have a very good self perception of myself. Whenever I would meet someone the first thing out of their mouths is "are you ever tall" or "boy is she ever tall". I grew to hate that, and I grew to expect it. I usually was not disappointed that way. It was the first thing out of peoples mouths and to me after a while it was like why don't you just say "boy are you ever ugly " because that's how it made me feel. It was, here we go again. When you are large for your age people expect more of you because they think you're older. In school they might think well she is probably a little slow or stupid because she looks older- she is older but she's in grade 3 how come she is not in grade 5 or 6? And that really does influence you as a kid I didn't feel good about myself. I hated being tall, I hated absolutely being told I was tall all the time. So I don't think I was a particularly attractive kid either, I don't think I was pretty and it does, it really has a huge influence on how you feel about yourself.

**And did you find that there was anyone in particular that influenced you like family or friends, or was it everyone around you?**

Pretty much EVERYONE around me. And it's true I was tall and I was bigger for my age and taller. So umm ya it was there. It just was there. Everywhere from- you know I kind of know how it feels maybe to have to sit at the back of the bus because in school guess where the tall gooney, skinny, rangy, uncoordinated kids go? To the back of the class. To the back of the class. And to this day, I went for my workout and I was thinking of this interview, and I thought "look where I am, look where I feel comfortable in the class...it's at the back". Because I've spent my life at the back, or on the side towards the back. Going up front and especially in front of the mirrors, are you kidding me? No way.

**That's interesting. So what about into adolescence?**

Things started to change in adolescents. I was horribly skinny. I use to wear great big thick corduroy pants under my jeans just to look like I had some meat on my bones. Really, really skinny. And then something started to change. I developed early, maybe because I was taller, I developed early. So all of a sudden I am- yes well developed for my age too. There you go start rounding your shoulders when you're tall. And my mother kept telling me "stand up straight, stand up straight" and I 'til this day I thank her for that because now I see kids walking around, and I think there's nothing worse than someone really tall trying not to be. Now I am telling my son who is 6'3 "stand up straight, stand up straight". In adolescence, I don't know? I guess I started to wear a little more makeup, and grew my hair long, and all of a sudden people started treating me differently. I started feeling a lot better about myself I started feeling differently about myself. But that was all

outward, and what I would call superficial. And I realize in your teens that's what it's all about is how you look and "do I look okay" that's all important but that part of my life, those teen years, especially as I got into the latter years, things were easier on me, I found life was a lot kinder all of a sudden..

**Because of your appearance?**

All because of my appearance ya.

**Was it mostly peers, or was it from family, or teachers?**

I would say mostly peers. All of a sudden you got guys paying attention, it's the whole teen thing but I do remember distinctly one day I was shopping with my mother and we ran into some friends, or women that she knew. And I thought here we go again I'm gonna get this "oh are you ever tall or is she ever tall" and umm there was this woman who said to my mother "is this your daughter" she said "yes this is" and she introduced me, and I thought here it comes, I was waiting for it and she, out of her mouth came something entirely different and I stood there in shock she said "she's enchanting" and I thought where did that come from. So my eyes were riveted on that woman and I went home feeling like a million bucks because in my mind that was the first time ever, maybe it wasn't, but for me that had an impact. It made me feel good.

**Did you find there were influences outside of other people, like media or other things?**

All the women in magazines, I mean they're all beautiful, they're what you call perfect and on TV especially I think back in the 60s if you were blonde and blue-eyed. Wow. But that was around the time when there was Farrah Fawcette. I'm thinking of that super model, an American one – Kristie Brinkley. That seemed to be the epitome of beauty at that time. But the rest of us didn't look like that – most of us didn't look like that. But when there was someone, especially this is Northern Quebec, where you are dark haired and brown-eyed or green-eyed, not as many blonde blue-eyed kids around. So if there was one, it was "oh my" that was very special. But I am thinking of the magazines, you take a look and you're always comparing yourself. And I think maybe girls compare themselves to what was considered beautiful in our society, and I think it probably is the same today, it doesn't change.

**What about siblings?**

Three brothers.

**Did you find there was influence from your brothers?**

No, no. they were younger brothers, and younger brothers tend to be ignored by older sisters.

**And your mom? Or the way your family viewed women, was there much discussion about how girls should look? Or the importance of how you look.**

No. I think from my dad no. I never sensed that he- no he never put anything like that on me. But my mom a little, ya, ya.

**Ideals of how a woman should look?**

Or. I am trying to think of something. I think it was important for her, that I look good. However back then, the way we dressed wasn't like our mothers, we broke away from that in the 60s and 70s. we would wear jeans and maybe it would be considered a little bit grungy by today's standards. You know the jeans the long hair, everything was long and baggy. That was kind of the style.

**How about your 20s?**

In your 20s. okay I kind of moved a little bit more away from the physical attributes because I thought maybe I have this going, you know – not bad. But it was always there, always at the forefront, even though you may be in school, you're studying, you're earning a degree, you're working, you're making money moving on, that's all there but by golly you always had to look the best- the best that you could. There was always that emphasis, always that pressure. A lot of pressure.

**Were you feeling good then?**

Ya I think I felt good about myself then. Ya.

**Were you married in your 20s?**

Late 20s, I was 27.

**How did being a newlywed affect how you felt about yourself?**

That's a very good question. I hadn't really thought of that. It doesn't really stand out. I guess I felt pretty good. As I said I had this long, long hair that everybody thought was great. That long hair I have to say I use to hide behind, it was a good cloak. It seemed to change up at some point instead of hearing "oh are you tall" I would hear "oh you have beautiful hair". People seemed to switch from "oh are you ever tall" to "oh is your hair ever long" or "you have beautiful hair". And that was positive I liked that. And my husband a year after we were married wanted me to cut it and that was scary. I kinda knew, oh ya it was time, you cant

walk around with long, long hair for the rest of your life. He kept asking me when I was gonna go get it cut.

**How did you feel about that?**

I was, again it was a bit of a process. It was in the back of my mind “ya I should cut it” but then you have to think about well what you want your hair to look like. I just had it long and straight all the time. I had it for years, and now what am I suppose to do. but I also think, you know I didn’t feel like I had to hide behind, and use it as a bit of a barrier between myself and others around me. But when I did go and cut it I got a great big, it was all curly like (it was the 80s right). So I went from having flat nothing straight to big hair. If you’re gonna do it you may as well do it up big.

**Were you happy with it?**

Ya it was good. It was okay. I always wanted curly hair, I loved curly hair so I thought maybe this is the time to have some.

**Okay. Good. So what about your 30s?**

30s were good. I had put on some weight, I was no longer 120 pounds, I was 130, 135. It was a really good weight, I’d kill to be that weight right now. Looking back on my 30s I think that’s the best that you kind of really have things going on in your life, or hopefully you do, and you’re established in your life, and married, and kids and it’s in your 30s your body’s still good before it starts, you know your metabolism starts changing up or your lifestyle, you start packing on the pounds and you’re not sure why. So 30s ya.

**so you were feeling good about yourself in your 30s?**

Yes.

**And you had kids in your 30s?**

Yes.

**And how did being a first time mom affect how you felt about your body?**

That was scary and very unknown. All of a sudden, all of your life you feel like you’re in control of your body and now you’re not. There’s this baby growing and your body is changing very much and you’re kind of thinking not for the better. And oh my gosh. Ya. so there’s all these hormonal, physical changes going on. So it really is, almost like a metamorphosis and it’s like out of your span of control. It just happens. And I did not really have a lot of women around my age, or people that were pregnant at the same times as me that I knew. I couldn’t really talk

about it, and not having sisters either, so I really didn't have anyone to confide in or talk to about my concerns, my fears, what was going on.

**That makes it a lot harder?**

I think so. It would have been nice to have someone to talk to about that.

**What about afterwards when you had your two kids?**

After I was working hard, taking off the weight- I gained a lot of weight with my second, and that was 6 years later, late 30s, and it was a hard pregnancy and so I put a lot of weight on and I had a lot of weight to take off. And things were coming along just fine and then kind of started hitting my 40<sup>th</sup> year. And it's like "oh what's this?" all of a sudden 5 pounds are on and you don't really know how that happened cause you are not really eating more, like you know? So I thought what's going on. And then the next year, another 5 and you went on holidays, and it's another 5, like it's not 2 or 3, its 5! Oh it must be the age thing, when you're 40 your metabolic rate starts slowing down and there are hormonal changes that start affecting all of that. That was not too much fun. I really was not enjoying it. And for me turning 40- ya I had a problem with that, I kind of ignored it for 2 years. Totally.

**Did you find these thoughts were from within yourself or were there things that influenced it?**

I think that was all within, yes.

**So that brings you up into your 40s, anything else about your 40s?**

No I don't think so. No.

**What would you say your main concerns are now surrounding your physical appearance?**

Being heavy because it's not like I think "oh I've got a really big butt and that's what bothers me" I seem to carry it evenly throughout so it's the whole thing. It's not like I would like to lose weight here or there, yes of course the stomach area is always the...muffin top thing. It seems as though when I gain weight or lose weight it's not just one area of my body it's throughout. Just being heavy.

**Can you tell me about a time that you felt particularly good about your body?**

I'd say around 18. Around 18 to early 20s. ya it seemed as though, all of a sudden, well not all of a sudden I realize it's gradual, all of a sudden I was no longer that thin or gangly. The other thing too from being a kid is that people caught up. You

know, people had growth spurts and that so I didn't feel so much like this giant amongst little people, and I did feel that way for quite a while. All of a sudden you know my gosh there's guys that are as tall as me or taller. I remember one incident, because I use to go I don't know what it feels like to be small. But one day I was at work, I guess I was in my early 20s. oddly enough, my co-worker we shared an office, she was 5'11. I didn't mind that at all. So this was January, she says "oh the tall girl shop down on Slater" somewhere or another "they're having a big sale" I said "oh ya okay I'll go with you" so we hopped down there, over our noon hour because we worked down town, and I walked in there, and I said "I'm in another world". I was for the first time in my life, the smallest person somewhere, I was the shortest, and the smallest person. There were women in there, I kid you not, I think there was one woman there she was 6'5. They were all tall and some of them very, very large, like large bodies. So I couldn't have cared less about looking for something for me. I just walked around feeling great because I was the smallest person around. I was small. I couldn't care less about the shopping. I find that that one sticks out in my mind. Oh there are big women out there in the world.

**Was there a time that you felt very negative?**

The negative part was mostly when I was a kid. In my adult- let me see. I'm 54 now, maybe when, I don't know, because the weight is gradually going up. And you're thinking I'm really trying here not to let that happen. And so you do get discouraged about it, about yourself. Although having said that, in terms of outside influence, you also see that other women your age, and your friends, a lot of them are struggling with the same issues, not all of them, but a lot. You are not alone and I think that is very comforting. If anything, is that you're not alone. It's not like when I was a kid, I was very much alone.

**So did you find it really helps to have friends and a support system?**

I think it's the old misery loves company. We're all kind of fat together. But as women yes we do sometimes sit around and talk about, and sometimes joke about it, and actually laugh about it. And say yes, I've had this experience, or that experience and also have a real big moan about it, you know, whine and complain. But when you have someone to do that with you, it's a comfort as a woman to have that around you.

**How much do you think culture and society have affected your body image?**

I think it has a tremendous impact. A tremendous impact.

**How specifically has it influenced you?**

Always trying, and feeling like you never measure up to that standard. I think as we age and become maybe wiser, or a little more in-tune with ourselves you start

to know that that standard isn't a realistic one. Where as maybe when you were younger you didn't think about that. You just thought about how you didn't measure up, whereas now you just know that's impossible. It's just an impossibility. Maybe it's because we are more informed and educated about that. We know that well some girl doesn't just do a pose for the cover of a magazine, it takes days to set it up. The lighting, everything, so it's an illusion more than it is a reality. And I think maybe when you get into your 50s and all that, you realize that. And maybe also learning how to be a little more comfortable with yourself, no longer thinking that it is just the outside of you, but the inside becomes more relevant, more meaningful.

**Perfect. How much do you think body image has meant to your life? How much of an importance has it had? What role has it played?**

I think when you're pretty, when you're attractive, you get a lot more attention. People are attracted to that, I think they treat you differently.

**So for you that was a big part of life?**

Yes, it really dominated that for me for a long time, because I was very, very insecure, I thought if I'm not pretty people won't like me. I also felt dumb so you always feel... and I was a very insecure person. And I think that may have been because of growing up feeling like the odd ball, or a bit of a misfit. That kind of thing.

**Did the way you felt ever motivate you to do certain things.**

Yes. It's unfortunate but I think some of the decisions you make in your life are strongly influenced by that. They aren't always for the right reason. Especially when you're younger, maybe not really thinking through what the consequences would be, or could be, or (and this is really hard to admit ) even maybe knowing or realizing that's the consequence and doing it anyway, saying "to heck with it. I'll live with it." And learning later to regret it.

**Do you ever avoid anything because of the way you feel? situations, or ways of dressing..**

Yes because when you are not feeling that great about yourself, and there's that basic insecurity. I remember not feeling particularly smart, and now I realize I am smart, but back then that influenced me, and in school it really did influence what I took. Because one, fear of failure, so I'll take this and not that, because I know I'll succeed here, there I'm not so sure. A fear of failing, being a failure. When you are secure with yourself (this is what I tell my kids anyway) I say "go for it" because you won't know until you try. Whereas I was afraid to try, and fail. I realize now, often time, failure is the best teacher, you can learn a lot by not succeeding in something. I didn't know back then but that can open a whole other



way of thinking of things, or different way of achieving your goal. That is part of the journey and part of the process and look at the experience you gain along the way. But back then because I felt so insecure within myself I didn't dare, dare take that chance.

**Do you find that your enjoyment in things was interrupted by thoughts of your body?**

No. no. I was very athletic right up to college and university, I loved basketball, I loved that. I think that did a lot for me, maybe felt a little bit better about myself with sport.

**Do you find that exercise does that for you now?**

I think so. When I went back after my kids were a certain age. I said "oh I've really got to go work out and start getting fit." And so I would go to the gym and hate every minute of it. You know when you haven't been doing something for awhile, the brain-body connection, you see someone going left, and doing this with their left foot. And you try and do it but your right foot comes out. It's almost like, it's a learning thing. I use to come out of there thinking "I hate this, I hate this", but I loved the feeling it gave me. it felt really good physically and I think that's what kept me going. Whereas now I do enjoy it, it's a social thing now, I know some women. But because of the little high, the good physical feeling after having worked out, that was – it kind of shifted into me not hating it as much, and then I started to enjoy it. And when you get more comfortable with something you start enjoying it more, you start feeling better about it. I could feel myself toning, I may not be losing any weight but I feel more fit, I feel healthier, I feel stronger.

**So it helps you to be positive?**

Definitely.

**Has anyone or anything helped you feel good about yourself even in times when you weren't feeling so good?**

My husband has never, ever said anything negative like "oh you're getting fat, you put on weight" or this and that. I think the only thing he ever said was "when are you gonna get your hair cut" he was never, he actually thinks I'm beautiful right now the way I am. So I can't complain too much. He's really, he's the one person that – but that is a very interesting point. He says "no matter what, I tell you that you look good, this, this and this" but he says "it falls on deaf ears, but if someone else outside tells you something it seems to mean that much more." And he's right, its true. But at the same time he's the one that I have to please not anybody out there. But the external influences are still there. If someone says a compliment, I don't know why it is, but it really goes a long way.

**Maybe it's because you expect him, because you know he loves you?**

Maybe because... That could very well be. Well he loves me warts and all. So maybe his take on it, or opinion doesn't weigh as much because it's biased already. But it ought to be the most important

**Do you think the way you feel about your body influences the way your children have felt about their bodies?**

That is really, really important especially with our girls and their self-awareness and body image. You don't really wanna be walking around calling yourself this and that because your daughter is there listening and thinking well "I don't wanna get this and that, and if I do..." that kind of thing. You know what I'm talking about. With my son it's a different thing because I saw him go through the same thing as me, he has the same body frame as me. so he was tall and big very young. Went through the same issues of expectations being so much higher and you mature more quickly just because things are expected of you that normally wouldn't be at a certain age. The other thing is "stand up straight and tall my man". With my daughter it's - she will say something like "oh mom, I'm really glad I got your small feet gene" because we both don't have large feet and she was whining about (because her brother has nice, long eyelashes) "I got your skimpy eyelash gene" I said "nevermind, you ended up with the nicest hair in the family, look at your brother, he got my hair, what do you think of that" "oh". But I never really want to go around discussing. We do go shopping. Now, I won't tell her something looks good on her if it doesn't, and she knows that now. We were going to a wedding and we went shopping, and she had this outfit all picked out in one of the stores, and she put it on, and it looked horrible, there was just no other way to put it, she looked horrible. Because it really did accentuate her middle, and she's a little heavier there, so I basically couldn't tell her that, but I did say "it doesn't suit you, it really doesn't do anything for you" "oh" and she of course got a little upset with me. So we started trying on different things and I said "that looks really good" I said "it accentuates this and all of that." And we ended up finding something that she looked like a million bucks in. Then we came and had a bit of lunch and she kind of apologized for getting a little upset with me because I didn't like the outfit that she thought she would really, really like. So that's what that is in terms of influencing your kids. The other thing is, especially with my daughter, I emphasize more on their accomplishments as opposed to their looks.

**Showing them what's important?**

Yup. Who you are, your accomplishments, and how you treat other people being more important than how you look.

**What do you think is important to know about body image and what women experience? What do you think is important to ask or know about body image across the life span from your experience?**

I think it's important to know. This is the one thing, it's not just your body, it's not just your face, and how you look but it's what's inside. And I know that's what everyone says but it's just that what you carry on inside you has a huge impact on how you feel and therefore how you look. Because you could be the prettiest girl on the planet, but if she doesn't believe that, she has a poor self body image or doesn't see herself as beautiful – she won't emanate that. It won't come out, even if she really is pretty. I think a case and point is my daughter has a girlfriend who is a knockout, she is just a knockout and that's the first thing that everyone is drawn to – just how beautiful she is. But unfortunately, and I think all through her growing up years, that was emphasized with her. She's got no personality. So initially after the first introduction, she really doesn't have anything to talk about or offer into the conversation, and if she doesn't think, like initially all the attention is on her, but once things settle down, and you're at the restaurant eating and everything, the attention shifts to the conversation. She all of a sudden will have a headache, is not feeling well, is sitting there pouting, there is something wrong. So that is her way of drawing the attention back to her. And my daughter said she hadn't realized it as much as when we went away on holiday that this is this girl's pattern, which is really unfortunate. Because she is a knock out and she knows it but she relies too much on that. So that's what I mean, if there was any message that I would give out to women is – it's not just a pretty face. A pretty face is great, and it's really great to have, people pay attention to that. That might be, maybe your foot in the door, so to speak. Once you get to that interview or topic of conversation wherever you are, you have to, you have to show that your good on the inside, that you're nice, that you're willing to listen to other people, and it's not all about you. As much as we'd like to think that, it's not. And it's okay to be a little superficial and say "ya, I wanna look nice, this looks good on me, I look hot today, fix my hair a certain way and people are telling me it looks nice so I'm gonna do it that way" I don't think there's anything wrong with that, but that it not be JUST that. It has to be a part of the whole you, and that isn't all of you. Our beauty doesn't define us. Or our homeliness either. And that's another thing, you can see a really, really hot guy, and if he's...really not nice, all of a sudden he doesn't seem to be that attractive or nice looking anymore because he's not a nice person. And that's what I would tell girls, and women. And maybe women my age are more clued into that more.

**From experience?**

From life experience and hopefully we can pass that on to our daughters or the next generation coming up, so it's not so hard on them.

**Is there anything else you would like to add that is relevant to your story?**

Feeling good about yourself is the best high. Just feeling good about yourself – that’s a pretty good trip. Sometimes it takes some people longer or sooner to get to that place, but as long as you do. Because it makes me sad to think that some people never do arrive there, never do really feel that good about themselves, and I think that’s really sad.

Transcript 4: *Dee*

*(Introductory and identifying information removed to ensure confidentiality)*

**Perfect. What is body image to you? How would you define body image?**

Well for me it's a mental, it's what you think...you look like as compared to what you see other people look like.

**So at this point in your life how would you say you feel about your body, what are your feelings and your thoughts?**

Well, at my point, at my age, I am thinking that all the hard work that I've done over the years is for not. Because it's a very tedious task to always be thinking about your body image. And at a certain age your body just does what it wants to do you know with the hormone levels and everything it just becomes increasingly more difficult to control, you know? And so you get very discouraged, you know, because you still want to maintain your weight, your style as well. Cause that's what it's all about, it's a style that you want to achieve that you want to look good, and it doesn't change from when you're 20 or 50 or 60 or whatever. But sometimes it just overwhelms you and you have no choice but to give into it sometimes and just let it go.

**Give into it as in accepting it?**

Accepting it, ya. You just have to accept it because you've been dealing with it a lifetime and you get to 60 and you think. I'm tired. I'm tired of this nonsense, you know, lets just go with the flow now. I'm not going to be 115 pounds. You start to think differently, you start to think "oh ya but as long as I'm healthy, I could use... I could still lose a couple of pounds" but I know I'm not going to be back where I was and it becomes an acceptance. Whereas when you're younger you don't take no for an answer, you just "I'm gonna make this happen".

**So are you able to be pretty positive about things?**

Well it's, I don't know if it's a positive, its more of an acceptance. You just think you know "I'm going to have to make this work because what are the alternatives?" you know. And I'm going to have to approach life a little bit differently. It's a mind thing. It's always been a mind thing.

**Definitely. What kind of things do you do to approach it differently or to accept it?**

Well I certainly don't stress over, I try not to stress over what I'm eating, I keep reminding myself going grocery shopping to make the right choices. I'm not a big exercise person. So I forgive myself, so I say okay if I can get out and walk, that's

what I'm gonna do. And I'm going to make better health choices, and I must say the media, and the magazines and the TV programs that are out there now...they're really working hard to combat the stereotypical image of what women should be. Where we didn't have that before. We had magazines...you know Miss Magazine, Mademoiselle Magazine, you know Cosmo, and they are still on the stands but you have the other, you have the Dr. Ozs of the world, and the Dr.Phils, and the Oprahs, that are out there now.

**So you think its getting better?**

I think so, I think so, you even have chefs that are out there ...like I believe his name is Jamie Oliver, who is out there and trying to get into the school systems to help the kids. And that's where it starts.

**A focus on health?**

Yes a focus on health. Which is an amazing thing. I find very amazing. And for sure I think now, they have to bring back exercise in the school. Stuff that all kids can do, not just, you know, basketball or any sports where a limited number of kids can do. just the basic calisthenics. Just touch your toes, and swing around, and jump around, and skipping rope. Absolute basics.

**Getting moving.**

Ya, yup.

**So I'm going to go through different time periods in your life, just to see what has changed or stayed the same. You can give examples of events or you can just tell me in general how you felt. So how about in childhood, how would you describe how you felt about your body? What were your thoughts and your feelings?**

Well I was always a very delicate, small child until I reached 10 which is puberty and then I just ballooned. I was a rolie polie little piglet and that's when my problem started. At 10. And I've been basically on different diets and health conscious from that age on.

**So you noticed when things changed?**

Oh definitely. I became very, very.. what do you call it?... not comfortable in my body.

**So before you didn't notice?**

I didn't notice, hadn't noticed. I just was you know a regular child, just doing, you know? Not even focused on eating, exercise, body image but come 10 years old I felt it. I physically felt it.

**Did you find that there was anyone or anything around you that influenced the changes?**

Not really. I come from a European background so there was always, always a lot of food on the table. I mean massive amounts of food now that I look back. My father was a butcher, he owned his own butcher shop. In our house nothing went to waste. My grandmother lived with us and she was, she provided all the food, she cooked, she baked, she was amazing, amazing. So we were constantly eating large quantities of food, big meals, three meals a day, and you know, we weren't that active. We weren't active. So in my case I just kept eating and ballooning and ballooning, and then. But from that age on I realized it so she would, we would bring our lunch to schools, and my grandmother would pack our lunch. And for me she would pack it separately because she would pack less. So she was kind of, she helped me a long all the time.

**Did you ask her?**

Yes. I was always saying you know "oh I'm so fat, look at this". And I remember my cousin getting married and asking my sister to be a flower girl and I was very hurt that I wasn't invited to be in the bridal party, and I was upset with myself because I said "she's not taking me because I'm fat".

**And were you younger or older than your sister?**

I was older. I'm two years older than she is. So even back then I was internalizing it. You know?

**You attributed it to your weight?**

Yes exactly. It was an example of how, still to this day, I laugh at it. It's come up with my cousin, I said "you bum you didn't ask me to be because I was a fat little rolie polie thing". And she starts to laugh she goes "no I just didn't have anybody to be with you as an usher at your age" she says "how silly you are". But after all these years you know still, it came up.

**And so as you progressed into adolescence did things change?**

Ah no because it just gets worse. You start comparing. I started comparing myself to my cousin. We were in a very closed little ghetto area I would say. It was a lot of Polish, either polish or French kids. We were all cousins, and friends, we all grew up, our grandparents knew each other, our parents knew each other. We went to school together so I personally would compare myself to the girls I was

going to school with. We wore uniforms so we were sort of just, you didn't notice it until the odd time we were allowed to wear something new and all of a sudden your body kind of oh well yes, we have a body beyond the uniform. And kinda looked, and then you start to compare. Oh I wish I had this waist and oh I wish I had that, those legs, and I could do with fatter thighs. You know and here we go, and the journey begins.

**And was it mostly peers?**

Ya. because there wasn't too much out there in the media believe it or not. I think I was 10 when we got our first, maybe a little bit younger, when we got our TV. And TV was very basic then, so we didn't have the media, we didn't have the magazines, as many as we have today for the children out there. And certainly we didn't have the computers where we could access all kinds of other stuff... information you know? So we were pretty limited. But still we found ways to be able to compare ourselves. I think it's just a human trait, that we tend to do that. And women tend to do it far more than men. A man can be chubby and it doesn't bother him. He has to be severely obese, I would imagine before he starts to notice anything. But men just go along their merry way.

**So you didn't find your family had much influence on the way you felt?**

They were supportive. Like they'd always so you know you're not fat, don't be silly, everybody's built differently, it was you know, and we didn't have issues. My mother was slim. We didn't have anybody that was obese in our family so it wasn't that. It was just a self image thing. You know that I had, a struggle that I was dealing with.

**Perfect. What about as you got a little older into your 20s?**

In my 20s I was married. I got married at 21. But I think what influenced me there, was my boyfriend and then became my husband. He was very conscious of looks, appearance, and it was a very difficult relationship because I felt I always had to be....perfect. so that just exacerbated whatever I was hanging on to. Whatever negative self-image I had. So that didn't help. I know when I first got married I put on a bit of weight and... that was an issue with him. So it became my major issue. I always struggled with that plus with his attitude. He was, he always liked to instigate, sort of look at other women and compare me.

**So he would actually say?**

He would. He would. He would say "oh wow, look at the legs on her" .and so you know my self image, I was struggling with that, and I was always thinking "oh well, this isn't good but I cant do anything about my legs or my this or my that". And it was you know, always on the top of my mind. So it never really left me, you know, having said that I stayed with him for 27 years (laughs). I struggled



along and it was my problem. It becomes your problem because you have to deal with it. You decide as a person how much you're gonna take or how much you're not gonna take and how you internalize it. You know? So.

**So he was your main influence in your 20s?**

Yah.

**Did you have any positive influences? Friends or anything else?**

We had, you know, I think my friends also had issues, I had a very good, close friend and she was pretty chunky but you know what? She was very confident, she was. And I admired that in her. And I worked with her for many, many, many years. And her weight issue never came up. It was always, she dressed her body the way it was, and she never brought it up. I mean we went exercising together and everything. She was not as fanatical maybe, and I use that word loosely because I wasn't crazy, but I was always on one diet or another. I didn't get into the pills or anything like that. The exercise, you know where you go to every gym possible and you join and then you don't go. The same history like very body does. Different diets, and the yoga, whatever crossed my path, I would try it out. Whatever diet came by and you know. I think as I got to my mid to late 20s I went on the Scarsdale diet. It's very strict and very...it worked for me, and I was able for 15 years to keep my weight off. I would always go back to it if I put on five pounds, but I was very regimented during that time in my life.

**So it was a way of eating mostly?**

It was a way of, it was a diet, I mean you followed it with regard to low carbs, there were some carbs, but combinations of food.

Okay.

Combinations of food, and things that worked. And it did work . but it brought me down to my lowest, lowest weight to the point that people were calling, and my sister was living in Ontario at the time. And they were calling and asking if I was very ill because that's how badly I looked.

**And this was when you were living in Quebec?**

Yes.

**That was in the late 20s. So going into your 30s was when you managed to keep the weight off?**

I was very happy. I had achieved the body image that I wanted and I was not, I was working out, I was doing yoga, nothing crazy, no crazy stuff, I would go to

the gym on and off. I monitored everything I basically ate. But it was a chore because you always have to be on top of it. I would allow myself- when we went out, or Christmas or any of the holidays would come, I would allow myself to eat. But right after that I was back on point and weighing myself. And I would weigh myself everyday. And that was a good way of keeping it off if I put 2 or 3 pounds on I would immediately- I did allow myself to go up, I went down to 115 pounds, I was about 5'7 and that was far too slim. I actually felt like a hanger, I just felt very, very slim. As much as I hated the overweight, I hated being that slim because I felt like nothing ever really looked good on me and so I allowed myself you know to, I got up to about 120, 125 which made a difference and I kind of stayed in that you know, weight level. And I felt very good, I felt very confident, it's amazing what it does for you emotionally. And I thought it was very comfortable, I felt very comfortable in my skin at that weight.

**So you found that your thoughts and feelings were very much connected to your weight?**

Oh ya..ooh ya. dramatically. I felt that if I had to go somewhere, I felt confident, I felt my clothes were gonna fit, I felt comfortable in my clothes and you know, that projected. It just projected.

**Did anything or anyone reinforce that confidence? Or was it just really yourself?**

It was basically myself. You know because a lot of outside people. Well they were, they were I must say, I remember going to a cocktail party at the vice president's house and we were all there, and the senior managers, and people didn't recognize me, who hadn't seen me, maybe in a year, a year and a half, two years, and they came up to me and said "I cant believe, you look so great, oh my God". You know this whole scenario and of course you feel great. But I thought oh God I must have looked like a dog before! (laughs) which isn't true. I mean you look back now and think that's kind of silly . but then you are sort of immersed in it and think oh I'm so glad I achieved this and I'm feeling good about myself and people are noticing it and um.. who doesn't like that?

**You felt nice.**

Ya you feel nice and attractive. You know so.

**And when you had your daughter was that in your 40s or 30s?**

I was 38. And my daughter I didn't have her, I wasn't able to have children, I had endometriosis. So I wasn't able to have children. So my daughter's adopted. We brought her to our home when I was 38.

**Was she a baby?**

She was 3 and a half months. Ya. She was tiny.

**Did that influence your lifestyle, and the way that you felt about yourself at all having a new baby?**

At that time I was still very, don't forget I started working when I was 17, that's a big, that's 20 years that I worked and I didn't have children. So it was difficult, the first year I was home. I wasn't gonna stay home I was going to work. But then it just hit me that I was only going to have one child. And so I decided I wasn't going to have this go around ever again so I better... I decided to stay home. That influenced my image about myself as well because I felt very isolated. I was an older mother, and I thought like, who am I going to connect with now you know? I managed to meet some ladies, but then you're home and you don't have the outside influences, and you don't have the drive, or the, how can I say, when you're very focused, you don't have the focus that you do because your focus is on something else. And so you kind of, you're in your pajamas maybe a little bit longer, your schedule is not your own because it's the schedule of a child, and so then you're whole world as you knew it starts to fall apart a little bit. Then once they start going to school, whether its grade school or whatever it refocuses itself. You know? So in that time period I felt myself gaining weight just because of my lifestyle. Again there was a lifestyle change.

**Did you feel like you had lost control of things?**

Ya. ya. I really did. You become focused on somebody else and because it's so difficult to maintain a certain weight - your focus is on yourself all the time. Because you're thinking about food, you're thinking about choices, you're thinking about what you're consuming. Your thinking, well if I consume this at this time of the day what am I going to do for dinner? So you're, food is your lifestyle, I mean I don't wanna overdramatize this but when you have a weight issue that's what you're thinking about a good part of the day. You know well I cant eat this because you know, somebody brings something to the office and you want, well no I can only have a little piece because I know I have something for dinner tonight that I might wanna have. So your mind is always thinking. When you're at home its like ah...okay well I cant eat now because the baby's crying, I gotta feed it, and then its like oh my it's already lunch time, okay well I haven't had breakfast so maybe ill eat the bowl for lunch or some stupid thing you know? And then you've lost control, and you feel like you've lost control. So slowly the pounds started to you know, and then I started to get miserable again. It's like I cant fit into this, this doesn't fit, I'm unhappy now I have to go buy bigger clothes but maybe I'll try another diet, it's just, you become very frustrated, very frustrating.

**As your daughter started to go to school, how did things change?**

You become to have more of a life. You figure okay your up at a certain time, she has to be at school at a certain time, you're sitting and eating breakfast at the same time, and I started to focus on her, on her eating. And I was always very conscious of what she was eating. I didn't want to give her bad eating habits. My husband at the time, he was very disciplined. And he became, in our first years of marriage he became very overweight as well. And then he developed kidney problems, and they determined he had almost like an allergy, his body produced a lot of calcium with whatever little calcium was in the food it really manifested itself in his kidney problems. So he had quite a number of kidney operations, he had kidney stones removed, and so he was on a very strict diet and to this day he maintains that diet, and he's slim and he is just very focused. But I find that men...it's their jobs, and their lives- themselves. They don't concern themselves too much with the children. No matter what you wanna say it's women's you know, like, men babysit their kids, you know they don't, you know - women take care of their children. But if a woman is going out – men babysit the kids. So getting back to the eating, I tried to keep her from making mistakes and eating but naturally she has a very good constitution. So she's very, very tall and very, very slim. But I had the opposite problems with her, I had problems with feeding her, and her maintaining her weight because you know, I didn't, I wanted her not to be so thin because she looked anorexic. But that was her constitution, that's who she was. She didn't share sort of my DNA it was hard to know which way she was gonna go. Once I was on a (she was in school) I was on a schedule. So it was volunteering in school, and umm you know, just more regular meals, not staying home as much. I had more freedom, you have more freedom as the kids get a bit older and their in school so you reach out with your friends, you have an opportunity if you want to go back to work which I didn't. I felt more in control, not as good though as when I was working.

**Was it less important to you?**

No. no it was still in the back of my mind always. And if I would know I had to go on a business trip with my husband, my number one focus was okay how much do I weigh? And how much do I have to lose before the trip? That was the whole thing.

**And was it mostly yourself that was influencing these feelings?**

Oh ya.

**Did you feel like your husband had less of an influence at that point.**

Yes. Because you get older, you get wiser, and you think well “to heck with it” you don't like it, well that's your problem. I was hard enough on myself, I didn't need him to kind of feed into that and make me feel even worse than I did feel. I just came to the point where I ignored him because I caught on to his... what it is - is games, people play games. So that was part of his character and I had other

issues. Like I had my daughter to take care of and myself to take care of you know.

**Did you have friends that had much of an influence ? or even family?**

No. the family, it was a very...weight thing is a very solitary journey just like a lot of other things in life are and I must say you know, my family, if I hadn't seen them in a year or whatever, and I would go to Montreal because by that time I was living here, and I'd always get "oh my goodness" and were talking European people, you have to be chubby for them to appreciate you. "Oh my goodness, you don't look so good, you're so thin" but I'm happy. I'm happy, I'm thin, I'm thinking I'm looking good. And I was because I look back at pictures and I'm thinking I like the way I look there. But their perception is they wanted little... little butter balls. You look healthy if you're a little more rounded. You don't look as drawn, you don't look as tired – that's them speaking. I had that issue, but I just sort of thought I'm happy and this is the way I wanna be.

**So through your 40s it was?**

My 40s I got into, I was still on diets, and I was getting more and more desperate because I saw my weight going up you know, 5 pounds, 6 pounds...try to take off 3 pounds, and put on. And then you have your emotional things that happen, you know people getting sick, and people passing away, and family members and everything. And that plays a big part in your life as well. It's emotional eating and life just went on. Your busy with your children, and your husband, and your lifestyle – whatever that is and it was basically what I had lived through my 30s. there was not drastic – very, very similar as far as that's concerned.

**What about beyond your 40s?**

When I got into my 50s life changed drastically for because that year I had, another back surgery so it was very debilitating, I decided to go back to work and I also decided to leave my husband. So those are major, major, major things life. So that was a big, big change. And I found that, that was the beginning of me being out of control. That's what it was. And me trying to hang on- hang on, hang on to everything that was happening in my life. And it wasn't that I was eating badly but I was eating... not that I was eating a lot, but I was eating badly.

**Was it a comfort thing?**

It was. It was you know, going back to work after not being in the workplace for a dozen years and had to make major concessions because I did not want to go. I didn't want to work downtown – I could have made more money. But I decided my daughter needed me to be close to home emotionally, because of everything that had happened with all the changes. So I decided to work around the house and you know so then you're not happy with... you no longer make decisions just

for yourself, you make decisions for other people in your life. So in this case it was my daughter and you don't always make decisions that are great. That are great and that make you happy. That's just life.

**Doing what's best for the family?**

Yes. Exactly.

**So what kind of work were you doing?**

Well I worked, I was an executive secretary when I stopped working. Then I decided just to go back into the work force and I did admin work but then I had worked originally for one company for 21 years. and in the last 10 years I've worked for, I don't know, x number of companies because they downsize, they close, or they go bankrupt, or whatever. And the last job that I had, which I left on December the 24<sup>th</sup>, the first time I ever quit a job in my life was...but I thought I'm too old for this, I can't stand this person that I'm working for. Because in the past I did, I worked for people that I didn't really like, but you know it's a job and you do it. This person will eventually get transferred so that's okay. But I couldn't – so I quit. These are major issues in your life, when you're working and struggling. And if you have any struggle it manifests itself right on your hips or your waist or wherever you don't want it. It just sticks on there like glue. And that's exactly what happens. Your busy, your working, your moving, your this your that but emotionally your drained and you're making bad decisions, and your making eating – eating not healthily. So that was in my 50s was the start of my demise (laughs).

**So were your 50s when you felt the worst about your body?**

Ya. ya. because I just turned 60 last year. So the 50s were bad because I was able to control, you know in the 40s - it was starting to get a little out of control but I was still able to reel it back and reel it back. Okay well I'm getting older and I'm starting the menopause and okay now we have to be realistic here. I'd always be talking to myself “you have to be realistic, do a bit of exercise” and because I have my back problems, and as you get older you get health issues that also control your mobility and it becomes overwhelming as well. Because now you not only have your weight issues but you have health issues. Then you have the menopause – lets throw that in there to the mix! Lets just add to more misery. But you keep bringing yourself back and say “well hells bells”, a lot of my friends are sick and going for chemo, and you know “snap out of it” you know and get realistic with it, it's only weight and as you get older..

**You start to worry about function?**

Oh yah, and in your 50s its very traumatic, and most of the women I know. We all go through it. Thankfully in this day in age were able to talk about it. Whereas

with my mom and my aunt, nobody would say anything, my aunt would be sitting there with her little battery operated fan and they wouldn't say nothing you know. And I say to my mother now "I don't remember you complaining" and she says "well what good would that have done?" that was their...different mentality. They didn't have it out there, their problems in life, their marriage, their kids, they kept it to themselves. And they didn't even discuss it with their friends. I said to my mom "what did you talk about" "recipes, the weather, cleaning products, new cleaning products" you know, they just had their own little lifestyle. And because my mother didn't work outside the home, a lot of women didn't when I grew up. It was the exception rather than the rule. It amazes me how they worked through all that with really not very much support, and they had problems they had all kinds of problems. And yet we have the media out there, we discuss everything with our friends, we laugh about it, we have outlets just to be able to breath and we have movies about it, books about it, and thankfully. I think this is the most fabulous time in history to be a woman. Really, because there's so much out there and you can pick and choose what you wanna do, who you wanna be, everybody's so open and you have a lot of resources, a heck of a lot of resources. So having said that it's a bit easier to deal with than in the past, for women dealing with it in the past. And a lot of women were not in my mothers time, but maybe in my grandmothers time, a lot of women were going through the change and they were institutionalized because they didn't have the medication that we have, they didn't have the resources, their husbands would commit them.

**They didn't understand.**

They didn't understand. So that's scary stuff compared to what we have to deal with. You have to, you kind of bring it into perspective. You say okay well you're fine. If you read up a lot on history and what's happened in the past you think "thank God" its not gotten any easier physically, but certainly mentally. I would say more mentally, because physically you can get medication to help you with certain things. But mentally you at least can cope a bit better than the women in the past.

**So coping and social support and those sorts of things?**

Oh ya. oh ya. definitely, definitely.

**So basically your negative feelings over your life have always been weight related?**

Yah. I've always, always struggled, I am the heaviest I've been ever. And it's always an issue. And as a matter of fact last night my sister was here and we were talking about it again. And she now, she was always very slim, she never had weight issues, but she has health issues now that necessitate her taking steroids. And so she's put on a lot of weight. And she's actually said to me "I understand". She says "what is happening, and what has been happening with you because it is

totally, I feel like I'm out of control, I've never been this big you feel just so thick and you don't feel good in your body and in your skin, you feel so ugh.. uncomfortable, you feel uncomfortable in your clothes, cause everything you put on you never know if it's gonna fit, or how it fits". You go out and your sitting there and you laugh about it, you know, it always comes up in conversation, and one women will say one thing and you'll say "well ya, you should be in my pants, their so tight! I can hardly breath, I wish I could just you know". And umm we were taking the dog for a walk last night and I said to my sister – she said you know "lets go out" and I said "well I gotta change my pants" and she goes "why" and I said "because under this big blouse my zippers down, it's actually broken." (laughs) "I don't wanna go out with a broken zipper!" and she says "oh okay". So it always comes up, it always comes up, you try to avoid it but it always comes up.

**Can you tell me about a time when you felt particularly good?**

In my 30s I was in control of my life and I was in control of my health issues, and it was basically more about me. I felt in control with myself and more so with my environment. It's when outside influences come in. you know you have children and they take over more so. I mean they need you so it becomes an issue in your life.

**Things that you can't control?**

Yah.

**What about culture and society? Has their been much influence from that?**

Oh definitely. I find if you come from any kind of a European background. It's all about the food. It's always all about the food. I know I was told a long, long time ago I was very tiny I was very petite, and my grandparents were very, very concerned about my weight. They would actually put brandy in my milk to boost it up. You know, and it was always an issue. Its not, I never really focused on it, never really thought about it too much but sometimes the older you get and you start thinking back on your life and you kind of think you know we were never forced to eat, my parents never forced us, we always had a lot of food in the house. And I remember Sundays when the family use to come, because we lived near the polish church, and we had relatives that lived sort of outside the area, and they would come over for dinner to our house. And my cousin in particular her mother would force her to eat. And my father's big thing was " in my house, we don't force anybody to eat anything, if she doesn't want to eat it- she doesn't eat it". But we grew up on everything, nothing went to waste in our house because of my father's profession. And my grandmother worked in the store, and she would make pig's feet, she would make head cheese, she would Polish sausage- fresh, every part of the animal was used. And I think because my life, looking back, was based on that. My Grandmother would take us, you know Bon Secours Market is



in Old Montreal, oh it's not there anymore, but she use to take us down, take the streetcar, go because she needed us to help her carry the food from the market back home. So I analyze it, and I think back there was always an issue around food. Either I was shopping for it or I was eating it. It was always something. We don't take our kids out now, when they're small we do, but it's sort of in and out. Its not like "come with me because you have to help me carry the groceries on the bus, and on the street car, and get to the house" and stuff like that. And so I look back and think there was always an issue around food. And me being the eldest it was more focused on that, I was more focused on to be the helper to be, I didn't prepare the food, but certainly I went shopping for it, and help out and so on and so forth.

**As you mentioned your family's view of the female body was that they shouldn't be too thin, was that the biggest influence that your family had?**

Yes. Oh for sure. That was the – I mean they didn't, it wasn't so much my immediate family like my parents or my grandmother that lived with us, she'd say "oh your perfect, you're perfect, there's nothing wrong with you, don't be silly". It was my issue and an issue outside my immediate family where they always had an opinion. You know but I was the hardest on myself for sure.

**Did you find outside of your family, living in Montreal or when you moved here, did you find that other people's views of the female body influenced you or was it more seeing other women?**

Seeing other women and comparing myself to other women and to images – but that was something that had started when I was very young, when I was in grade school.

**So the media, did you find as you got older that the media had a bigger impact, did that start to influence you?**

Oh ya. you know you'd see in more of the magazines that were out there. And don't forget it was all about body image in the 60s and the 70s that was really all the twiggy era. And how slim can you be? How slim can you go? And all that. I think subconsciously it gets into you and you don't realize until years later how much it did influence you. You know. And it's a very...it just creeps up very, very slowly – the media part of it. You know? You don't notice it's happening. For sure, for sure.

**How much has body image meant to your life, how much of a role has body image played?**

I think it's played too much of a role actually. You know, I've found that looking back now, I think that I wasted too much time focused on body image and having

said that I don't think it's changed. It's not only me, I think women in general, instead of getting better, I think it's gotten worse.

**You mean as you age?**

No. in the media. I mean yes and no. at least there's a Ying and a Yang now. Before there was just like you know...a Ying. Things weren't very good. At least now you have people on the other side of the scale saying don't be ridiculous, lets be healthy. Whereas you didn't have that before, not as much. It seems like the other side was more predominant and you were getting bombarded by all this subtle advertising. There was nobody, you had your family saying "but you have to be healthy and you have to this, and you have to that" and your thinking ya well what do you know. You know, you're just my family, I think I'm gonna side with this here. You know. And so you know there's a lot out there but there's still issues, major issues.

**Do you think body image had stopped you from doing things?**

Ya I think so. I think it influenced my confidence and it prevented me from just saying "oh the heck with it, lets go out there". I would focus on – and a point to make is, I was never fat. It's how I perceived myself back then because I just...we have different bodies, we have body types, we have body. My girlfriends would touch me and say "oh you feel so marshmallowy" and she'd be hard as a rock, she was fat-that girl I was telling you about, she was chubby but she was solid. Whereas me, I was more, I was marshmallowy – my skin was soft and very you know, and I would laugh and say "ya, ya, ya but I'm built for comfort, I'm built for comfort". And I'd always laugh it off, but deep down after when I'd get back home I'd say "ya, she's right". You know.

**And that was when you were thin?**

Ya even when I was thin I felt very soft and then I'd put on a bit of weight and I'd start feeling squishy, very marshmallowy, you know you kinda touch a marshmallow and it's nice and soft. And so I would say that even to my daughter. She'd say "oh mommy" and she'd pinch my tummy, and I wasn't that fat and I'd say "but I'm built for comfort". I never wanted to project my body image on her.

**Do you feel you've had a positive influence on her body image?**

You know I tried. You can only try as a parent. You can only say "I'm gonna do the best I can". I try not to nag her, she's a junk eater and she's...it upsets me because I tried at home to serve good meals, and to portion control and things like that. And now I just say you have to...and she'll say "oh look I'm fat" and I'll say "no, no you're not fat, right now you are just perfect the way you are" I say "before you were just way, way too slim" .. but I try not to tell her that. She'd say "how do I look mom" and I'd say "you're just perfect, you're perfect the way you

are”. I just didn’t – I didn’t want to go there. I’m not going there with body image. I say you know you have enough with outside influences - media and friends, without – my daughter’s friend – anorexic, tiny, my daughter is very tall and very , she’s slim now, she use to be skinny and her friend was short and chubby – not fat, but chubby. But I saw where it was going in her life, her mother was very, very obsessed with her own body and exercising and it translated into her daughter developing anorexia because there was an issue there at home with body image. And also because, this girl had a friend, my daughter who was very slim, and exactly what I lived through, my daughter didn’t go through it, but her friend. So I could see through her eyes what she was going through. And you know with anorexia you struggle with that your whole life- she is much better, she was hospitalized and everything, but now she maintains her weight, and you know she looks good. But that’s an issue she’ll deal with the rest of her life. I see my daughter now, she’s 22, and her body’s changing, it’s becoming more womanly, more curvaceous, and before it was more male looking body, very straight, angular body, and now she’s coming into her own. She’s never obsessed, but she’ll mention it. She says “oh I feel like a pig” and I’ll say “ you didn’t really eat that much, you eat the wrong stuff, but hey”. You know. I’m not obsessing about it.

### **Trying to encourage healthy?**

Exactly.

### **What do you think is important to ask about body image, what do you think is important to understand women’s body image? What is the most important thing to ask women about their experiences?**

The question would be when did all this start for a women?, and I think you are going to find that it starts very young. It’s not like you get up one day and...there are women, just through their menopause see their bodies changing and its very, very upsetting. There’s a big percentage of that happening. The true body image problems originate from when, from my own experience and people I’ve dealt with, from when they were very young. So the question would be “when did all this happen?”. And most women can pin point and say you know, I can tell you, I was ten when it started. And up until then – I was fine, I didn’t think about anything. Of course I didn’t have the media or any books, it just came upon me very naturally and I just, it just happened. It’s a natural progression for some people with their body image, and their weight.

### **I have that seen from these interviews that every woman has been able to say.**

It is really, really. It’s so human nature.

**And physically, it’s a natural thing to happen when you go through your first period and things change.**

And a lot of women also never experience it. They'll say "I never had this issue" and some people will say well it happened to me when I was 24- after I had my first child and then I was out of control, it just sort of happened and then you know, it does, it just gets out of control. And there is a lot to be said about diets, which I didn't know when I was a kid, you know, you figure okay a lot of research has gone into it now, and they can tell you a lot more about body fat, and mental, how you look at it mentally, and hormones and so forth. And women were so frustrated because you go on a diet and it was the wrong diet, you shouldn't be on a diet, you should be on a health kick, a healthy lifestyle which no one ever tells you. Whereas now its kind of going into the schools and trying to tell kids if you follow the Canada Health Guide then you will maintain your weight. And products, products that are out there are brutal. I had that conversation just last night with my mother and my sister. We were talking about products and what we give our children. And we said, we would take our lunch everyday. My parents couldn't afford for us to eat in the cafeteria everyday so they would pack us a lunch. We took to get to high school, we took 3 city buses to get to high school. My parents didn't drive us. When my sister went to university, she went to Loyola, and we lived in the East end. Well she took two buses, and a metro. So you know, you were always moving and traveling and all that. And my mother and my grandmother would pack us our lunch, and we'd have a sandwich and fruit and milk. We didn't have this pop and energy drink and all this stuff that is loaded with sugar and loaded with salt. And other things like they say if you cant pronounce it, you don't want it. I said to my mom how do you control this, and she said you just don't give it to your kids. And I said "you know how many kids go to school and they have leftovers and the other child sitting beside who doesn't have it says you're not gonna eat it can I have it? And that's how it starts". And then after that they keep on you and on you as a parent and you say oh to heck with this I'll buy you as a treat or whatever. I know when my daughter was small I tried to not feed into the cereal business, but eventually they get into high school and it's out of control. You do lose control of your kids at a certain age, whether you want to admit it as a parent or not – you do. you know? And I said times were simpler, my mother sent us off to school – we had our bus pass and we had a quarter to call home if something happened. You know? We didn't have any money on us. From point A to point B were going to school – that's all you need. You don't need any money, you got your lunch, you got your bus pass, and you got quarter for emergency. That's as simple as it got – as complex as it got I should say. And that's it. And now a days it's like crazy. It's crazy, it's not, not easy to bring it back to what's out there for food? And all the pesticides and all the allergies that the kids have. My daughter has allergies, she developed them late, with fruit. And she'll get this tickling in her throat, its like itchy, and that's how it manifests itself. And she says "I cant believe this" we never had a problem before, and now for the last 5 years or so, let's say since she was about 15, 17 around there she developed an allergy and so now were talking about kids who have all sorts of allergies, not just to nuts but to everything out there. And parents- not everybody can afford to buy organic. And I was talking to my mother about it

last night and I said “mom in your day they didn’t import all the stuff that we imported, what did you eat you people?” “soup, lots of soup, and home made bread, very simple things- honey and bread, if we were out we would have an apple, my mother would cut it up very thin to put it on a piece of bread with honey” and that would be their lunch, very simple. You know. And now a days with all the fast foods, and thankfully McDonalds has stopped supersizing so I hear, and a lot of the other places, they are even trying, they are going in with their apple pieces, and their little salads and stuff for the kids to try and re-educate the kids. I don’t know where this is going to go with the food industry. It’s difficult as a parent to because everybody leads such a stressful life. Busy life, that it is so crucial to people’s well being that you cook, and you go back to the basics. And even before I worked, from until I stayed home. Every weekend what I did was, I cooked and I baked for the whole week. And I didn’t have any children but that’s what I did. My husband was from a European background and he expected it. You know. And I didn’t know how to cook, I didn’t know how to bake, I didn’t know how to do anything. I didn’t know how to clean, my grandmother lived with us our whole life, she did all the baking, my mother did all the cleaning, we had a small little house, little upper duplex, and that was how simple it was. And grew up with the same background, his grandparents didn’t live with him but they lived a block away. And that’s how it was. And to this day there’s a lot of European Italians, Russians, whatever. I call it ghetto-ized because they are very cellular, they are very family oriented. And it’s all about the food, that’s what it comes down to. All about the food, you get together and it’s about the wine, and the food, and desert, you know you go to a wedding it’s all about the food. Its not about the decorations or anything else. Its about the food. There better be enough food, and good food. You know, how can you get away from it? You will probably find that culturally you’ll see a difference in peoples attitude toward food. You’ll find that Europeans are so food based as opposed to other nationalities. So.

**Is there anything else you want to add or clarify about your experience?**

I think I’ve covered quite a bit. Do you have any other questions? I try to be as honest as I can be with my issues, and for sure they don’t leave you, they stay with you but you learn how to cope with them. For sure. And you have to be realistic. I still haven’t given up my quest. And I know my friend and I talk about this all the time, about losing weight but its for different reasons now. It’s no longer- before it was social reasons, what other people thought, how you looked, and you get to a certain age where you say “I’ll be damned if I care what anybody thinks” you know, but it’s for me, it’s for myself. I mean it was always for me because I wanted to feel good in my body but also it was for social, but now it’s less for that, it’s more for feeling healthy, and movement, because you find as you get older you start to stiffen up, its just a fact of life. It just happens, you think its not but it just does and you have to exercise. I’m a terrible one for exercising. But no matter how little you do, to remain, to try and get to a point where you’re healthy. I’ve reached the point in my life where I realize I’m not going to be 135

anymore. But certainly I can lose some weight and be fitter and healthier, and that's I think what a lot of people as you get in your 60s and 70s people want to be more focused on being fit, because you just don't want to be so out of shape that you feel it's hindering your movement and you become very sedentary and that's no good. I have an aunt whose 95, she'll be 95 this year, she still drives, her mind is sharp as a tack. And she's taking care of her boyfriend, he's 90. They've been together 25 years. and it's amazing- I look to her because I think she doesn't stop. This humidity, I call her and I go "where have you been" and she says "I went out" I said "in this heat?" I didn't even go out. She says "I have to go out, I have to go out everyday" so she goes and buys something to eat. Everyday she goes out to buy something to eat for their meal, she goes to the supermarket buys a couple of things, that forces her to go out. Then she goes to the doctor, she goes there she goes here, she goes shopping. Her zest for life has not diminished. She loves to get dressed and she just hasn't given up on life. And that is hard to do as you get older because mentally and physically your body is pulling you in another direction. You don't want to go there, but there are days that overwhelm you when you think it would be so easy to not do this, or not do that. And if you have somebody like I have, like I look up to my mom too, like my mom's 85 and she's still pretty active, and my aunt and I think- I think I feel worse then they do. but that's just my perception, I'm sure they'll tell me otherwise. But they are different stock. They were never babied they just forged through life and they do what they have to do. and sometimes I get angry at my mother cause she'll say something to me and I'll go "don't tell me that I don't want to hear that" she goes "well you just have to focus and breath deep, just keep on going" that's what she says "breath deep and keep on going". Ya, okay I'll try. But sometimes you don't wanna hear that. I think each generation seems to be getting weaker and weaker, I don't know. My grandmother lived to 100 and she had her mind about her too. You get more feeble, she developed pneumonia and she passed away, but otherwise you think, you think back and they didn't have that much food, but the quality of food was better, they painted their house with lead paint, they had probably asbestos all over the place. So they had all these chemicals in their life as well, what makes it different for them and us? But their life was more difficult, and my mother says they didn't have time to think about silliness like their weight, they were busy living and surviving because of the war, and issues of money and not having it, and making it work. And I think that's a big contributing factor in how we perceive ourselves. Because maybe ya we have to much time to dwell on it.

### **Everything's become more efficient**

Ya it has become more efficient but it's coming to the point that we are, we can't as human beings be as efficient as a machine, not as quick as a machine. And we demand that it becomes quicker we become very, we lose patience with the machinery that were dealing with, we lose patience with ourselves, we have no down time. I mean my generation still does because we were brought up with lots of down time, and our lives I feel were more balanced, than I see your generation

or the generation that's coming up, they're very bad, because you're hooked in 24/7 all the time. You can't run away from it. Before, God forbid if your boss called you at home. That was a no-no. absolutely not. Now a days anybody can get you at any time of the day or night and there are people who are so focused that they're up all the time, so there's going to be major health issues there. Oh for sure, so it will be interesting to see how the new generation coming up is, and how they are going to deal with the issues, basic issues of life, which is exactly that. How you perceive yourself and how you perceive others and away you go you know? And how you live, you know?

**Perfect.**

I hope I answered all your questions.

**You did, for sure.**

Transcript 5: *Eleanor*

*(Introductory and identifying information removed to ensure confidentiality)*

**How would you define body image? What is body image to you?**

When I think of body image I think of how you see yourself compared to others.

**At this point in your life how would you say you feel about your body? What is your body image?**

I've always wanted to be the skinny minny. I've always been envious of those really, really skinny. But being short you know, it doesn't, every little pound makes you look...if you lose 5 pounds when you're 5'10 versus when you lose five pounds when you're 5'2. There's a big difference. So...

**So how would you say your thoughts and feelings usually are presently? Are they positive or negative? Is there any thing in particular you usually think about?**

I think some days "hey you're doing okay for the age you are, you're doing okay" and other days I think you know "oh it would be nice to be thinner". And with the wedding coming up I want to be thinner, but I don't know if that's going to happen (laughs).

**Are your concerns usually weight related?**

No I think more tone, and fitting into clothes. I don't go on a scale. I don't believe in them.

**So what I am going to do is ask about different time periods in your life, just to get an overall picture of your childhood until now. First childhood, what would you say your body feelings and thoughts were?**

I never had any feelings. It didn't really bother me. I remember my brother calling me "bummy". I was a cute little kid but it was never discussed. Back then it wasn't really an issue.

**And your family was never really concerned with anything?**

No . just that nick name.

**So basically there was nothing influencing it positively or negatively. It was just a non-issue in childhood?**



Ya. Ya.

**What about as you went into adolescence? Did anything change there?**

I was very, very self conscious. You know during puberty. I was very, very self conscious. I hated going to gym and that whole thing.

**Self conscious about your body?**

Ya.

**What did you find influenced that?**

Oh the boys, they made stupid comments.

**Mostly boys?**

Ya.

**What about girl friends?**

I cant really remember to be honest. I'm just thinking about my best friend, she was thinner than me but it was never really an issue. When we moved to Vancouver I was very, very self conscious because we moved when I was 13. I don't really remember the weight thing as much as how I looked with my hair, you know that type of thing.

**And appearance can be something, so you were more self conscious about your appearance when you were a teenager?**

Yes. I had very, very curly hair. And I always wanted straight hair and I wanted long hair. And I could never have long hair. And I was just...

**So it was mostly that. And did you find things outside of people, at school or in the media?**

No I don't remember that.

**Okay. Do you remember anything about your family when you were in your teens. How they believed women should look?**

I remember I was doing dental assisting when I was out of high school and I remember the stress level just sent me through a loop and I got, and I really had a hard time, and I didn't realize it and I started losing a lot of weight. And then I started feeling really good about myself that I was losing so much weight, you

know, but yet everybody was saying you look sick. I was very, very skinny, I was going green.

**But you were feeling positive about yourself at that time?**

Yes. Even though I was a mess I was feeling positive.

**So you were getting feedback from other people, so that was heading into your 20s?**

Mm hmm.

**Did anything else happen in your 20s that influenced your body image?**

I got married. During that time I was fine. We travelled around Europe and I was thin and I felt really good about myself. I was always worried about my hair. I always wore a kerchief. I never had the issues of breaking out or anything. I had good skin. Ya I don't really remember. I think it started mostly when I had my first child.

**What age were you married at?**

24

**and you had your first child at ?**

26

**And that was when you started to feel more self-conscious?**

Ya.

**And was that part of having a new baby? Or was it because of physical changes to your body?**

Well when you're nursing you feel very...top heavy (laughs). I was top heavy to start with so ya I was very self conscious of that. But when I look back I really was not overweight. I really wasn't with the first. With the second it happened a little bit more and then the third.

**And when did you have your second child?**

2 years later

**did you find it was a different experience than your first?**

Well I had gained more weight and it was harder to lose it. It was just an ongoing struggle.

**And that was something that bothered you?**

Ya it was always in the back of my mind.

**Did you find anything influenced the way you felt about the weight gain?**

I do remember actually when I was a teenager when I first moved from Vancouver to Montreal and living on my own I had gained a fair amount of weight. And I remember my mother coming and saying “wow what happened to you”

**So it was the first time being...**

Criticized.

**And away from home?**

Ya. But it was an eye opener and I just started watching myself.

**Did you find that you took it negatively or as a check?**

I was disappointed in myself but got over it.

**And then that's heading into your 30s with three kids now. Anything else happen in your 30s that influenced the way you felt about your body?**

No.

**And that's when you weren't working you were a stay at home mom right?**

Yes. Moving and moving.

**Did you find there was much influence from friends or the environment around you at that time?**

No I found I often compared myself to other people, who you know they just had a baby and they're skinny, skinny. Its always been in the back of my mind. You know, so.

**Comparing women?**

Ya ya.

**So it's been mostly indirect influences just seeing other women and comparing yourself?**

Ya ya.

**And did you find it was only when you say people in real life situations or did TV or magazines or anything that influenced you?**

I mean in the back of my mind I knew TV was TV. And they were only going to show the perfect image and it use to really annoy me. But it was in real life when I would sometimes get really you know.

**Alright, what about in your 40s? Were there any differences there?**

No. that's when I went to work...not really. Late 40s I decided to start running and I became really fit and I felt really good about myself. I was on top of the world. Like I just felt physically on top of the world, and emotionally and everything. I just felt really good about myself. And then I hurt myself, and couldn't run and then I started running again. And ya, you know.

**And so what got you to start running in the first place?**

I don't know I just wanted to do something really weird and I saw these people pounding the pavement so I found a "learn to run group" and I did it and I loved it and I just kept going and going.

**So you were just looking to try something new and different?**

Ya and I wanted to do some physical exercise and I saw them doing this and I thought there's gotta be something that people like in it.

**Was it that you felt so good when you did it?**

Ya it was a real accomplishment.

**Was it an everyday thing? Or a few times a week?**

I would do it 3 or 4 times a week and then for my 50<sup>th</sup> I did my first 10 k. so..

**Oh nice. and then you hurt yourself after your 50<sup>th</sup>?**

Ya. It was, and then I started running again. I've been going in spurts. Running I find sometimes is just too hard on your body. That's why I took up biking. I'd like to do the two but we'll see. If time allows it.

**So you felt that running felt really good and that was something you chose to do on your own. Was there anyone else that influenced you, did you have friends or anyone that you did it with that encouraged you?**

Ya I started meeting people through the running group and so we would go together and it was really, we complimented each other, it was just very positive you know.

**And motivated each other?**

Ya! And it was just a fun thing to do. you know it wasn't...

**It was something to accomplish outside of everything else?**

Ya and I was getting compliments from everywhere you know? Boy do you ever look toned, boy do you ever look fit. Even strangers you know, like boy you must work out type of thing. So I felt really good.

**Good. And so that was heading into your 50s. how about up until today? You've been cycling, do you find that there are many influences today? Friends, or your kids, or coworkers?**

No. sometimes I'll look at people and think oh gosh I wish I could you know, I'd feel so much better about myself if I lost 5 pounds you know. I mean I can lose 5 pounds rather easily so you know its not a means of not doing it. Ya I often look at people...

**It's mostly comparing?**

Yup.

**So has anyone had a positive influence on you that encouraged you to feel better about your body?**

Ya. This girl that taught me how to run.

**How was she a positive influence? Just the fact that she ran with you?**

Ya. "you're looking good" or you know, it wasn't so much the weight thing, it was just feeling good about yourself and getting out and doing something to make yourself feel better.

**Perfect. So exercise has been a big positive thing on your body image journey. You mentioned your kids, do you find your body image has changed because of life or role changes, such as newlywed, mother, going back to work?**

Ya.

**How have you found this to change your body image?**

Ya. you have to kind of accept when there's a change of life that you're going to gain weight. You are not going to have this svelte figure. You know its not going to happen. Some people do, but I'd say majority don't. I'm sometimes okay with it and sometimes not. I think compared to other people I know I've done okay considering. Ya... there was another part of that.

**Just with life and role changes, how you felt that your body image has changed? Do you find it's changed a lot with life changes?**

Well I don't know if this is body image...

**Whatever you think is..**

But I've always felt myself to look younger than I am. And to me that's always been important. I mean a lot of people when they hear how old I am or how old my kids are, they just get totally blown away, and I'm ya well.

**That's a nice thing.**

Ya it feels good. And I mean even looking for a dress for my daughters wedding. I'm not even looking at the mother of the bride. That's too old stuff. So I just went right for the bridesmaids stuff. You know, so , and break the norm.

**Those encourage good feelings then.**

Ya. and you're as old as you feel.

**Good. Great. And...**

I guess adding to that. It's just your attitude that you're gonna take. I could have taken the attitude of ya okay, I'm 55 and I've got three older kids, and yes I should be wearing this mother of the bride dress because that's how it is. But their just frumpy, and I don't want to be... frumpy.

**And you don't have to be.**

No.

**And it sounds like you have the same view with exercise, you are going to try to stay as active as you can and try new things.**

Ya, ya! I'm not going to kill myself but..

**A very positive outlook?**

Ya.

**Today you mentioned that for you it hasn't always been weight, it's been more the way your clothes fit and your shape. Is that what you said before?**

Ya.

**And so your appearance, your hair, is that one of the things across your life...what would you say are the main things if you think of shape, weight and appearance?**

I guess being top heavy (laughs) was always an issue with me.

**So that was something you were self-conscious about from when you were young on?**

Always.

**That was the major issue?**

I would say so, I would say so.

**Do you ever feel pressure from anyone (family , friends, colleagues) to look a certain way as a woman?**

It's funny because this place I was working at , no longer working at, thank God. I brought the picture of the wedding...the dress in, and she goes my that's kind of racy for a wedding. For a mother of a bride. I just thought screw...you know?

**Who is she to say?**

Ya. And she said it twice.

**Oh really.**

Ya. so I basically told her where to go (laughs)

**So this is recently, because you are making wedding plans?**

Ya. and I just you know what?...think what you want. Ya you know.

**Would you say someone trying to put you into a box of what you should be and that's a pressure?**

Ya

**But you don't feel like you succumb to it?**

No. in a way I think she was jealous of me because she would often say you really have your own style, I really admire your own style, it's a cute style, its really unique. And its like ...okay! (laughs)

**Good. Can you think of time when you felt particularly good about your body? Was it when you started to run, was that the first time you felt really positive?**

Ya I think so.

**And that's quite recently. Was there a time that you felt quite negative, probably the worst you've felt?**

Ya I would say probably five or six months after I had my third. I was frustrated because I was so busy with the three of them I didn't really have time for me so ya. So I didn't have time to do anything..

**And did you feel like anything at that time (when you felt negative) that there was anything that influenced that? Any people or things happening around you that influenced those negative feelings about yourself?**

No, its just when you're a mother and you're pulled 20 different ways. You're envious when you hear of people who can go exercise or have time to do things and my husband travelled a lot so I didn't have that option.

**You didn't have the time for yourself?**

Yup.

**How do you feel culture and society have affected your body image?**

I still think that, you know, people expect you to be a certain.. I think the expectations always there but I think they're coming to, people are coming more to terms with you know, some curves are okay.

**Do you think its like that across every age group? That it's getting better at all ages?**

I think ... I don't know about teenagers though. They are a concern, a big concern



**How do you feel that it's a concern, the norm or the expectations for teenagers are...**

Ya, I've known some friends of mine and their kids are anorexic and it's a real, its heart wrenching. Its a real illness, ya it's pretty sad.

**How about your family or extended family. How do you think culture has influenced their expectations of women?**

It seems anytime there is a family event, it's a lot of eating. Food, food coming at every which direction. You know that's the only thing I can really..

**And is, do you think that's part of your background? Do you have a European background?**

Well we're Jewish. So every Friday night...you eat.

**And do you get together with your extended family or is it more immediate?**

Well now its just us, we don't have extended family close by. They are all in Montreal.

**So food has been a big part of your culture?**

Ya. I think its dumb.

**Do you believe that your culture has an ideal for women's bodies?**

I know, the orthodox Jews they hide their body, you can't see their body. They only wear dresses or long skirts, or they just don't expose their body. So you know, that's kind of, I don't think they really are as concerned...

**How much has body image influenced your life, how much of a role has it played?**

I'd say a pretty large part. I've always, ALWAYS been self conscious of how I look. I've always taken pride in how I look. I very rarely go without makeup, mind you today I couldn't be bothered. (laughs)

**Busy day.**

Ya. I take a lot of pride in how I look. I spend a lot of money on face creams and stuff because I feel like the damage has probably been done but if I can stop anything further...

**Do you feel body image or feelings about your body has ever stopped you from doing things?**

Ya I've never really been comfortable getting into a bathing suit. A lot of people say oh try swimming it'll feel so good. But first of all I don't like wearing a bathing suit or how I look in a bathing suit. And then secondly you know, the after effect – my hair.

**You find your self conscious about your hair even now?**

Ya. well not now. Well now I've gotten it professionally straightened so I'm okay.

**Do you feel the way you feel about your body has ever motivated you to do anything?**

Once I went to, went with a girlfriend to Weight Watchers, I felt really good, like I lost 10 pounds then. I felt good then so.

**Did you find any exercise was ever motivated by the way you felt, or was it more that exercise just felt so good in itself?**

I'd say I exercise more to feel good, like mentally, rather than..but then you get the physical and you feel good.

**So do you feel that your body image is ever taken away or interrupted enjoyment in certain things?**

Probably. Like getting on a bathing suit and going swimming, sitting by a pool you know?

**Do you feel like it ever interrupts your thoughts about other things?**

No.

**And when you do feel positively, do you find it increases your enjoyment in things?**

Oh ya. you feel good about yourself for sure.

**Do you feel the way you feel about your body influences the way your children feel about their bodies?**

No not really. I find that my daughter is really self conscious but she looks amazing and I almost kind of think she looks too thin now. I know always been an issue but now everybody in the family has taken on this healthy thing you know,

working out and eating properly and, you would think that my husband would follow suit, but you know, he just doesn't care.

**Do you find that influences you at all?**

I find in a way it almost motivates me more to eat healthy and exercise, ya.

**And why do you think that is?**

Well he had a heart attack about 10 years ago and were all saying you know, you have to eat healthy you have to exercise.

**What do you think is important to ask women about body image? What is an important question to ask you or other women about body image? What is an important thing to know about body image?**

Who sets the norm of what is right and what is perfect? There is no norm really. I mean you have that BMI or whatever it is. Even that, I don't know. (laughs)

**Who do you feel is setting the norm right now?**

I think it's these fitness ads and these good life fitness you know, and showing pictures of these pumped up people. Lets face it most people who go in there are not pumped up. I don't care what anybody says. I joined the Y and it's like I was worried about it, thinking I was going to feel self conscious because I don't know any, like I'm not fit and stuff. But it was a joke. Like you know? (laughs)

**Do you think that that's an important thing for people to know?**

Absolutely. Ya. like you know you might think that you're gonna go in there and there's all these thin fit people but the percentage I would say are pretty...low.

**Do you think there's anything that would have helped you when you were going through negative body image now or in the past? Anything that would have helped you to have a more positive image or to help you have positive coping?**

Ya I think the openness. Like today it's okay to be overweight as long as you dress properly, you know? It's okay, to you know, have a few pounds as long as you're healthy. As long as you're keeping active. Whereas years ago it was never discussed you just saw these twiggy and whatever on the TV, and you know Bay Watch, and your thinking "oh my God where did I go wrong?" you know. But that's not reality.

**So did you feel like you couldn't talk to anyone about it when you were younger?**

Ya you just didn't. it was just there. I guess brewing in your own head, knowing that its stupid. I would get very frustrated.

**How old were you when you would get really frustrated?**

I'd say the past 15 years because now all of a sudden people are talking about it more and its more accepting.

**Did you think there was a lack of information back then or just lack of openness?**

Lack of openness.

**Is there anything else that you think is important to describing your story with body image?**

Just remembering that everybody is a unique individual inside and out. And it's not on the outside it's the inside that makes the person.

**What do you think would help the younger generations be more positive from your experience? What would be something that would help kids or adolescents?**

Just eating healthier, I'd like to hear. And their getting away from pop in the cafeterias now and stuff like that. It's good to see that they're making the changes so umm I think that's really good. And just getting them more physically active.

**So encouraging an all around healthy lifestyle?**

It's a concern with all these x-box and all those video games. Kids just plunk themselves down and parents are at work and they're just sitting there playing games, when they should be out running around, and riding a bike and you know, so but they're not.

**Perfect. Anything to add or clarify?**

Nope.

**Perfect.**

Transcript 6: *Fiona*

*(Introductory and identifying information removed to ensure confidentiality)*

So ya, you know and in terms of my self esteem , I always felt that my brother had been embarrassed by me. I am a fat baby, who moved to a fat child, who moved to a fat teenager who moved to a fat adult. And I have had periods of time in my life where I have had managed to lose substantial amounts of weight. But I haven't, like most people will tell you , it's very difficult to keep it off. For me it has been a support system, and I have turned to eating in order to deal with emotions that I wasn't ready to confront. I do feel that as a child my brother was embarrassed, because while he was very chubby as an infant, and has become very heavy now as a person who is not able to , well he does exercise, but he is not able to control his intake as well as he would like to be able to.

**Good. What would you say body image is to you? How would you describe body image?**

My perception is that it's how you feel about how your body looks. And I don't feel good about that. Now, as a kid I remember being teased and it was very upsetting because I was a sensitive kind of person. I've always had the ability to try to feel happy and to try to bring joy into other peoples' life. I guess that was something that I wanted to see. My father is an incredibly happy person, he's always, despite the difficulties that he had in his life, he has always maintained a cheerful, mostly cheerful, joking, kind of demeanor. And he didn't take my feelings as seriously as I wanted him to do. He did that, I believe, because he thought that by dwelling on it, he might make things worse for me, it wasn't a philosophy that I understood at the time. So we had a difficult teenage years. He and my mother were at odds, as I said my mother was very heavy. That caused conflict between them, and he ridiculed her and I saw that. And I sided with her because I wanted to be like my mom, and so this was the whole mother-daughter connection thing. I felt that he was...behaving negative toward her. And if it was negative towards her he was negative towards me because I looked like her, and I wanted to be like her. She had some admirable qualities. The more I pushed the admirable qualities and talked about them and tried to push those things the more he was ridiculing it and making fun. And that's part of how he dealt with it. When I was 32, actually 31, I had (between 26 and 27 and the time I was 31) I had lost 100 pounds. I started at 289, and lost 100 pounds. Well actually 142 pounds .. in the summer of 1989 I weighed 141 pounds. And that's the lowest weight I've ever remembered as an adult. I had worked really hard over a series of years, number of years to accomplish that. And I had my cousins wedding to go to and she was 10 years younger than me and I wanted to look very nice, and so I worked extra hard that summer to try to get down as far as I could and so I did. And I remember that the morning that I weighed myself before the wedding I weighed 141 pounds. And still didn't feel satisfied that was enough, still you should be 130 pounds or 125 pounds. And that had been the goal. When I was in grade 5 a girl had teased

me about being fat and asking how much I weighed and I trusted her and told her and then she told everybody at school. So that was pretty upsetting. So I had, when I had lost 100 pounds I had been offered an opportunity to have abdominoplasty and liposuction in my thighs. I also had a procedure on my arms. And I still have the scar, it still hasn't totally disappeared. And so I thought "you made it kid- your never going to go back to that". That life is going to be, you have sealed your fate, you've got it down, and you will never go back again. Well sadly, that's not true. And even though I felt happy that I had lost all this weight it just was never enough.

### **The negative feelings were still there?**

Yes and feeling that I haven't changed but everybody else feels I have. And the attention, huge amount of attention that you get when you lose weight. I know that. I know that to be a fact. Because I have since lost another large amount of weight and people just cannot help themselves, to talk to you, ask you how you did it. And they act like it's a huge deal, and really what I want to do is not discuss it, just leave it alone, don't draw attention to it because it just makes me feel that...that it's more important than it should be. When I was a child and we were in school it was always you have to learn about who the real person is, what their feelings are, how they behave towards other people, and that's the valuable issue. Is that what the person is on the inside not what they look like on the outside and yet as you grow up and you go into the teenage years and you're trying to attract attention, well I don't know if you are trying to attract attention from other people and men particularly, you – things change and you realize that your visual impact is much more important to men, and boys (like my brother) than it was to, than it should be, but that is the reality. Men and boys are much more highly motivated by a visual impact than women are. They are attracted by that visual, by that visual picture. That is not something that they can alter, that is just physically how they are made. And so as a result I didn't have boyfriends when I was a teenager. I mean I talked to boys, I had friends that were male, but it wasn't a large part of my social life. It was at school, working on projects at home and different things. I didn't have any special friends and I didn't have any physical involvement with boys. In fact my husband is the only person I have ever been with. And so as a woman in my age group, I understand that I am not a typical woman and I wonder sometimes if I've used the weight to protect myself from some of the pain that can come from having a relationship with another person. I'm aware that that may have been a factor in my life, I'm just not sure how to overcome it. I mean I am willing to acknowledge that that's part of it. I have often thought that food has been my friend and when people have disappointed me I could always find food. I'm ashamed of some of the quantities of food that I've eaten in my life but it's the reality that was me.

### **How would you describe your feelings at this point in your life related to body image and how you feel in general?**

Right now I'm relieved that I can fit into clothes that I can actually go into a store and buy. Because there have been periods in my life that I couldn't buy clothes that made me feel happy, made me feel like I was still a functioning person in society. Different occasions in my life where I have had to settle for an outfit rather than buy something I really like. You know? Makes you sad, you know? It makes you, its quite disappointing. I'm... I like my toes, I use to like my toes, I use to try to find ways to tell myself that I like different parts of my body, and you know? Things happen as you age that you don't like, and so I can never say that I was... I mean at one point I felt really proud of my arms because I did weight lifting and those, in order to lose the 100 pounds I did a lot of work a lot of exercising. Whether I had the whole thing about over-exercising happening at that point, it seemed a less bad situation than overeating so I exercised a lot and I was young enough that I could do it. My knees give me problems at times and I am not able to do the kind of fitness activities that I did at that time. So no I don't like my body.

**Do you find that the functional part of your body image bothers you, as you mentioned your knees or is it mostly appearance related?**

See I can do anything, I just cannot jump around too much. Whereas 10 years ago I would skip with the kids. You know I could do skipping and jumping. I can't do that now. I suffer from it if I do. And so in order not to have the discomfort of it I don't do it. But there are a lot of stairs in my job and I'm doing the stairs. If I have 15 kids I am doing them 17 or 18 times a day. I have 4 schools and three of them have stairs, one of them is only 1 floor, the rest of them have stairs. And I have to go and fetch the kids and bring them back and it can be... I do find it rearing, I find my breath is not what it was. Because I had increased my breathing function because I was exercising so much so... I've gotten asthma I've gotten, you know I cant breath, I cant run up the stairs anymore. There are people at work who make comments because of that and you know...

**Really?**

It's... people who lose weight, and feel proud of it, sometimes want to show it off, like they, to be fair, I suppose it's the feeling of success in their life but also it's that element of you know "I'm better than you". And I'm not the only person that I know that has felt that way because there are other women who have weight issues after having children and what not. Anyway.

**You mentioned child hood a little bit. Your experiences, as you mentioned were mostly negative..**

Mmm hmm. Because I could never wear the clothes my friends had. My mother would do her best, she did a lot of sewing, I mean I was on Romper Room. And it was a two week period and my mother had an outfit for me everyday, even though one of the days was a holiday so they filmed two shows in one day. So she had a

different outfit for me. So you know it was important for her, because of her feelings about herself, that I have nice little outfits. But that was before I started school, you know? I was a little kid then. And once I started school you know I could never wear hot pants and the mini skirts, and I tried to do it, and my mom tried to help me. But it just didn't fit me the way it fit the other kids.

**So was your mom a positive influence for the way you felt about yourself?**

I don't know that she could have been. Because she had her own issues, and she wasn't able to resolve her own issues, and so ...you know? We were eating partners. I wasn't going out with any boys when I was a teenager and so she and I would have little eating fests.

**So a lifestyle influence?**

Mm hmm.

**Was there anything or anyone else that influenced you?**

My sister is very, very tiny. She is very petite and always skated as a kid. So she was always very, very tiny. So she got to live out a lot of my mother's fantasies about skating and doing all these tricks on skates. So a lot of attention to my sister, to take her skating, and lessons, and stay with her and watch her, and encourage her, and all that kind of thing. And it was the time, because we didn't have very much money when I was little. My parents were starting out, and they had built this house and had a mortgage on it and what not. And they were really trying to build their life up so that they could have some of the stable life. And you know I just wasn't... I wasn't aggressive about saying you know "I wanna do dance" or anything like that, but I wonder if I had been encouraged to do it as a kid, if that would have at least, if not controlled my weight, at least prevented it from getting to be as morbidly obese as I got to be. I don't know. No way of telling. It would have been...If I had had a chance to do it (we lived in the country) If I had of had the chance to do it, been encouraged a little bit more, I wonder... but that's all it can ever be.

**You can only wonder right. Did you find many changes? Or were your experiences through adolescence very similar to childhood?**

Adolescence was very uncomfortable because I could hardly fit into the desks at school. And I didn't have a lot of friends, I had a small group of friends that I sat with at lunch time and socialized with after school. We went to movies, or came over to each others house, or things like that. We didn't have access to public transportation where I lived, so it was a lot dependent on parents driving you around. I guess it still is, I know my sister drives hers around a lot. And then I learned to drive, and then things were, I was able to go more places and do more things, but exercise was never a priority for me. It was uncomfortable, hard, and I



didn't like it. But as an adult I had a certain amount of dedication to it. I've built it into my life, by doing it first thing in the morning and so no matter what happens for the rest of the day I know I've had that part done. I've built into it, things that I can enjoy, listen to my ipod, listen to books, and have been able to find enjoyment from that, but it is essentially a boring, repetitive activity that I feel obligated to do it. Its not something that I say " oh I get to walk this morning" (laughs) and yet given the opportunity, I like to walk, and certainly enjoyed it around L.A. but my niece who is this whiz in synchronized swimming didn't want to do that. So what can you do?

**What about your experiences in your 20s?**

Well again. Well went to university, didn't make a lot of friends. I tend to be a person who makes just one or two close friends. And you know? My roommate told me that people were making fun of me while I was swimming. Because one thing I did- was swim. And I'm still not sure why she told me that. In order to make herself feel better because she defended me? But you know, it was difficult. Because she was having boyfriends and going out on dates and doing things. I was at home, working, you know...just...living a pretty quite life, and trying to ...do my work at school. Figure out how I fit into the situation at school. When I was in...when I had finished second year, I got a job, a summer job. So great thing, got a summer job, my dad got me a car, two great things, and I started losing weight. And I lost 75, 80 pounds, over the summer time because I went to one of these weight loss clinic things. I went everyday to this place, and I lost a lot of weight over 3 months. And I was feeling very positive about myself. Went back to university, weighing less, it was very obvious to people there that I'd lost weight. So there were people who were... seeking me out...and... it didn't help me to umm.. keep it off.

**Having the attention was more of a hindrance?**

Yes. Ya. Because I just wanted to blend in, fit in , like other people. It just was, I mean. I don't... ya. The attention was an issue. So... it was you know? It was a change from a very safe, happy place (I had been happy in the summer time) and then back to school, and the stresses that you feel as a university student. Anyway, I started putting it back on, anyway... and then, again. I have tried. I've tried quite vigorously to try and lose weight, to get back to what would be a normal size. I haven't been able to prove to myself that I deserve it I suppose. I don't know. Anyway.

**Great. So was there anything in your 30s or after university life that you felt was significant to your experiences with your body.**

(Sigh)

**Did you start working right after university?**

Ah no. no . I was not employed regularly. I had little jobs, contract positions with the government, with other things. There were periods of unemployment, periods of supply teaching (which I detested). And, umm that was, part of that time was during the hostage situation in Iran. And I read about the nuns who had lost a lot of weight during their incarceration there, and they had done it as a way of maintaining their own control over their bodies, and their own satisfaction in being able to control that part of their lives. And I thought - wow. They can do this, I can do this. In a way I am in a prison here. And If I start to do something about this I will be able to come out of this...with a new life. And I had fantasies of falling in love and getting married. And having the Cinderella life. And you know? I met my husband at the time that I had lost a lot of weight. And I am very open about that. I am very open with him, and he knew that I had been heavy and had lost weight. And since, my relationship has been gaining and losing, gaining and losing, back and forth. You know he's seen my on diets, horrible diet situations, he's seen me on Weight Watchers program, trying to modify my eating. And he's seen me, you know, have medical problems where I couldn't exercise or haven't been as regular as I would like to be. But... after we were first married..

### **How old were you when you married?**

39. he'd said something to me about my weight. And I said " do you want to go on with this marriage? Because this is... I cant accept that you would say something to me about my weight". I can't remember exactly what it was, but I was really, I was really ready to put it, put our marriage on the line because of that. I'm just, I feel that I'm too sensitive to be made comments. And I'd gotten my father out of my life, you know, to a large extent, and I didn't need someone else who was making comments. And so he's never said anything to me again, he's never been... hurtful to me about it again. I know he must have to bite his tongue a lot. That's the issue. This is who I am. And I would like to be thinner, and I've tried at various times in my life, I've tried. But essentially it's a journey that I haven't found the key to manage and it seems to me that when I get to certain point, in terms of my weight, it is ... I am unable to maintain the intensity of the desire to be thin, to the exclusion of enjoying the treats that I like. So, and my 40s have had, brought up health issues...Now I must say that I do not have high blood pressure, I have low blood pressure, I don't have a cholesterol issue because, generally I'm eating lots of fruits and vegetables. I do have an issue with irritable bowel and that does cause me gas, you know? It can be humiliating to be, having a gas issue, when you're in public or around children or those types of things. But I have not allowed myself to umm feel that I can not be out in public. I have not allowed the embarrassment...and you know embarrassment has been something that has followed me through my life because of the weight and people's , and my perception of other people's attitude toward me, and my belief that they have a negative attitude toward women who are heavy. Ya my body image has been negative through my life. And I have felt ostracized and excluded

and disappointed , disappointed about my feelings about my weight, and maybe unreasonably so, maybe my perception of how I look is much more influenced negatively than it would be perceived to other people. I don't know. But you know. I don't, I have never felt...good in my skin.

**That is a good way of describing it. Do you feel that from being around people, the feelings are influenced by yourself, or do specific people make you feel more positively or negatively? You have mentioned your father...**

Ya he was a big negative influence. I know that his intention was not to... was to try to bring me out of it. Try to get me to fight back, and to do something about it. Because by not doing something I was just accepting it, and to be more aggressive about it and to want to lose this weight. And so he told me that I couldn't get my ears pierced until I was... until I'd lost 25 pounds, and so I did it. I lost the 25 pounds and got my ears pierced and put it back on, and more.

**Do you think maybe it influenced you to go the opposite way, like "I'm in control of my body" or something like that?**

(Pause.) That's putting blame on him. I've never blamed him because it was my choice, my choice to eat the food, my choice not to, you know, sit and read in my room rather than go out and play and run around. You know I did things, I did those things, I did go for hikes, and I did play with my friends, but not enough to balance out the weight issue. And I liked cookies and I liked sweets, and still do unfortunately. You know, if I had been able to find a way to limit how much.. I could regulate myself a little bit better about it. And I was seeking approval by adults.

**You were seeking approval?**

Yes definitely. The kids teased me so I would seek adult attention. I mean I have always understood that it's sort of a weak way to blame someone else for what is essentially what is my choices, my decisions, not knowingly understanding that when I was eating candy it was.. that it would result in me carrying excess weight to an extent that it would be almost impossible for me to lose and feel like I'd accomplished it. That it was over.

**Did you feel when you were younger that you didn't know enough about what you ate?**

Sure. Sure. You know like looking on it now, ya my parents could have, should have been more proactive about my weight. Because I was a kid, but umm I was cute, and I was pleasing so I didn't get the kind of attention that might have, if... things were, if we knew then what we know now about children's health. I'm not diabetic, I'm not, I don't you know, have any of the typical health issues of an overweight woman.

**That's good.**

It is, I'm lucky. And I attribute it to the fact that I am able to lose before it got to a situation. Like both my mother and her sister had gall bladder issues when they were in their 40s... my mother had a surgery when she was 32, gastric bypass. And she suffered for 10, 15 years after it with different residual effects. The stitches got infected, and she got a, she had to have it...well, the doctors wanted to reverse it so my father signed the documentation to have the procedure reversed. But she still had many, many physical ailments as a result of that surgery. Which is the reason I have not pursued medical, I mean I've had plastic surgery, I've never pursued a medical solution for my weight issue. I've always told myself that I can do it, and I had the will power, and my father was there cheering me on. I've got the will power to do this and overcome it. It's a great regret in my life that I haven't been able to do it, but its not... I mean the older you get the harder it is. So I don't perceive it as being something that is within my reach now. I'm perceiving it as being beyond my reach, I would be happy to sort of be 175, 180 pounds. But that's just not...

**Are there things that make you feel more positive about the way your body is? Or have there been things in your life that have been a positive influence?**

Well I spent a lot of time, when I was a teenager, telling myself and feeling positive about my face. That you know, I thought my face was attractive. And that I would be really pretty if I were, if I were... thinner. And that this was something I should strive for because I could be an attractive woman. It never was enough to compensate for the weight. It made me feel that at least I have one part of me that is attractive but it also made me develop my personality so that people would be friends with me because I was nice or I was kind or I was giving. That's how I sort of coped through.

**By being a good person on the inside?**

Yup.

**Do you feel that you are the biggest influence on your perceptions of your body?**

Yes. Like nobody is going to tell me what to do. certainly at this point in my life, it's my choice. I still know that if I stop myself from eating a chocolate bar or a candy... That isn't even really in my life anymore, you know? I have no capacity, I do not have the capacity that I had to eat . you know when I was younger, or even five years ago. I know that I can make good choices. It's just the allure of sweets and cakes and things like that. And I think okay, ill just have one on the weekend. And it gets away from me.

**So you don't feel pressure from anyone that influences the way you feel?**

I mean, well ya. It has changed tremendously because I am older now and I have gray hair. I have allowed my hair to stay natural. And that was a choice that I made because, I mean and there has been positive result from that because I am taken very seriously (at work)... mostly they take me very seriously, and they listen to me, because I'm the voice of reason and experience. And so in that way I have come to a space where I don't feel the pressure to be sort of young and beautiful. Up until my late 40s my face was not as...well I have lines in my face now but I was fortunate to have good skin, and now I'm realizing yes there are more lines in my face, the fat has collected in certain ways. So, and I don't have this jowly second chin down here, I mean I have weight down here but it doesn't surround my face the way it did my mom, and my grandmother and different people in my life. You know, it would be great, and I keep telling myself it would be great to be a little old lady who is skinny. I had a grandmother who lived to 103, and she would complain about her stomach, that she had a little pot-belly. But she was very active, and very youthful looking well into her 90s. she was just a real going concern, and so...ya. I have an idea that it would be good to be a skinny little old lady, it would be.

**Is there a time that you felt particularly good about your body? Was it the time you mentioned you had lost weight at your summer job?**

Well it was my late 20s when I lost the 120- 140 pounds, ya I had. My arms had tone to them and you could see the muscle. Yes. I could go out and by anything I wanted, I could wear high heeled shoes. I looked much more of what I wanted to. What I had in my mind that would be...good for me. But never enough. I had maintained my weight for about a year at 150, 155. And I was wearing pencil skirts, and high heels and working everyday. I had a selection of clothing that I'd bought that made me feel good about myself.

**What about as a newlywed? Was that ever a positive experience for the way you felt about yourself?**

Ya ya. We were happy but I was not thin. I was quite heavy by the time we'd gotten married. When I moved away from my mother and started working full time, living by myself, you know, my husband- I was seeing him at that time. You know, we were both aware that I was gaining weight. It was that change.. and instead of being able to control my life, and reflect on the feelings I was having and prevent that from overwhelming me about where I was going, how I was letting this impact on me, I have just sat back and let the weight come on.

**Moving away from your mother made you lose the control or it was positive?**

No. I had developed control because I was cooking for myself and I was exercising. And there she was trying to, in a way interfere with that. She would

smoke when I was exercising. And we would have lots of arguments about it. Some of the things she was representing to me...and then when I was living with my sister who was a tiny little thing, and working downtown Toronto and living a life that was a, you know, career woman. And I still didn't fit into that...so why bother? Why bother to maintain this whole thing about trying so hard. And I started having issues with my feet and I couldn't do the exercises because it was hurting my feet. And so I allowed that to be my escape.

**So you moved from your mother's to your sister's and started feeling control and then losing the control?**

And couldn't maintain and couldn't discipline myself enough to maintain that lifestyle because I had developed, you know all the walking and the running, had really done a number on my feet. And so I started wearing orthotics. And it became I struggle and I couldn't keep up that two hours a day of exercise that I was doing. High impact aerobics, plus I had this job that was very demanding and I wanted to be successful at. So there's pressures on me that were preventing me from maintaining the quality of life that I'd established.

**How much influence do you think culture and society have had on your body image? And background, whatever you think outside of yourself?**

I think that there is definitely a connection between my grandparents. My grandmother, my maternal grandmother's lifestyle in Manitoba, and they you know, because so many of them had weight issues as children, growing up into being adults, the wedding pictures of those women reveal that the majority of them, there were 2 that didn't resort to weight as an issue in their lives. And I don't know how they managed to avoid it because it was obviously something that the majority of them dealt with. And then you know, it's a genetic predisposition, which doesn't mean it's a death sentence or a life sentence, but it's definitely there. Its definitely part of it.

**Did you feel like it was inevitable?**

Yes. Cause here was my cousin, my mother's cousin, my aunt who was close to us, my uncle's both had weight issues as well even though they were cousins by birth to my mother. It was just all around me. My father didn't, he never had a weight problem, his mother never had a weight problem and my sister's never had a weight problem. So to answer your question, certainly I grew up in the age of Twiggy, and there was a huge influence of how to be thin, to meet this criteria of women who were beauty queens, and we have that whole influence through the 60s and 70s of all the beauty pageants and women in magazines. There was definitely an influence of repetitively seeing how you don't fit the image of beauty. I don't know how you can escape that unless you live in a vacuum away from general society. I watched a lot of TV as a kid so all the girls on the soap operas who were so beautiful and unimaginably thin, and dress so beautifully.

And this was you know, one of my deepest desires was to be able to fit into clothing and look beautiful. And yet here I was looking in the mirror and telling myself you are beautiful, you have a beautiful face, you try so hard to do things for other people, to be a listener and help your friends. If they have problems they come to you, and people would just tell me things, like I'd be sitting and they'd tell me their sad stories or whatever, and something that I didn't have to do the hard work that was necessary to lose the weight.

**Overall how much has body image influenced your life? How much of a role has it played? How has it affected your life and the things you do? has it stopped you from doing things?**

Absolutely. It has prevented me from, and still, I don't go swimming because I don't want to get into a bathing suit. I make myself do the social things, it is something that I do, I force myself to go in public, to socialize with friends, and to go to work everyday, and interact with other people. Because I'm very aware that I'm not part of the gang, part of what other people look like. I have a different character status in life.

**Has it ever motivated you to do things?**

Yes. Definitely I have been motivated to try and look better and get into clothes and what not.

**And the exercise you mentioned earlier?**

Mm hmm.

**Do you feel it's placed an importance in your life (the way you feel about your body) because it's influenced you?**

Yes. It has been both the motivating factor and the, it's both a carrot and the source of great sadness. It's a mountain I've never quite climbed. I've gotten pretty high up but never reached the summit. And even though I've gotten to a level that was quite satisfying it was never enough for me. And it's something that's the hardest challenge, the hardest challenge and very rewarding at the time that I was feeling...it was very elusive.

**Do you think the fact that you always wanted, when you said you were successful with weight loss that you always wanted a little more, do you think that that was what made it harder to be positive?**

Yes. Definitely. It's almost like I couldn't allow myself to be satisfied, and stabilize for a moment. I had to , it became harder, and harder to try and go on with it. And that's where I am now. I've reached a certain plateau and it's just

hard to keep going, to keep the discipline and keep the lifestyle that I know I need to do, to be ultimately successful.

**Good explanation. What question do you think is important to ask women about body image? What do you think is important to understand your experience with body image? Or if you could summarize it, what information is important to understand body image?**

I think it's the difference between... for women to be able to feel comfortable about how they look and not feel that they have to be...that there's only one type of model that you can be like, and I don't mean... I mean in terms of role models in your life, you don't have to be perfect but, you know, at some point in your life you maybe carry a little bit of extra weight and that makes you unhappy but if you do persevere you can, even if it takes a long time...it's possible that you can overcome it. I believe that, I do believe that. Even though I have not been successful. I want women to feel good about, and bring out that they feel good about themselves as a person rather than a physical being. But I don't know that that's really possible because you know there's so much, there's so much influence to be a certain way, even from a little child to be accepted. I don't know if I was accepted or if I was just available. Sort of a wounded soul because I knew that I had this part of me that was a negative feature in my life and tried to overcompensate because of that because I wanted people to be friends with me and I would try to be nice to them. And my mother certainly fostered that, kids could come over and have a popsicle at my house, she would put water in a pool and let us run around and do those kinds of things. It's very complicated.

**Definitely and everyone has their own story and different things that affect them.**

Yup, yup.

**What sort of things do you think would have helped you have a positive view of yourself and feelings of yourself when you were young? Would it have been some sort of social support, like a positive influence from a certain person ?**

Well, ya. I think that if I had a friend who... was involved in some sort of, I say dance because that was the thing that I had wanted to do as a kid. And my parents didn't think that I was committed to it so they weren't going to pay for it. And I understood that and didn't rebel against it and didn't argue back. So my father's wishing for me to be more aggressive in defeating this devil on my back... just never happened that way. It's not... I don't know how you resolve it. I wonder if women in places that are not as easily accessible to media, I wonder if they have the same kind of body image, but then you're getting into the whole poverty. The other thing that really bothers me, is obesity and overweight use to be seen as an issue of the wealthy and now it is seen as poor people. Poor people are the one's



who are heavy because they cant, they don't have the ability to seek out quality food and exercise.

**Is there anything else you feel is important to add or clarify? Anything that you think is important to your story of body image?**

That there have been times in my life that I have been able to take my life and not give up on it.

**Control and empowering yourself?**

I don't know what the secret is. I wish I did. But there has been no one that is more vocal about body image than Oprah. And unfortunately she's had her own demons. She maintained her weight for quite a bit of time but you know things happen.

**And maybe that's why she has been so vocal because she's experienced it.**

Ya.

Transcript 7: *Helen*

*(Introductory and identifying information removed to ensure confidentiality)*

**Great, how would you define body image? What do you think of when you think of body image?**

I think of, well first of all, I think everyone looks first. I always think it's important to know personality and that kind of stuff. But ultimately you can't know somebody without starting a conversation, so I guess you kind of look at somebody and go "is this persona approachable, not approachable?" There's body language that you can kind of see. So for me ultimately I think everyone looks first of all at how somebody is looking, and I think we all make pre-judgments on people that we shouldn't make pre-judgments on. And because ultimately everybody is who they are, and comfortable in their own body, and sometimes I think that when you get to know somebody, you are just wow'd by who they are and not by who they are on the outside.

**So at this point in your life how would you say you feel about yourself physically?**

I'm actually very comfortable with myself right now. You know, it's difficult as you get older you want to try to stay young, and it's a struggle because you look in the mirror and you can see it's not happening, so you hope or you wish that you can still be 20 or 30... it's hard to keep that youthfulness but right now I'm happy with the way I am and the way I look. Now I am comfortable with it.

**Do you find that you have people or things that make you feel comfortable?**

Well a great husband. So that's nice. You know, I've got some great friends that have been really helpful too. Great parents obviously, so that's really nice. They always tell me how great I am even though I maybe haven't done anything- so that's nice.

**Good. Take your time. So we will just talk about different time periods in your life, it can be an event or a general feeling, you can start with childhood.**

I have an older sister, she is only about a year and a couple of months older than me. she has always struggled with weight and I fortunately have always been somebody whose been slimmer, not thin- thin, but slim. So my sister, I think, always use to say things to me like "how are you like you, and I'm like this?" and "why aren't you big?" so it's always hard, because I'm just who I am and she is who she is. But she really struggled with people not liking her because of her size and already the pressures of feeling that you had to be thin were already there, prevalent when I was younger. About being active and all that- and I was, I was more of a tom boy than my sister, she sat around more, watched TV more, so I

tried to include her in a lot of stuff. So my sister and I have had an on-off relationship because of it. Because she has always looked at me like “why did she get that?” or “why is she like that?” and “how is it that she turned out or had this?”. So I think it’s jealousy and it’s been hard on our relationship because I’ve never once felt that she should feel like that. We roomed together for like the first, until I was 12 so she and I were roommates. So we were fairly close obviously and I guess as she got older, and more uncomfortable with who she was, and maybe more grudgingly, and more importantly she thought of me as something else, it just put a lot of stress and strain.

**Definitely.**

It’s kind of continued because my sister is still a bigger person. And my family overall tends to be big, big- like all the women tend to be. So I am very lucky that I am not, but you still get that real sense of not belonging because they all look at me like “how did you turn out like that?” and “why are you like that?” and I always felt like kind of in a – I never really felt as welcomed, if that’s at all possible. I don’t know how to explain it.

**I understand.**

I never really felt like I was a part of the group because I wasn’t like them.

**Perfect.**

Weird.

**And that puts a lot of stress?**

It does! cause I’m thinking to myself “what? You’d only like me if I was bigger? Why can’t you like me for who I am and forget that I’m lucky my metabolism lets me be who I am”. I do watch what I eat, I don’t go crazy, but you know. So that was my childhood.

**Perfect. So it was mostly family influence?**

Mostly family. Because I have to say kids, as a kid, I am just trying to think back about kids...they gave my sister a hard time, and I’m thinking back then, I have to say, there weren’t as many overweight children because we really were actively playing outside, so there was very few, so the one’s that were, were probably picked on more – because you could really see them. So ya, I guess it wasn’t really until high school when you really saw more demographics of everybody that comes to the big school - then you saw more of that. I guess because I came from a very small town, and a very small school – I guess it just wasn’t the same. I don’t know, I think things have changed. We were a lot busier, we were outside all the time, we would skip for like 5 hours and not think anything of it.

**It has changed a lot. A lot more indoor screen-type activities.**

Absolutely. Definitely.

**How about adolescence?**

Well you know when adolescence comes you get very self-conscious because I was very much a tom boy, so when my breast started to develop I was very self-conscious of it. I did not want to wear a bra, I was trying to find all kinds of things to cover that. So I didn't really feel comfortable with myself at all as an adolescent. I think we all go through it, and yet it's funny cause some women, not myself, but others that I ended up being friends with – they embraced it, they loved the fact that they had that, and they were out there with them, and I'd be still like...and I guess I always thought (even back then) well I don't have as big of breasts as my friends, and you know, felt different because I wasn't. so adolescence was kind of (and also getting my period, was kind of like "oh no! what's this?" and didn't like that obviously) and I think I became very self-conscious and drew back a lot within myself, I wasn't as outgoing, I was very self-conscious. Especially in high school, before that I would be on every team, high school I was very self-conscious and didn't know how I was gonna fit in, so I really got shy and didn't participate in very many things. And that was a big difference from elementary school to high school, in everything and then doing nothing.

**Perfect. Great, did you find there were any big influences as a teen, or was it your body changing?**

Ya. you know friends take you for who you are which is nice. And I guess you know, I didn't feel like, I guess I just sort of got comfortable with how it was and this is how it's going to be.

**Perfect. How about going into your 20s? Were there many changes?**

Not really. That's sort of when work started to come in, finishing school, going off to work. So again the work force puts a whole different perspective onto your life, you know you're working with older people, people of your age. Again – I didn't feel, I was feeling a little bit more, I was given lots of great opportunities and so I felt far more comfortable with myself, I really felt like I could do anything I wanted to. So I came from that very shy, didn't say much in high school, and even going off to college- didn't say much, a very quiet person. I found going off into the work force, and I guess it was around my 20s that I didn't mind saying my opinions, and people listened to my opinions, whereas before I didn't really think I had any opinions or didn't think I should be heard or listened to, so I became very... more outgoing. My personality changed, I became more

comfortable with myself, probably a little bit too over- opinionated on some things, probably a little extreme.

**Why do you think you became more comfortable?**

I don't know, I think it was just a sense of knowing who I was, meaning I just really came to think "hey I am a great person, I have a lot to give to this job, I am really good at my job, I really am great at meeting these people, and learning about these people". And I think there is that thing where you start to learn, and you learn, and learn, and learn. And the more you learn the more you feel confident about what you have to say about things. I think it's just life experiences made me more comfortable and more outgoing.

**Good. Perfect. And did you have any life changes, were you married or have kids?**

I did get married when I was 22, so I was very young, didn't have kids until 5 years later. So again, like with the marriage, I felt good about myself because I was on my own, having my own apartment, paying for all my bills, not relying on my parents for anything. So I guess you just sort of feel "wow look at me I'm an adult now". We didn't have kids until 5 years into the marriage so I was 27 when I had my first. That was a big change for us obviously. It was kind of unexpected but it was a nice unexpected kind of situation. Having my body change as far as how it looked- I loved to the fact that I was carrying a baby. But then it was the extra struggle of "oh do I look awful" because your body changes. So again, you want to keep what you have, but you can't and you let it go and I have to say having my son was the best thing that ever happened to me... So being a mom was just so much fun, I was able to stay home and not have to go back to work. So I was very fortunate that I didn't have to worry about going back, we ultimately decided to relocate so that we'd have a place that we could afford on one salary. So we made lots of changes so that I could be home. And then three years later, I had my daughter.

**So you had your boy and your girl. Did being a new mom, in terms of your body- did that bother you?**

I wasn't too worried about how I looked when I was pregnant cause I felt great. For me I was very fortunate that I didn't have the morning sickness or any of that. So I was really lucky. The weight seemed to come off fairly easily afterwards so it wasn't like it was a big problem. It was hard to go from working and having that core group that you always knew to being at home and not having the adult interaction. So I really made sure that I would go to groups where the kids could play and I could talk to adults and stuff. And I did a lot of babysitting too so I could stay home and bring in more kids, so to be able to stay home with them. So that part of it, I enjoyed thoroughly being a stay at home mom, I would not regret being at home with my kids, and I was home for 16 years. So that was a nice long

time for me to be able to do that, and I absolutely love every second that I made that decision. My son says to me “but you gave up your career” I said “ I didn’t give up my career” I said “ look what I got instead, that was my career”. So it was fun, I got to volunteer at the schools, you know I got to be, and go on field trips. So it was good.

**That brings you into your 30s. Did things stay the same?**

I have to say ya, as far as my body image and stuff? Ya. I guess when you get older, again you always want to maintain, remember what I looked like when I was in my 20s, hmm should I try to look like that? Again there were times when I did lose a lot of weight (and I did write that down on my sheet) like after I stopped breast feeding my daughter I just went way, way down, probably to the lowest I’ve ever been. And also I liked exercising, I went and joined a club, again that was for me to get out, to get away, have some mom time just for me. So I would exercise 3 or 4 times a week. So I don’t know if that had anything to do with it. So I was obviously conscious of what I was trying to maintain because I wouldn’t have gone to the gym so much. And then just you know people saying “ you look great, you lost all the weight after the pregnancy” you know, that’s good. But it’s kind of hard to always maintain that because you can’t.

**You felt pressure?**

You do, you do feel pressured about staying because first of all you don’t like the fact that your clothes don’t fit you any more. Plus I guess you know, it all stems back to wanting to make sure I’m not like the rest of my family. This is an opportunity where I could plump up at this time – but fortunately I was conscientious about making sure I didn’t gain too much weight. I guess ultimately we always do struggle with the weight issue all along, from when I was little (worried about the fact that I was always so thin) and when an adult I was like “ I still want to keep that way, as much as I possibly can, I’m gonna try the best”

**So it’s not so much the feelings of being insecure because you are overweight- it is the feeling of being afraid that you will become overweight?**

Yes exactly. Exactly, just afraid. Knowing that it is in my family, knowing you know?

**That it is a possibility?**

Exactly. So in my 30s, like I still was comfortable with who I was. But I was little more self-conscious about making sure I did stay the weight that I was. So I worked harder at it.

**Perfect. So coming into your 40s were things the same still?**

Well in my 40s I was realizing that my marriage wasn't where I wanted it to be. When it becomes an unhappy situation, you become unhappy with yourself and who you are, and why you're staying and what you're doing. And you're kind of looking at everything and going "hmm is this really where I wanna be? Is this really my life? I am so miserable now" so my husband and I totally went in different directions. He went off and did his thing, I went off and did my thing. So we were never a cohesive partnership anymore. You realize your kids are still there, so you're trying to pull it together for them, and you know, you never ever, want obviously to separate or have a divorce. But it ultimately just got down to – not being happy, not being happy with who he was, or who I was in this relationship. I sort of just thought to myself "I want so much more in my life and this is not it". It was when my daughter went off to university at 17 (I knew she was leaving, she was going off to Ottawa) and my son, he was already done school (he was going to move to London, Ontario). So it was then, when I really looked at my life and said "what am I doing in this relationship and do I want to be with this person for the rest of my life?" and it was a hard struggle obviously. It was very difficult to tell somebody that you don't love them anymore, that you don't want to be with them anymore, even though we were together 25 years. That's a long time to be with somebody, but it had been 10 or more years when I was not happy, and he obviously wasn't happy but he wasn't about to say anything. So I guess at that time in my life, I was more comfortable with who I was, who I wanted to be, and who I wanted to have in my life that I finally had the strength enough to say "we're done- completely and truly, utterly done". And he obviously didn't want to believe it, he thought if we went to counseling we could fix it, and this and that. So I think he ultimately thought we would get back together again even though we had put the house up for sale, you know, already talked about how things were going to be divided "you get this, I get that". We were trying to be good about the whole thing, and trying to keep it together for the kids too because ultimately that's what you have to do. So when the house finally sold, and I went off and bought a house on my own, he realized I really was serious. Then I think he thought I would move back. So I guess at that time in my life I felt the strongest but the weakest. Because I felt strong that I could do it but in the weakness (I'm going to cry again)..

**That's okay, just take your time..**

...I felt bad about breaking up my family, and that I didn't want them to hate me because I wasn't happy or that I didn't work hard enough at it so... I put a lot of pressures on myself worrying and stressing about how they were feeling and whether I had made the right choice. You know? Should I have stayed because, for them so they would not be hating me? But ultimately I couldn't stay in that relationship anymore. So even to this day I still worry about what I've done to them, and just a lot of extra pressure on myself. So... so just them that I really worry about. You know I have a good relationship with both my kids. But my son was the one who ultimately said "well that's your moral dilemma" when I told him that his dad and I were going to split up. So ultimately he thought we should

stay together for better or worse, blah, blah, blah, never realizing that if you're in a bad relationship, whether you are married or not married... I mean how many times have we been in a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship and it didn't work out because that person didn't make you feel good or you know, too many conflicts, blah, blah, blah. My daughter was the one who understood, but then she was the one who was at university so she had to be the person who was kind of in the middle because obviously we had to split all her costs for university. So I think she felt the pressures of mom not talking to dad and you know, her dad would say "ask your mom". We both did it. I would say "ask your dad, is he willing to spend half on bringing you home?". So she got the extra pressure where my son, he didn't because he was on his own and we didn't have to worry about that. In some ways I do feel bad that she got put in the middle of that relationship because ultimately the longer, at first when we first split, we tried to maintain friends. You can't stay friends because there is a reason why I didn't want to be with him. I don't want to be his friend now- he is my ex. I am not going to have him over for Thanksgiving dinners, I heard about those families. I'm like "how do you do that!?" "why would you do that?". So the hardest out of that was realizing I was on my own, and I was by myself. And I have to say it was good, but it was very lonely because I went from 4 people in a house to just me in a house, to a different house. So I found it very lonesome, and I found it a very funny time in my life. First of all I was 48, for me, I had a couple of single friends, and they were like "lets go, lets go to the bar" and I was like "nooooo, I didn't go to the bar in my 20s I'm not going to go when I'm 48" and they all go "come on out, come on out". So I did try it a couple of times...not for me. So I was comfortable not wanting to meet anybody, I didn't want to. I just wanted to focus on finding out who I was, and what I wanted, and what I would not accept... ever again. And why did I...so I really came to understand me at that time. I think you have to do that, you have to do self-reflections because otherwise you're never going to learn anything if you don't do that. So I learned an awful lot about myself, and I did go to like a "people of separations" there was a course being offered. Like you went there and you kind of spilled your guts, and you had to do homework and stuff. So I think it was good to kind of get it all out and you were with people you didn't know so it didn't matter right? So you could say anything cause you're like "ya whatever I'll never see them again" so it was a cleansing. And it was good, it was a good cleansing. So still didn't expect to find anybody, blah, blah, blah and then was invited over to some friends for dinner and you know, and then my new husband now, he was there, we got introduced. He just sort of said to me very off the cuff "can I call you? Can we maybe go for like a coffee or drink" so I said "ya sure". I was very conscious because I really you know didn't want to date anybody. So at the beginning I was like "I can only see you Tuesdays and Thursdays"... I was pathetic! "And maybe every other weekend but not every weekend." It just progressed. I am really fortunate because I really have a really amazing guy that I just couldn't have asked for anything more. We just got married last December so...

**So you are coming up on a year now then.**



It's just not the same the second time around you're just like whatever. That's just because even when we got married we went off to an island and just... We both had the big weddings before, we don't need the weddings. We told the family and they were all happy for us.

**Great. That is basically leading up until now really. Do you find that your relationship with your husband right now helps you to be positive.**

Yes it makes me feel better about myself. "It doesn't matter, and don't worry about it" he always says. "Don't worry about it. Stop stressing!" so that's good because I was a bit of a worry wart – my whole life. I'm always very conscious of how I am making other people feel, so I always want everyone to be happy, not feel bad, so I would stress about a lot of stuff. I would be worried like "I just said that to so and so I hope they are okay with that, I hope I didn't say too much" or whatever. So his attitude is "just don't worry about it, let it go, why do you care it's done, you can't change it" so he's like, he's much more calming, laid back than I am. And I think that's a good mix for us. The strugglings are obviously-blended family, it's never easy. We said from the very beginning "I'm not going to say anything, I'm not parenting your children, and you're not going to parent my children. Those are yours and these are mine and whatever we ultimately decide we will of course, tell each other if we're going to help out our kids" but I said "seriously I don't discipline your kids, you don't discipline my kids". So it's good that way, my daughter now that she is living with us, I'm sure for her she's probably like "oh great it's really their house" and she doesn't feel like it's hers. I'm sure its short term until she gets what she needs to do. For me, it's probably the best I've felt in a very long time as adult. About who I am, where I am at, but I do worry still about how I look. Like I told you, I try to pretend or think that I'd like to still look like I'm in my 20s but I'm not. Its funny how it's always going to be there. And I think as we get older, I mean I guess, I don't know because I've never really talked to anybody about body image and how people feel about it. I guess because we just slap it off, I think now it's more out there with media, magazines and all that kind of stuff about how we're supposed to look. But I think there's a real sense of pressure on a lot of people at a very young age. Because I know even one of the girls in my grade 2 class, she was you know a little chunky, and she knew it because she came up to me and she said "so and so is teasing me about how big I am". It's funny because it's there and always will be but I think it's more now. More pressure on people to be properly, look whatever, and at a younger age.

**And at every age.**

Yes! So even for myself because I'm in menopause now, the weight tends to go on a little bit easier now so you know, I worry about that, I don't want it to happen. But being in menopause is probably the nicest and greatest things. Not having to worry about your period anymore, it's just so great. The hot flashes I

can live with those because they are not that bad for me. It's just nice to have that freedom of never having to worry about you know, its coming up to that time.

**So would you say your biggest concern is aging in general?**

Aging in general, absolutely. I know when the gray hair comes in and then you know the wrinkles start and you're realizing "hey I am not as youthful as I use to look". And just knowing, and feeling more tired, not as "oh I use to be able to walk that far but now I can't so much". So just knowing that things are changing and also to you worry about health because now my parents are getting older and I'm seeing their health issues, I wanna make sure that I don't have those health issues. So I'm trying my best to change things they're doing wrong so I don't end up down their road.

**That's good.**

Ya.

**Perfect. So what would you say is a time that you felt particularly good about yourself? Can you think of a specific time period in your life?**

I have to honestly say, I think I felt good about myself when I had my kids obviously. But I think now I am more comfortable with who I am and where I am at – right now. So I'm gonna say probably now. I guess it's just that freedom of knowing, you know what? Life is behind me, look at what I've done, and look at what I have to look forward to.

**Do you think that influence is from yourself?**

I think it's a combination of a whole bunch of stuff because I love my job, I love my family, I love my new husband. So I think it's just being in that whole big realm of niceness and greatness right now that just makes me feel that "wow this is really great".

**Perfect. When would you say is a time that your body image was particularly negative?**

Well, I'm gonna have to say, I think it was negative, like I say the pressures of when I was younger of "why you? Why you?". And I think also when I was going through my divorce, when I really realized that I had hurt people that became a lot of pressure on me and I was feeling bad about who I was. Again because I was so conscientious about how other people are feeling, obviously I'm thinking I really have hurt a lot of people, and maybe I was being too selfish, you know "why were you thinking about yourself? Why weren't you thinking about others?". So that was probably a downward part. But also too I'm gonna say probably throughout the last part of when my relationship with my ex wasn't good, like when we

weren't together as a couple, we were in separate rooms, we were just living in the same house basically. That was a very bad time, because ultimately when you're not loved, or cared for, or respected, then you have no great sense of self worth. So hence you just feel really bad about who you are and what you're doing. That was probably my worst.

**Perfect. Okay, what about culture or background, or society? What influence has that had on your journey so far?**

You mean family?

**Ya or the world around us, media, or if you have a background that you think really influences you're the idea of how a woman should be.**

Ultimately I like to watch (I don't watch a lot of TV) I like Oprah because she brings out things that women never talked about before. And I like things like Dr. Oz always looking into things like health issues, and just again understanding and being more aware. And I do a lot of reading so I'm very much the type of person who likes to be on board with anything new that comes about and looks into it. So they all do influence me obviously- I'm going to have to say those things probably the most.

**And they are positive?**

They are very positive, because again they are making me think, making me go and research and look at things. I've gone to a naturopath. I don't like going to the doctor that much. For a while I was getting lots of bladder infections and stuff like that so I went to her instead because I thought I can't always take medicine it's crazy. So she brought me into a whole new realm of eating better, taking vitamins, so just a little bit...

**Expanding yourself.**

Yes. Sure.

**Has society ever had a negative influence on you?**

Umm, no. I mean ultimately I don't know about the negativity, I guess other than if people don't know me they could judge me for how I look I guess. I've never really had any...no. I can't think right now of anything negative.

**Okay that's good. So overall what has body image meant to your life, what role has it played? Was it something that was very important?**

I would say ya, probably. As much as you don't want it to. And I'm thinking now, the more you ask me questions, how much body image has played an important

role in my life. And I honestly never really thought about it as being that but the more you are asking me questions the more I am realizing wow it looks like I really was conscientious about how I looked and whatever and I just, I guess you don't think of it at the time that you're doing it. But looking back on it, I think overall society, or myself, I think it's a combination of everything makes you still realize that you have to look the way...like look a certain way. And it's sad but it's true.

**And maybe it's the fact that everyone feels that way so you don't realize it?**

Exactly, ya the pressures are there. I mean I never even realized how many pressures I had until I started talking to you about my childhood. Oh ya, you know what? I was the only one that was thin- so there's the pressures already there. So ya, I think ultimately, I didn't realize how much we are aware of it. And I don't know if other women feel the same way but I think we bottle it up and don't think about it. But overall I think we do all worry about it.

**I think so. Perfect. Do you think the way you felt about your body in the past or now, has ever stopped you from doing anything, stopped you from maybe participating?**

No. the only time was when I mentioned..

**Adolescence?**

Ya. but other than that – no.

**Has it ever motivated you to do something, you mentioned exercise?**

Exercising and when I was doing that I ended up teaching some exercise classes. So that made me more aware of that, and that I had the confidence to do that because it's not always easy to be in front of the class and teaching the class as opposed to in the class. So I felt comfortable at that point in my life, because I knew what I was doing and people looked up to me.

**Good. So exercise has been a really big part of your life.**

Absolutely. I have to say, I walk at least, at least a half an hour to an hour every day. I do, I am very conscientious, I think it's very important to exercise. I'm not saying go and do it for 3 hours but like I say a good walk..

**Getting moving.**

Right.

**Okay, has the way you felt about your body ever made you enjoy things less or more, or do you think that is something separate?**

I don't know. It's funny about body image because whenever it comes to, like whenever we're going to go away and you have to find that bathing suit. And you go to that store, and you say to yourself, you try on something and you go "oh God I look awful!" and then, so you find what you think you look good in. Then you go to the beach and you look at people and you say "did they not look at themselves before they came out?". I was worried about the way I was looking in a bathing suit and some people just have NO worries about how they look. I always say to myself "what are you worried about? Why are you fretting in that bathing suit store, when you look fine". But again there is that pressure of "oh I don't look good" or "wow maybe I shouldn't be wearing a 2 piece bathing suit anymore, I am in my 50s maybe I should be wearing a once piece bathing suit" and then I go out there and I see this like 70 year old women who is like 250 pounds and she is in a 2 piece bathing suit! And I am thinking what am I putting pressure on myself for? She's comfortable with who she is and she's strutting around like she's "okay look at me" and I'm like whoa. I guess I just I don't know... I think sometimes I just don't have that self-confidence to think "hey you know, you do look good, get out there, do it."

**Not to worry so much?**

Exactly.

**What do you think is important to ask women about body image? What is important to know about it? From you experience what is important to know?**

You know what, I think ultimately, I think there should be more, we as women should talk more about it. We don't. We're very self conscious about it or perhaps we think "am I the only one feeling it? Maybe if I found out that other people felt the same way I did" but we all don't, we all keep it all inside. I think it is important, I've seen it with the little kids, to realize that the outside stuff doesn't make a person. It's the inside stuff that makes a person, and that we shouldn't put so much emphasis on that exterior body thing. We're a culture who likes the sexual, the way we exploit our bodies, everything showing, and you know, maybe as a society... I don't know. I don't know, it's sort of one of those things that I think we should talk more about it, more open about it. I think more women would probably gain a lot more, and feeling like "wow I felt like that and I just never talked about it". I just honestly never even thought about body image until you were asking me these questions or even before I was coming here. I was thinking "what does body image mean to me?" because I never really thought about it, but it's there for everybody. I think we all worry about it. I think we all do so I kinda wish there were more ways we could understand it and realize it's okay to have the feelings were feeling. Because I think were told in society to

bottle it up, move on, don't worry about it, or it's just in your head, or just I mean you know. There's lots of eating disorders out there because of it. And why is it now? Like it never use to be like that, so there is something in our society that's just not right. Because you look back at pioneer times they never had struggles with it, nobody cared, everyone was the same. So I don't know, I guess it's the pressures of media, society... I think a lot of people look at celebrities and think they have to be like them or "oh look at their life".

**Our culture has become very obsessed with celebrity life.**

Absolutely! It's sad that we look at other people and are more in awe of their destruction and their silliness, and everybody loves it. I think there are lots of things that I wish we could change, just for the young kids that are coming up. I worry about them, I worry about what they're going to be because if were at this part in our lives- what are they going to be like? Is there going to be more pressure for them.

**That's a good point- what is going to happen to this generation that has more pressure, what is going to happen in their later years?**

What is going to happen? There is going to more and more and more. And these kids know about all these celebrities and how they look. They are quite aware of it. They are the ones that, we never had clothing from like Hilary Duff. We never had that stuff, so I just worry about what it's going to be.

**Do you have any thing else you would like to add?**

Now that this has been brought up, I am probably going to self-explore and probably think a little bit more about how much an influence have things in my life been to my body image today. Because I think, I think you open up things in your life that you're like "wow I never thought of that but ya it could be this"

**So do you think it's important to take the time to reflect on that?**

Yes because it's who I am! Unfortunately if it's good or bad or whatever, it's who you are. And there are reasons why I felt the need to be sure and conscientious about how I look. I didn't realize I was so much, but now I really do realize, it did play a big role in my life and I wanted to be careful, and to not gain a lot of weight. So I just want to make sure I don't put those pressures on anybody else around me.

**Is that something that you talk to your daughter about?**

No we didn't really talk to much about it. So it would be interesting to find out how much she saw from me, right? Or even like my sister, you know it would be interesting to ask her if she felt the same, what her feelings were like as a kid. It

would just be interesting to find out how she perceived her childhood. Just kind of ask like some of the questions you just said, not deeply but just you know “hey what was your childhood like? How was it for you?”. Just to see what she comes up with and then who knows maybe she and I would have this great discussion over how her perception and my perception. Either we will be bang on, right on, or we’re gonna be like “wow that’s what you saw and this is what I saw”. Ya I think it would be interesting.

**Maybe clear things up?**

Absolutely. That you bottle up and don’t realize that it’s been bothering you. I think ultimately it’s good to think about these things. Like it’s got me thinking.

**It comes back to what you said earlier about openness because maybe you think someone thinks one thing and you think another.**

Ya and you can’t assume because we all know what assuming does...you cant do that!

**That’s true.**

We all worry about it. I volunteer at a nursing home, and I’ve got women who are like “honey I can’t leave I gotta put my lipstick on” and I’m like “what are you worried about we’re just going down the hall” but they have to put their lipstick on “oh I gotta fix my hair” and we’re just going down the hall, we’re walking. So it’s funny that..

**The pressure doesn’t go away?**

I don’t think so. I don’t think so. I don’t know if it’s your personality that makes you more than... because there are some days I’m like I don’t care, and others I’m going to make sure I look good. There are some days I couldn’t care less! So I don’t know.

**Perfect.**