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# Adolescent Female Embodiment As A Transformational Experience In The Lives of Women: An Empirical Existential- Phenomenological Investigation

Allyson Havill

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Adolescent Female Embodiment as Transformational Experience in the Lives  
of Women: An Empirical Existential-Phenomenological Investigation

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Psychology Department

McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Allyson Havill

March 31, 2006

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## ABSTRACT

Adolescence can be a time of psychological vulnerability in the life cycle of a woman as she experiences multiple developmental changes. As articulated in the literature related to adolescent female development, a changing body may be at the heart of what can make this a time of profound transition for the adolescent girl as she attempts to negotiate alterations in her identity and self-concept, and consequently her social roles.

The purpose of this investigation of adolescent female embodiment was to understand the experience of adolescent girls as it relates to their changing bodies, and to explore the question of whether these experiences put them at risk for limitations and a loss of potential in their lives as adult women. Specifically, this investigation examined the vulnerability of the adolescent girl, as identified by Pipher, to a loss of wholeness, self-confidence, and self-direction that may continue into adulthood.

The means for illuminating these existential possibilities involved asking adult women to reflect upon and describe their experiences of adolescent bodily change in terms of how these changes had affected their view of themselves, their relationships with others, and their everyday lives, as well as the ways in which these experiences had affected their lives since adolescence.

The findings of this study of adolescent female embodiment indicate a profound unity between the body and the self, and supports previous research suggesting a strong unity between body image and self-concept in this population. Strong connections between alterations in the body/self and changes in familial and social relationships were also articulated by the participants of this study. Relationships cited as being most significantly affected, were those with their mothers, whom they

felt had not prepared them for what was to come, and their relationships with male and female peers which were altered in relation to this new sense of confusion or lack of self-assuredness. The participants of the study also universally described their awareness of their bodies becoming objects in the world, and the limitations that this increased self-consciousness placed upon them and their freedoms. This investigation also identified individual struggles that the participants continue to engage in as adult women, struggles that involve developing a sense of autonomy and authenticity, and struggles to reclaim the self.

The results of this investigation are relevant for clinical assessment and intervention with adolescent girls and women as they make explicit some of the multiple losses and transitions that make them potentially vulnerable to anxiety and depression, and which must be successfully negotiated by this population.

## INTRODUCTION

In her 1994 book, Reviving Ophelia, Mary Pipher makes the observation that adolescent girls “crash and burn in a social and developmental Bermuda Triangle” (p.19). Pipher points out that a changing body is one of the contributing factors which make young girls especially vulnerable to what she calls a disowning of the adolescent girl’s true self. She makes the claim that this process can result in a loss of wholeness, self-confidence, and self-direction that can last well into adulthood.

This investigation will seek to understand what an adolescent girl experiences, and how her world changes as her body undergoes the physical changes associated with adolescence. It will also explore whether these experiences are so profound, as Pipher suggests, that she experiences limitations and loss of potential in her adult life.

The crucial role that the body plays in the changing world of the adolescent girl is clearly articulated in the literature. Several authors implicate the body as being at the core of what makes adolescence such a time of vulnerability in the life cycle of a woman.

Brumberg (1997) notes that “the body is at the heart of the crisis of confidence that Pipher and others describe” (p.xxiv). She reports that at age thirteen, fifty-three percent of girls express unhappiness with their bodies, and by age seventeen the level of dissatisfaction increases to seventy-eight percent. She points out that discussion of the body and how to improve it are a main focus of attention in publications and media targeting adolescent girls. As the adolescent girl faces the question – Who am I? Who do I want to be? – the answer revolves increasingly around the body. The increase in

anorexia and bulimia over the last thirty years indicates that for some girls the body becomes an obsession. But even among those who never develop eating disorders, the body becomes central to the way in which girls define themselves. Brumberg points out that although young women have greater freedom and increased options, because of unique biological and cultural forces, they also experience greater pressure and risks than they did a century ago. Brumberg believes that the body is “central to the experience of female adolescence” (p.xxv), that adolescent girls make the body their “central project” (p.xxv).

Basow and Rubin (1999) describe adolescence as a critical period, a crossroads in which girls are attempting to stay in touch with themselves and their own thoughts and feelings, and at the same time, meet the female role expectations imposed on them by others. They “are confronted with heightened expectations to conform to a more restricted female role” (p.31). Basow and Rubin point out that this adult female role is a role in which there is a focus on being attractive to men and serving the needs of others. In order to do this, they may come to discount their own feelings, leading to increased self-doubt and conflict. Problems such as eating disorders, body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, depression, and limited striving towards achievements can be consequences. They point out that by age fifteen, girls are twice as likely as boys to be depressed, with this ratio remaining through adulthood. Basow and Rubin suggest that one of the reasons for such a disparity may be what they describe as the greater challenges faced by adolescent girls during early adolescence. One of these potential problem areas is a negative body image. Significant changes in the body during adolescence include

menstruation, the development of secondary sex characteristics, widening hips, and an increase in the body's storing of fat. These changes are a function of nutrition, genes and hormones. But the culture's ideal female image which is presented to the adolescent girl primarily through advertising and the media, and which girls are encouraged to aspire to, are "virtually unattainable without extreme dieting or cosmetic surgery" (p.35).

Streigel-Moore and Cachelin (1999) identify the process of coming to terms with the biological changes that come with adolescence as a major developmental challenge for girls in Western industrialized countries. Adolescence is associated with weight gain, and this developmental change occurs in a cultural context that promotes being extremely thin as an ideal of feminine beauty. Therefore, the natural changes associated with adolescence are at odds with the cultural ideals of female beauty. Thus, there is tension between this cultural ideal of female beauty, and the physical reality of the female body. The combination of a cultural prescription for girls to care about the opinions of others, to define themselves through their physical appearance, and the beauty ideal of thinness, creates a powerful force to motivate girls to pursue thinness. Streigel-Moore and Cachelin point out that, confronted with the weight gain associated with adolescence, and intensified gender role expectations, it is normative for adolescent girls to experience intense dissatisfaction with their bodies. For some, concerns about their physical appearance become overwhelming and eclipse the pursuit of other life goals. For a particular group of girls, their negative feelings about their bodies and their efforts to achieve a thin body contribute to the development of eating disorders. Eating disorders represent a major health problem for adolescent girls. An estimated one percent to three

percent of adolescent girls meet the diagnostic criteria for anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa. Even though a small number of adolescent girls develop diagnosed eating disorders, a large majority of girls and women submit to dieting and have subclinical concerns about eating, body dissatisfaction and a “normal discontent” (p.101) with their bodies. These issues represent a risk for other forms of psychopathology such as depression.

Thus, support is found in the psychological literature for the centrality of the body in not only diagnosed disorders in adolescent girls such as eating disorders and depression, but the far more widespread problem of dissatisfaction and unhappiness with their own bodies.

Understanding how women experience the developmental period of adolescence with its dramatic emphasis on the body and its shifting role expectations, can be clinically useful. What is learned through this investigation may contribute to a foundation of knowledge that can be used to develop clinical interventions for psychotherapy with women and adolescent girls.

A sampling of some of the research dealing with body image in adolescent girls will provide evidence to suggest that adolescent girls do indeed appear to be vulnerable to a variety of difficulties and insecurities at this particular stage of development. Several investigations will be cited, in which both males and females were studied, which found that girls appeared to have more negative and/or more complicated responses to social, environmental, and biological changes. On the other hand, there is also data to suggest that a change as significant as menarche may also have positive, integrative effects.

Because there is some conflicting data in this regard, as well as an abundance of research which appears to indicate that adolescence is a problematic developmental period for girls, there is reason to pursue some clarity as to the kinds of experiences which may most affect girls of this age.

This investigation will seek to understand something about how the lives of girls change as their bodies change, and how their experiences may affect their future development and their lives as women. This will involve allowing adult women to describe their adolescent experiences, and reflect on how they believe their lives have been subsequently influenced by these experiences.

Boss (1994) provides a useful a conceptual framework for highlighting the value of this approach as a means to access and elucidate such human experience. In Boss's Daseinanalytic approach to understanding human phenomena, human beings are motivated to conduct themselves in certain ways based on biographical events. These do not in any way cause future behavior, but rather provide motivation inducing "a person to restrict, or partially blind her to the abundance of her inborn possibilities of relating so that she fulfills only a few neurotic modes of relation to her world...It is in the form of motivations that the past addresses the present" (p.192-93). In Boss's view, a human being exists in the present in such a way that she is always engaged in coming to terms with her past. At the same time, she is fundamentally directed towards what approaches her from the future, and to do this she must be open to it. Boss understood openness as a primordial characteristic of what it means to be human. This openness allows for "the inherent unfolding of inherent potentialities into existential freedom" (p.199). For Boss,

health is equated with freedom, and it is the extent to which a particular person is open to her possibilities for relatedness, to carry out her existential potentials, that she is free from pathology. Boss's concept of a human being is one who is fundamentally open to life's possibilities and who may suffer from a constricted ability to maintain her openness. Pipher's (1994) suggestion that women are vulnerable to a loss of wholeness, self-confidence, and self-direction is an example of such constricted human potential.

An objective of the present study will be to illuminate the ways in which the participants may describe their existential possibilities as constricted in some manner, in relation to their adolescent experiences. Guignon (1993), elaborates further on the temporal quality of human existence, which, as he notes, Heidegger locates in the unfolding of a life. This temporal unfolding has the structure of a narrative. It follows that we can understand a person only in terms of where she is coming from and where she is going. "From a narrativist perspective, actions in the present are only fully intelligible in terms of their place within the narrative unfolding of the person's life...what has happened up to this point and where things are headed in general" (p.5).

Consequently, a goal of this research involves not only understanding what adolescent girls experience in relation to their changing bodies, but also what these experiences might mean in the context of a particular person's life. This investigation will seek to give a voice to the narrative, that is, the unfolding story in a person's life. Asking women to reflect on their earlier experiences, is an acknowledgement that such experiences occur not in isolation, but in the context of a life.

In addition to the significance of such experiences in the life of an individual, Gilligan

(1989) points out that the developmental journey of the adolescent girl has meaning for the historical and cultural world of which she is a part. Identifying adolescence as an “especially critical time in women’s development” (p.4), she writes of the adolescent girl who gets

...lost in a sudden disjunction or chasm as she approaches adolescence, as if the world that she knows from experience in childhood suddenly comes to an end and divides from the world she is to enter as a young woman, a world that is governed by different rules...As the river of a girl’s life flows into the sea of Western culture, she is in danger of drowning or disappearing. To take on the problem of appearance, which is the problem of her development, and to connect her life with history on a cultural scale, she must enter - and by entering disrupt - a tradition in which “human has, for the most part, meant male. Thus, a struggle often breaks out in girl’s lives at the edge of adolescence, and the fate of this struggle becomes key to girl’s development and to Western civilization (p.4).

Finally, there has been a long-standing tendency in the psychological literature, in the development of both theory and research, to neglect or pathologize the experience of women in general. Freud, whose views on female development have been so influential as well as widely criticized, was himself uncertain of his own views. He insisted that psychological differences between men and women could not be erased by culture because they were the inevitable consequences of anatomical differences between the sexes, i.e. “anatomy is destiny” (1926, p.212). However, he was doubtful about the validity of his theories about women and admitted that his understanding of women was incomplete. “We know less about the sexual life of little girls than of boys. But we need not feel ashamed of this distinction. After all, the sexual life of adult women is a ‘dark continent’ for psychology” (1926, p.212). In 1933, he concluded his final essay on femininity by saying

That is all I had to say to you about femininity. It is certainly incomplete and does

not always sound friendly. But do not forget that I have been only describing women in so far as their nature is determined by their sexual function. It is true that influence extends very far, but we do not overlook the fact that an individual woman may be a human being in other respects as well. If you want to know more about femininity, inquire from your own experiences of life, or turn to the poets, or wait until science can give you deeper and more coherent information (p.135).

In order to provide a foundation for the present investigation, a review of the literature in three relevant areas will be presented. First, selected existential-phenomenological ideas about the body will be presented. Next, there will be a discussion of theory and research in adolescent development relevant to the body. Finally, a review of past and contemporary feminist thinking about the body will be discussed. The relative strengths and limitations of various theoretical approaches to understanding the human body, especially in relation to adolescent and female development, will be reviewed. How these different views may contribute to an understanding of the life experiences of individual women will be evaluated. A particular goal of this study will be to demonstrate that although a number of theoretical perspectives offer valuable ways of understanding the human body, an existential-phenomenological approach is especially well-suited to illuminating and understanding the experience of adolescent girls as it relates to their bodies. The existential-phenomenological approach is a particularly useful method for the purpose of understanding the meaning and significance of human experience in the life of a human being.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Phenomenological Theories of the Body

The evolution of thought about the human body is well documented in the psychological literature and encompasses a number of theoretical approaches. Several conceptual approaches to understanding the body can contribute to the present study of female embodiment. Relevant theories about the body can be drawn from physiological, psychoanalytic, psychosocial, postmodern, and phenomenological thinking.

Freudian psychoanalytic theory and Erikson's psychosocial thinking will be discussed in the context of female adolescent development. Postmodern thought and related feminist conceptualizations of the body will also be discussed in terms of the proposed study. Because the purpose of this investigation involves understanding the meaning of the experiences of women, phenomenological theories of the body are particularly useful for providing a way of informing the results of this study.

Within the phenomenological psychology literature, writings about the human body which are especially relevant for this study of adolescent female embodiment, include those of Donald Moss, Paul Schilder (who may be considered a forerunner to phenomenological thinking about the body), Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Medard Boss.

Moss (1989), in a comprehensive discussion of the history of the concept of body image and a presentation of phenomenological concepts about the body, wrote that phenomenological psychology provides a way of viewing the human being holistically, as a unity of mind and body. Far from studying only subjective experience, a "physiological understanding of the body is also addressed by phenomenology. In fact,

the phenomenological understanding of the human being begins by drawing on advanced concepts from neurophysiology” (p.63).

However, neurophysiology in its most advanced form, “provides only a limited perspective on the body” (p.64). It is phenomenology that introduces the idea of the ‘lived body’, giving a “broader, more adequate perspective on the body...it is an attempt to complete the picture of the human being and his or her body that physiological psychology begins” (p.64). The phenomenological approach dispels the misconception that human beings perceive their own bodies in much the same way as they would notice any other object in the world. Historically, psychological theory postulated that sensations are the primary elements of consciousness and that a one-to-one correspondence exists between incoming sensory stimulation in the world and what occurs in the brain. In the process of interpretation occurring in perception, subjective meanings are added on to objective sensations. From this perspective, human beings start out with an objective, “disinterested visual picture of the body, and then subjective meanings are stuck on later to produce the final body image” (p.66). However, as Moss points out, this view has not been supported by the findings of over seventy years of neurological, physiological, and psychological research. Historically, the concept of body image has been generally understood to mean ‘the picture that the person has of the physical appearance of his body’ (p.64). It refers to an “explicit picture of the body” (p.64).

The contributions of neurologist Paul Schilder did much to advance our understanding on the subject of body image. Schilder had the following to say regarding body image.

The image of the human body means the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say, the way in which the body appears to ourselves. There are sensations which are given to us...Beyond that there is the immediate experience that there is a unity of the body. This unity is perceived, yet it is more than a perception. We call it a schema of our body or bodily schema...The body schema is the tridimensional image everybody has about himself. We may call it 'body image' (Fisher, p.8).

Schilder emphasized that body image is not simply a cognitive process, but reflects

“wishes, emotional attitudes, and interactions with others” (p.9). Fisher (1990)

considers Schilder’s most unique contribution to be his recognition of the involvement of the body in the events of everyday life. Schilder explored the relationship of body image to socialization, and to such experiences as being touched, feeling angry, feelings of unattractiveness, of laughing or crying, and of sexual intimacy.

As Moss (1989) points out, Schilder’s work represents a shift from understanding the body as one more object in physical space, physical space having “to do with the objective position of an object in a mathematically charted space. My own body’s spatiality has to do with specific human situations, and with attitudes and actions I may take up toward these situations” (p.74).

Schilder is cited by both Moss and Fisher for making significant contributions to the evolution of thought on the body and body image. He recognized that the body exists in relationship to a world and that the body and the image one has of her own body must be understood within that context. He pointed out that the space surrounding the body differs “from the space of physics” (Moss, p.74). If we are to understand something about the life experience of the adolescent girl as her body undergoes the physiological changes associated with adolescence, the phenomenological concepts of the

lived body and lived space are fundamental to such an investigation. Schilder's emphasis upon the importance of the body as to how one experiences the everyday events of daily living is central to the present study. One of the questions this study will seek to answer is how a girl's changing body participates in her experience of such everyday events. Inclusive in these experiences are her relationships with others and her own evolving sense of self. A viewpoint emphasizing the body as an objective physical entity is not adequate to gain access into this world. An understanding of a female's experience of her body and how it inherently becomes the means by which she will experience her life is one of the areas this investigation will seek to clarify.

Two existential phenomenological thinkers who have given particular attention to the relationship of body and world are Merleau-Ponty and Boss. Merleau-Ponty's fundamental concepts of human embodiment include several ideas that are pertinent to the proposed study of female embodiment.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) called the body as it is experienced, the "lived body". In contrast to other objects which are merely observed, one's own body cannot be viewed in such an objective manner. Merleau-Ponty pointed out that the image we have of our own bodies is not based on knowledge that is acquired in the world, but rather is understood at a "pre-reflective level".

In other words, before reflecting upon and knowing about our bodies, we live our bodies. That is, we are familiar with our own bodies in a way that allows us to act in the world without having to consciously focus on what we are doing. For instance, we can walk across a room without having to actually think about the steps we are taking. We

can do this because of the pre-reflective or lived knowledge we have of our bodies.

But what occurs when the body is changing, as for the adolescent girl, and the once familiar body becomes thematized or requires one's attention as it moves through the world?

Moss (1989) points out that for Merleau-Ponty, body image must be considered in light of the lived body as it is "built up around the immediate, prereflective familiarity with one's own body and the network of actions possible for one's body" (p.67). The picture one has of her body is "not based on a passive visual perception of 'what is there'". Rather, the picture is built up around those parts of the body that have a special relation to the world of things and of other people" (68). Our own perceptions of our bodies tend to emphasize or highlight parts of the body which are important in social relationships. Unlike a camera which objectively records, and for which all parts of the body are equal, we tend to select aspects of our own bodies, especially those we believe play a significant role in our attractiveness to others, and focus greater attention on those areas.

Pipher and many others point to the heightened vulnerability of the adolescent girl as she becomes aware of the way her body may be newly scrutinized by others in a way that it has not been before.

Merleau-Ponty (1964) points out that a child begins to experience her body as "mine" when she begins to recognize her own reflection as her own. This, of course, takes place in the realm of her relationships with others. Moss points out that "the child acquires the physical image of his or her own body in the context of 'seeing him- or herself in others' eyes" (p.67). A phenomenological understanding of the body then

makes a distinction between a body that is my own and all other objects. It is this “mineness “ that is essential to understanding the concept of body image.

Merleau-Ponty provides a description of the psychological significance for the child of acquiring the specular image, that is, her ability to recognize as her own what visually appears in the mirror. Until this time, her body is a “strongly felt, but confused reality” (p.136). In learning to recognize her own image in the mirror, she learns that “there can be a viewpoint taken” (p. 136) on her. With the advent of the specular image, she not only develops the capacity of being her own spectator, but she now develops the awareness that she is visible both for herself and others. “The acquisition of a specular image...bears not only on our relations of understanding but also our relations of being, with the world and with others (p.137).

Part of the uniqueness of the human body lies in the fact that our bodies are the only objects that we can never encounter in the world. We exist in and act upon the world through our bodies, we experience the world and others through it, yet we can never know it directly. For Merleau-Ponty (1962), the human being must be viewed as an embodied-being-in-the-world. There is a unity of the self, the body, and the world. Our bodies are always engaged in movement or behavior directed towards a world.

To summarize the key ideas which make up Merleau-Ponty’s theory of embodiment, we may say that we experience our bodies in a way that is unlike our experience of any other object in the world. We live our bodies, and consequently have an understanding of our bodies that allows us move and act in the world without conscious thought. The picture or image we have of our own bodies is influenced by the

fact that we live in relation to a world of other people and things. Subsequently then, we do not passively observe our own bodies, but rather selectively emphasize those aspects that we perceive to be significant in our social worlds. We experience our bodies always as our own and we learn to do this as we are aware that we are observed by others. Ironically, our bodies are the only objects that we ourselves cannot encounter directly but are the means through which we experience the world.

The phenomenological understanding of the body conceptualized by Merleau-Ponty includes several ideas that have particular relevance for this proposed study of female embodiment. First, it emphasizes the unity of the individual, her body and the world. If we are to understand something about the role that a girl's body plays in helping to shape her relationships with others and her experience of her world in general, then this basic unity must be understood as foundational for gaining access to these experiences. It is simply not possible if we attempt to bridge a gap created when we view the body, mind, and the world as separate entities. In quantitative research studies which will be subsequently cited, the body or body image are viewed as variables among several others. Isolated variables are examined in light of how they affect one's body image. Although these studies make contributions to the literature pertaining to body image, which will be discussed in terms of the proposed research, a problem with this approach is that it tends to view the body as an object in the world just like any other. There is no recognition of the unique characteristics of the body such as those described by Merleau-Ponty. For example, since one can never encounter her body in the way that others encounter it, she can only imagine the way others perceive it. It is this concern that the

girl and ultimately the woman has about her body, i.e., how it is viewed by others, that may become paramount in her life experience. Pipher (1993) says that the girl's feelings about her own body and how it is perceived by others are so critical, that she is at risk for significant loss of potential in her adult life. If we understand, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, that we have a knowledge of our bodies that is based entirely on our experience of living, the body becomes so familiar that we know it without even thinking about it. But what occurs when this familiar body begins to change, and what does it mean for the person whose body is in the process of changing? The once familiar body now looks, feels, and moves differently. The human body is constantly in the process of change, and at no time in a person's life does bodily change occur more rapidly than during childhood. It is not that the adolescent girl has not previously experienced major changes in her body, but the changes experienced by the adolescent girl are qualitatively quite different than those she experienced as a child.

What is also familiar to the young adolescent girl are the responses of others to her body. She comes to expect certain patterns of relating, certain reactions from others. As her body changes she may experience changes in these customary responses and what was once familiar and taken for granted now may be altered in ways that may significantly affect her life experience.

Just as her own sense of self and body are woven together and cannot really be understood as separate, her own body and other's perceptions of it also cannot really be separated. This study of female embodiment will attempt to highlight what kinds of changes occur in one's relationships with others as physical changes occur in the body.

For the girl, what could be counted on in the past is no longer necessarily true. Her body not only looks different, it feels and moves differently. Just as when there is some alteration in the body due to illness or injury, what was once taken for granted now becomes a focus of attention. How does it affect her relationship with significant others such as her parents, family, friends, boys etc? In what ways do these people relate to her differently as she adjusts to a body that is in a process of change? How does her sense of self evolve as her relationships with those around her begin to change? Just as her body and her relations with others cannot be separated, her view of her self and her body are similarly intertwined. It must be understood that there is a dialectical process involved in the way that one's view of her body, herself, and her relationships affect and are affected by each other. This is the essence of the phenomenon to be considered by the proposed study.

Although Merleau-Ponty provides a strong framework for understanding human embodiment, he does not address differences in male and female embodiment. Throughout his writings, Merleau-Ponty speaks frequently of "the body", as if there were one universal body instead of two uniquely male and female bodies. A goal of the proposed study is that it will be able to build upon Merleau-Ponty's theory of embodiment by contributing to a discussion of what specifically characterizes female embodiment.

Just as Merleau-Ponty provides a comprehensive approach for understanding the experience of human embodiment, Medard Boss' understanding of embodiment can add much to an investigation regarding the experiences of an adolescent girl during a time of

rapid and significant physical change, and especially how it may manifest in her future as an adult woman.

As previously discussed, in Boss' Daseinanalytic view, it is our openness to our inherent possibilities that is the essential characteristic of what it means to be human. Based on past events in our lives, we may at times be motivated to restrict ourselves to certain modes of relating. Pipher identifies particular areas of vulnerability for young women as "loss of wholeness, self-confidence, and self-direction" (p.25). It is possible then that women who are asked to reflect on this time in their lives will describe these types of losses. It may be said that this is a presupposition of the proposed research. Will they describe the influence of their adolescent experiences in terms of loss? Or will their experiences be quite positive, leading them to describe ways in which their adolescent experiences expanded their potential for relatedness?

It may be useful during a period of developmental change such as adolescence, to approach the phenomenon of female embodiment as similar to what occurs in the body during a time of illness or injury. This in no way is to suggest that a transition through a normal developmental period is in any way pathological, but rather the process of change occurring in the body is in some ways similar to what occurs during a time of illness or injury. That is, it requires one to become aware of her body in a way she could simply take for granted in the past.

Boss gives an example of what occurs when there is an injury involving the wrist or elbow, impairing one's ability to offer one's hand in greeting. There is a loss of one's existential potential for relatedness. During adolescence, the girl may become self-

conscious or anxious about what is happening to her physically and this may alter her ability or sense of freedom to engage fully in her usual modes of relating in the world. The adolescent girl is not only adjusting herself to the physical changes happening in her body, she must also adapt to the altered responses of others to changes in her appearance. How she negotiates this period of transition and transformation may have implications for how she lives in the future. Will she be affected in ways such that she is motivated to restrict or close off entirely, possibilities for relatedness which interfere with the unfolding of her existential potential? Or will this period be a ground for new and expanding possibilities for what it means to be human, representing a time of increasing freedom and openness to those possibilities?

Boss (1994) identifies a structure for examining the question of an individual's freedom to carry out her inborn possibilities. We may look at 1) how a person's freedom to live out her potentialities is impaired or interfered with at a given time; 2) What are these possibilities; and 3) with respect to which aspects of a person's world does this impairment occur?

This is a useful framework within which to conduct the proposed study. This investigation will seek to address these three aspects of an individual woman's existence and the results will be discussed in terms of Boss' Daseinanalytic approach.

### The Body and Adolescent Development

There are several theorists who can contribute to an understanding of the adolescent girl's struggle with her changing body. Psychoanalytic views of adolescent development

provide quite detailed theoretical accounts of the developmental process during adolescence, and clearly delineate male and female development. Classic psychoanalytic views however, have been widely criticized for their attempts to understand female development in male terms. In other words, masculine development is consistently used as a baseline to which females are compared. The outcome of considering the female in terms of the male has been that in the traditional psychoanalytic view, the female is understood to be inferior. Many psychoanalytic theorists, most notably Karen Horney, and Clara Thompson among others, moved away from Freud's classical psychoanalytic model and assigned a higher value to interpersonal and cultural forces as being influential to female development.

Because his theory devotes particular attention to the adolescent period, and emphasizes a physical ground for personality development, the ideas of Freud are especially relevant to this investigation. It is important to include Freud in this discussion of developmental theories because subsequent theories were greatly influenced by Freud and the male bias inclusive in his theories has been implicitly adopted by many of them. Freud's understanding of the female as inherently inferior to the male is rooted in his theory of psychosexual development and more specifically the phallic stage.

His thinking about the Oedipal complex forms the basis for the masculine bias which pervades not only the psychoanalytic theorists but, as Gilligan (1993) points out, psychological theories in general. As the boy develops sexual feelings towards the mother, his father is viewed as a rival. He resents his father and begins to imagine that his father views him as a threat. He fears his father will retaliate, and as he becomes

aware of the absence of a penis in the little girl, he concludes that this is the result of punishment for seducing the mother. This creates anxiety that he will be castrated as well and as a result, he represses his sexual impulses towards his mother.

According to Freud (1925), this has strong implications for personality development. This castration anxiety is actually adaptive in terms of development of personality as it enables the boy to forget his sexual longing for his mother and his hostility towards his father. This is accomplished through repression. It also allows the boy to identify with his father and take on many of his father's values. Because identification is the adaptive response to the Oedipal desires, in Freud's view, castration anxiety is ultimately responsible for shaping the superego. Freud conceptualized a different path for the girl. Although she initially forms a strong attachment to her mother, when she discovers that she doesn't have a penis she experiences a sense of jealousy and inferiority which Freud called penis envy. She holds her mother responsible for this and so her attachment to her mother is weakened. She transfers her love to her father since he possesses what she desires. Since she experiences herself as an already castrated being, she experiences less anxiety over possible retaliation than the boy. Her attraction is not as strongly repressed as the boy's attraction to his mother. This diminishes her motivation to identify with her mother and, as a result, Freud concludes that her superego is not as well-formed as the boy's. He argues that women are more narcissistic and insecure than men. In response to criticism, Freud insisted that psychological differences between men and women could not be erased by culture because they were inevitable consequences of anatomical differences between the sexes.

This view of male and female development provides the context for understanding Freud's theory of adolescent development, which again includes divergent explanations of male and female development. In his "The Transformations of Puberty" (1938), Freud states that prior to the pubertal phase, the sexual instinct has been primarily autoerotic but now for the first time is directed towards a sexual object. He suggests that the sexual development of the male and female "now part company. The male sexual development is more consistent and easier to understand, while in the woman, a sort of 'regression seems to appear'" (p.604). Freud points out the importance of this stage for later development. "It is known that the sharp division between the male and female character is established at puberty; a contrast, which more than any other factor, decisively influences the later development of the human being" (p.612).

Referring to the autoerotic nature of sexual impulses in childhood, Freud makes the claim that "the sexuality of the little girl has altogether a male character...that the libido is regularly and lawfully of a masculine nature" (p.612). Freud specifically describes his view of "how the little girl becomes a woman" (p.613), a process involving both a shift and a repression. Freud notes that his use of the term masculine may be understood to denote activity, while to be feminine indicates passivity. At puberty, there is a shift from clitoral (active) excitation to vaginal (passive) excitation as the center of libidinal impulses. For the boy there is "a great advance of libido", while for the girl "a new wave of repression" (p.613). Puberty necessarily involves a transfer from the clitoris to the vaginal entrance as the leading erogenous zone. In summary, Freud asserts that "in order to become a woman, a new repression is required which abolishes a piece of infantile

masculinity and prepares the woman for the change of the leading genital zone” (p.623).

To his credit, Freud recognized that males and females follow different developmental paths, and he specifically wrote about female development. He also identified the adolescent period as extremely important in terms of later development. However, he placed a great amount of emphasis on sexuality, saying little about other aspects of development or discussing in any detail the implications of his views on interpersonal functioning.

In his theories of adolescent development, as in much of his thinking, Freud’s views about what it means to be female rested primarily on the biological differences between men and women. His views have been widely criticized by feminist thinkers. Jean Baker Miller (1983) wrote

Freud believed that girls now had to learn for good that they were not to use actively all of themselves and all of their life forces from a base centered in their own bodies and in their own psychological constructions. For Freud, this meant of course, the derivatives of their sexual drive. Instead, these forces are to be turned, now, to the use of others – men, in the first instance, and to the service of the next generation, child-bearing. That is girls had to resolve their psychological issues by becoming passive and masochistic – i.e. to accomplish the necessary submission to the man and to ‘sacrifice’ themselves for children (p.8).

Gilligan (1993) points out that as Freud built his theory of psychosexual development around the male child and tried to fit women into his masculine model, he came to acknowledge a developmental difference for women. Freud considered this difference to be responsible for what he saw as a developmental failure in women. Specifically, that women are deprived strictly due to their anatomy of the impetus for a clear Oedipal resolution. She also points out that for Freud, puberty brings a new awareness to the female of “the wound to her narcissism” and she develops “like a scar, a sense of

inferiority” (1925, p.252). Gilligan notes the trend, prominent among developmental theorists and the psychological literature in general, of portraying the life of the male as the norm and the woman as a deviant.

The disparity between women’s experience, and the representation of human development, noted throughout the psychological literature, has generally been seen to signify a problem in women’s development. Instead, the failure of women to fit existing models of human growth may point to a problem in the representation, a limitation in conception of the human condition, an omission of certain truths about life.

In addition to Freud, Erikson is a developmental theorist whose work can inform the present study of the role of the body in life experience. Erikson described experience as ‘anchored in the ground plan of the body’ (Ewen, p.108). If life experience is indeed “anchored in the ground plan of the body,” how is it uniquely experienced by girls and women?

Erikson’s thinking is significant to the proposed study in that he acknowledges the role of the facticity of the female body in the development of the self and in one’s relationships. This investigation will seek to answer the question of how women experience the unique changes in their bodies in terms of themselves, their relationships with others, and the world around them.

Fisher (1986) reports that Erikson’s thinking closely paralleled Freud’s in his account of a sequence of developmental shifts “in the intensity of investment in major body zones” (p.51). Ewen (1998) outlines Erikson’s epigenetic theory of development whereby the development of physical organs unfold according to a predetermined genetic schedule and that human beings are predisposed to adapt to each developmental phase. Each epigenetic stage is characterized by a specific crisis which is brought on by increasing

physical maturity and by greater demands made by society on the individual. Each crisis must be resolved by the ego for personality development to continue with success.

With the advent of puberty, childhood comes to an end and the adolescent must contend with genital maturity and reemerging latent sexual impulses. The crucial problem of this stage is of course identity, and successful resolution of the adolescent identity crisis results in the ego quality of fidelity or the ability to pledge and maintain loyalties.

But Gilligan (1993) asks the question, “about whom is Erikson talking” (p.12)?

Erikson’s sequence of life cycle stages describes the development of males rather than of females. Erikson identifies a different sequence of development for females. For men, the forging of an identity that is capable of adult commitments precedes intimacy, but for females the sequence is different. According to Erikson, the tasks of intimacy and identity seem to be fused, “as the female comes to know herself as she is known, through her relationships with others” (p.12). Gilligan notes that despite Erikson’s view that male and female development diverge, his life cycle chart does not reflect this. Development appears to be associated with separateness, and attachments seem to be developmental inadequacies. Erikson describes male identity as being forged in relation to the world and female identity as being created in relationships of intimacy.

In light of Gilligan’s observation that Erikson seems to be describing normative development in terms of male development, the present study could contribute to an understanding of how women describe and experience their own adolescent development.

Although his theoretical model of personality development is criticized by Gilligan as being male-oriented, Erikson (1950) conducted research relevant to the question of how

girls experience changes in body image. He administered a task involving play construction to young males and females ages eleven to thirteen. He detected differences in spatial configurations in what they produced, which Erikson felt were reflective of differences in how they experienced their bodies. He asked his subjects to construct imaginary scenes with a variety of common objects of play. The scenes were photographed and analyzed according to objective scoring strategies. There were major differences between boys and girls with regards to what they created. The boys frequently constructed scenes involving movement and elevated structures such as towers, etc. The girls more often portrayed interior scenes or structures characterized by openness, with little movement involved. Erikson understood these differences as being similar to the differences in genitalia. He theorized that boys were representing a phallic perception of their bodies while girls portrayed a vaginal or internal representation of their bodies. The assumption was that the play situations provided some measure of the extent that they experienced their bodies as masculine or feminine.

Erikson's work provides strong support for the idea that girls experience the world in a fundamentally different way, which results in different ways of moving, acting upon, and relating to the world.

Miles (1986), in a doctoral dissertation, points out that Erikson "raises the question of how the factual aspect of 'inner space', i.e. the womb and internal genitals, relate to a difference in identity formation and subsequent relationships with others for the female."

Erikson still finds that 'anatomy is destiny...insofar as it determines not only the range and configuration of physiological functioning...but also personality configurations' (p.285, 1968). In consonance with Erikson's concept of 'vital inner space' the young female, at early adolescence, develops the capacity to 'include,' 'to

accept' 'to have and to hold'. Fidelity, then, becomes an even more important issue for her than for males of similar age. Others are to be included or excluded from her life resting on their capacity to be faithful so as to psychologically help fill this void or inner space, not necessarily in a sexual way but through the demands of interpersonal intimacy, or being-in-relationship...Specifically for females, the psychological implications of the existence of the maturing 'inner space' provides the ground for a particular sense of urgency for intimacy with others (p.13).

Many researchers since Erikson have examined the adolescent period of development, and a significant amount of research aimed at exploring the relationship of the body to variables such as self image and interpersonal functioning has emerged. But there is wide variation in the types of results and conclusions reached by these researchers. Seymour Fisher (1986), a physician who has published extensive research on body image, in an exhaustive review of the psychological literature on the body, questions whether adolescence is a time of increased concern or distress in relation to one's body. He points out that there is a widespread belief that adolescents experience greater psychological turmoil than people at other life stages. Because the body is so "radically transformed" (p.93) during this period, expectations that adolescent girls would experience such turmoil would be justified. But despite the fact that adolescence is characterized by major bodily transformations, based on his comprehensive review of the literature, Fisher argues that it is surprising that it has been difficult to establish with any consistency in the literature that adolescence is accompanied by significant shifts in body image. He concludes that there is simply not enough evidence to support the idea that adolescents are more psychologically distressed in relation to this issue than other age groups. This view directly contradicts Pipher's assertion that girls often enter adolescence as confident, independent, and happy girls; and too often come out on the

other side as submissive, depressed, and lacking in self-confidence. Such differing views about the significance of bodily change for the adolescent raises questions about how these changes are actually experienced.

A brief sampling of studies representative of some of the research conducted on body image during adolescence will suggest that there are many questions left to be answered regarding the role of the body in the life experience of the adolescent.

For instance, several studies have examined changes in body image in relation to menarche. A 1980 study by Rierdan and Koff compared 94 adolescent girls, half of whom had begun to menstruate and half who had not. They surveyed the literature and found conflicting views on the effects of menarche on girls, but noted that the impact appears to be particularly profound. They raised the question of whether this impact is primarily a positive and integrative one or a more traumatic and disruptive one. The subjects completed a Draw-A-Person test, as well as several questionnaire items dealing with various aspects of adolescent development. The drawings were analyzed according to several different scoring systems. Rierdan and Koff noted that menarche provides an excellent chance to study the psychological phenomena associated with biological change. They concluded that with the onset of menstruation, a girl seems to integrate a sense of herself as sexually mature into a broader psychosexual identity. Rierdan and Koff viewed the absence of a significant difference in pre- and postmenarcheal anxiety as inconsistent with the view that menarche is primarily a disruptive event. Rather, that it serves an integrative function. A value of this study is that it highlights the fact that there are conflicting views regarding the significance of the physical change involved in

menarche, in terms of it being a positive or negative experience for the self, and it considers the potentially positive aspects of the early adolescent period of development. A limitation of this study is that the evaluation of the significance of menarche is made according to scores achieved on scales measuring sexual differentiation and anxiety. The researchers make the assumption that menarche is a more positive event overall, based on scores representing a greater identification with being female, and the fact that there is no statistically significant increase in anxiety after menarche. But it could be argued that it is not sufficient to simply look at anxiety to arrive at this conclusion. Why single out this particular response? Wouldn't it also be relevant to examine issues such as the presence of or absence of depression and changes in self-esteem in order to conclude that menarche is basically a positive event for the adolescent. It could also be argued that this is where a phenomenological study could provide some clarity because if we are not limited to examining isolated variables such as anxiety and sexual identification, the subjects could describe their own experiences and they, rather than the researchers, could characterize their experience of menarche as primarily positive and or negative.

Several studies have examined the relationship between body image and perceptions of self during adolescence. During the multiple, rapid changes in the body at this time, perceptions of the body are important in relation to overall perceptions of the self. Kavrell and Jarcho (1980) found a strong correlation between body image and self-image for both adolescent girls and boys. The findings from other investigations provide additional support for the importance of this relationship. Lerner and Karabenick (1974) and Padin, Lerner, and Spiro (1981), suggest a significant relationship between self-esteem and

satisfaction with characteristics of the body, especially for females. The importance of body image to self-esteem is also suggested by the greater anxiety and preoccupation communicated by young adolescents about their bodies (Hamburg, 1974). Havighurst (1972) identified one of the developmental tasks of adolescence as the acceptance of one's body and effective adaptation to it. Differences between males and females in terms of self-esteem and body image are more apparent during adolescence, with girls evidencing decreased self-esteem and a more negative body image (Simmons, Rosenberg, and Rosenberg, 1973).

Tobin-Richards, Boxer, and Petersen (1983) point out that in early adolescence the body is "undergoing profound changes in terms of size, shape, and specific secondary sex characteristics" (p.129). The appearance of these new physical characteristics require adolescents to revise their theories about themselves. Culture-bound and social definitions about what is desirable and attractive are important in mediating the psychological experience of adolescence. For instance, the "benchmark of feminine beauty today" is the prepubertal look of being lean, long-legged, and lithe. Advertising encourages this stereotype..." (p.130). The developmental changes associated with adolescence are best understood as a set of processes rather than a unitary event. A number of studies have suggested that a subjective perception of the timing of these changes may precipitate a crisis if expected developmental changes do not occur as expected. A sense of being either early or late in relation to one's peers or to social norms can have effects on one's self-esteem. Such deviations from the norm can give rise to a lowered self-esteem and a loss of self-cohesion. "A sense of being early, late, or on time

in physical development, relative to same sex peers may strongly influence perceptions of the self and feelings of adequacy and normality...” (p.132). Findings from several longitudinal studies suggest that for boys, early maturation brings social advantages and late maturation tends to bring disadvantages. A positive social response is given to one who attains the physical status of an adult male. ”A mature male body brings with it the physical advantage of athletic superiority, and the social advantages of greater respect from adults, more attention from girls, and leadership roles among peers” (p.132). For girls however, the findings are more ambiguous. There is evidence that maturing early has psychological and social disadvantages. However, Tobin, et al report that there is conflicting evidence that it may bring greater prestige and self-confidence. With these mixed findings, it would appear that the clearly positive social responses that boys receive with physical maturation, does not occur for girls. “Becoming an adult in this society does not bring with it the same social advantage for a female as it does for a male” (p.132). In light of past research on physical development during adolescence, Tobin-Richards, Boxer, and Petersen hypothesize that the experience of physical maturation is a much different one for girls than for boys. Specifically, for boys, early maturation is related to a more positive body image and feelings of attractiveness. For girls, this relationship is more complex.

Tobin-Richards, Boxer, and Petersen (1983) examined the ways in which adolescents perceived developmental events such as physical changes in their bodies and how these were related to self-perception. They reported that strong correlations between body image and self-image could be found in the literature. The timing of pubertal changes

was of importance for their study and they found that a sense of being early, on time, or late in development, in comparison with one's peers may strongly influence perceptions of self and feelings of adequacy. A random sample of 70 girls and 52 boys were interviewed, both individually and in groups. The participants were administered the Self-Image Questionnaire for Young Adolescents as a measure of body image. Pubertal development was measured through a series of questions in a semistructured interview. Both girls and boys were asked if they had noticed changes on five different dimensions of physical development.

In this study physical maturation was seen more as a process, rather than a unitary event. A multivariate analysis of variance indicated that boys during early adolescence perceived their bodies significantly more positively than do girls. As stated, in particular, there was a significant positive correlation between early development for boys and self-perception. The relationship for girls, however, was more ambiguous and complex. While the relationship for boys was a linear one in terms of development and self-perception, for girls the correlation was more curvilinear, with a tendency for girls who mature later to have a higher self-perception than girls who mature earlier. Also significant was the girls' sense of timing in relation to their peers, with greater satisfaction being associated with a sense of being "on time" in terms of developmental changes. They also found that only for girls was there a significant correlation between weight and satisfaction with body image. A strength of this study is that it considers adolescence as a process, allowing for potentially richer descriptions of this period of development, and specifically the investigators explored the subjective experience of the subjects as far as

their sense of timing in relation to their peers. It provides support for the idea that, in general, adolescence tends to be a more overall positive experience for boys than for girls in terms of self-image. In this study the relationship between physical development and self-perception for girls was more complicated, and the correlation between the two was characterized by greater ambiguity. The proposed study of adolescent female embodiment could potentially provide a clearer picture of how body image and self image are related in the experience of the adolescent girl.

In another study which examined body image in teenage girls, Rosenbaum (1993) conducted interviews with 30 adolescent girls ranging in age from 11 to 17. In an effort to understand something about how adolescent girls experience their changing bodies, she used a semistructured psychiatric interview and asked them several open-ended questions. Specifically, the girls were asked about what they liked about their bodies, and what they didn't like. Rosenbaum noted that while it was easy for the participants to point out their dislikes, they had much more difficulty identifying what they liked about their bodies. When asked to rate themselves on a numerical scale, most rated themselves as average. Both their likes and dislikes most often had to do with weight. Even the slimmest girls would point to areas on their bodies which they felt were too big. There was a general tendency towards wanting their body parts to be smaller and less obtrusive. Rosenbaum gave the girls three wishes and, again, the most common wish was to lose weight and keep it off. Of particular relevance to the proposed study is Rosenbaum's suggestion that physical change becomes the ground for psychological growth, a ground around which to organize the experience of the self. Rosenbaum notes that the

participants were able to provide many concrete and personal illustrations of their subjective experience of a changing body, and this was also experienced as an ongoing “change in relationships with others, setting in motion a transformation of the sense of self in the social context” (p.78). Rosenbaum found that the girls tended to be sensitive to the reactions of others, and a majority of them were very self-conscious about their bodies. They were continually revising and integrating bodily change, as well as their body images and self-images. This study illuminates some aspects of the relationship between self-image, relationships with others, and the body. Of value in this study is that the investigator allowed the girls to speak of their own experiences of their changing bodies, which they were able to do quite specifically. This took place within the context of a semistructured interview, but it appears that the participants were given a fair amount of freedom as to their ability to respond. Rosenbaum’s study highlights the significance of the relationship between the body, the self, and one’s relations with others.

These three studies; Rierdan and Koff (1980), Tobin-Richards, Boxer, and Peterson (1983), and Rosenbaum (1993), are representative of many of the studies dealing with adolescent body image. They examine changes in the body in relation to self-image and relationships with others. Their outcomes are typical of much of the research reviewed, in that there is variation as to the findings of different studies. Rierdan and Koff found an example of a physical change occurring in the adolescent girl which they characterized as primarily positive when they described menarche as an overall integrative event for adolescent girls. Tobin-Richards et al, discovered what appeared to be a complex and ambiguous relationship between body image and self-image for girls, as well as

differences in the experience of boys and girls. Rosenbaum found general dissatisfaction and self-consciousness for girls in relation to their bodies. The methodologies of the studies varied as well, with Rierdan and Koff relying on questionnaires and drawings. Tobin-Richards et al also used a questionnaire but considered subjective experience in their study, and Rosenbaum allowed for open-ended questioning in her study. In other words, questions regarding the body during adolescence have been approached in a number of different ways, resulting in a variety of conclusions. There are a number of studies, as Tobin-Richards et al found, that suggest that adolescent girls have a more negative self-image and/or body image during adolescence than do boys. Precisely how these aspects of female adolescent development are experienced will be addressed by the proposed study.

Pipher (1994) is a contemporary theorist whose work is most significant for the proposed study. Her work stands in contrast to the psychoanalytic theory of adolescent development reviewed earlier, which emphasized sexual impulses in the absence of a larger social and cultural context. She identifies several changes that are common for adolescent girls, including those who become more deferential, self-critical and depressed. In addition to the potential for great unhappiness with their own bodies and a vulnerability to the development of eating disorders cited previously, other changes include a drop in IQ scores, plummeting math and science scores, decreased resilience and optimism, less curiosity and risk-taking behavior, a lack of assertiveness and a drop in energy.

Pipher identifies three primary factors which make young girls especially vulnerable

during adolescence. They include 1) changes in their bodies, 2) a culture which evaluates them almost entirely on the basis of appearance, and 3) the fact that just as they begin to struggle with new pressures, they are expected to distance from their parents and the support and protection they have felt during childhood. For the adolescent girl, the new body must become part of the self. Pipher notes that as it changes in size and shape, in the same way that pregnant women focus on their bodies, the body becomes a focus for the adolescent. She looks and feels and moves in a different way. Girls usually have strong bodies when they begin adolescence. “But these bodies soften and spread out in ways that our culture calls fat. Just at the point that their bodies are becoming rounder, girls are told that thin is beautiful, even imperative” (p.55). When they enter adolescence, girls give up their relaxed attitudes about their bodies and take on “the burden of self-criticism” (p.57). As they are gaining fat cells, they are bombarded by cultural images that tell them their bodies are all wrong. Many girls develop scorn towards their bodies and work for a “false body”. They allow the culture to define who they should be” (p.57).

She suggests that adolescent girls experience a deep conflict between their autonomous selves and their need to be feminine. She describes teenage girls who enter adolescence as independent souls and leave as submissive young women. According to Pipher, girls attempt to “fit their whole selves into small, crowded spaces. They stop thinking “Who am I? What do I want?, and start thinking “what must I do to please others?” (p.22). Here Pipher’s thinking converges with Boss’s emphasis on the constriction of human possibilities. Pipher argues that our culture forces women to split into true and false selves. With the changes that come with adolescence, girls face

tremendous cultural pressure to split into two selves, one that is authentic and one that is culturally acceptable. The adolescent girl loses confidence in herself as she begins a process of disowning herself. In terms of her body, she may begin to accept society's right to define her solely on the basis of her appearance. She may even begin defining herself that way. As the adolescent girl experiences social pressures to put aside her authentic self, she is often left with a sense of feeling disoriented and depressed, sensing a pressure to be someone she is not. Abandoning the self can take different forms, including conforming, withdrawing, getting depressed, and being angry. Pipher deals specifically with the adolescent period of development. There are many other contemporary feminist theorists whose work can contribute significantly to an understanding of the experience of female embodiment.

### Contemporary Theories of Female Embodiment

In addition to the literature relevant to adolescent female embodiment, there is a growing body of literature by contemporary feminist thinkers who have written about the body. In some ways their understandings of the body differ dramatically from the classical psychoanalytic and traditional concepts of the body discussed earlier. For one thing, they are written in many cases by female authors who do not fundamentally understand female development and female embodiment as a variation on male experience. Rather, the experience of being female and becoming a woman is understood on its own unique terms. A brief discussion of some of the philosophical, postmodern, and feminist approaches to female embodiment will be presented.

Before highlighting some of the contemporary works, it is useful to introduce some

of the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir, as they can provide a philosophical foundation for the proposed study. De Beauvoir wrote that “to lose confidence in one’s body is to lose confidence in oneself”. This certainly resonates with Pipher’s concerns about what happens to girls as they confront a changing body image during adolescence. To state Pipher’s words once more, a changing body is one of the factors which can make one vulnerable to “a loss of wholeness, self-confidence, and self-direction” (p.25), which she hypothesizes could last well into adulthood. De Beauvoir articulates a description of a woman as a free being who, nonetheless, lives in a world in which she is confined by men to the role of the “Other”. Miles (1986), describes de Beauvoir’s view of the adolescent female’s struggle with her identity as the Other. This is in contrast to the male as the Subject or Absolute. According to de Beauvoir, “thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him...she is called ‘the sex’, by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. The inessential as opposed to the essential” (de Beauvoir, 1952, p.xix). As the adolescent female begins the process of becoming a woman, she must experience herself and confront herself as an object. She must attempt to fulfill her human potential within the confines of being the Other.

Drew Leder, (1990) in a postmodern work on the body, cites Foucault in a description of the effect on the body when one is relegated to the role of “the Other”. Leder describes the phenomenon of “dys-appearance”, wherein the body, in contrast to its “dis-appearance” in ordinary functioning, (quite similar to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the pre-reflective body), “demands a direct and focal thematization”. The body is “always a

place of vulnerability, not just to biological, but to sociopolitical forces”. Leder points to Foucault to highlight the vulnerability of the body towards disappearance through the intentions of the Other. “...the body is also directly involved in a political field: power relations have an immediate hold upon it: they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (p.98). The adolescent girl is especially vulnerable to the effects of the sociopolitical forces pointed out by Foucault.

Sandra Bartky provides an example of such sociopolitical forces exacted upon adolescent girls. Historically in feminist writing there has been an emphasis on the concept of ‘alienation’, writes Bartky (2000) in a concise presentation of feminist works dealing with issues related to embodiment. “‘Alienation’ may be defined as a fragmentation of the human person and a prohibition on the full exercise of capacities, the exercise of which is thought necessary to a fully human existence” (p.323). The concept of alienation is one that Pipher also speaks of as she describes the pressure that a girl faces to split into an authentic and culturally acceptable self, a process of disowning herself, which includes an acceptance of society’s right to define her on the basis of her physical appearance. This definition of alienation is also very much consistent with Boss’ description of the human being as being free or unfree to live out his or his existential possibilities. One example of this type of alienation is what Bartky calls the “fashion-beauty complex” (p.324). On the surface, this appears to be a way to glorify the female body, but in fact is a way of devaluing it. She points out that we are bombarded by media images of perfect female bodies that we cannot possibly measure up to, leaving women with the idea that their bodies are deficient and for some, even to be ashamed of. Bartky

sums up the experience of alienation from the female body by pointing out that “Women in Western societies live out an estrangement from the body; on the one hand, we are the body and are scarcely allowed to be anything else; on the other hand we must exist perpetually at a distance from our physical selves, fixed in a permanent posture of disapproval” (p.324).

Bartky’s discussion of alienation resonates with both Boss’s phenomenological perspective of human existence, and Pipher’s cultural analysis of female adolescence. Bartky’s description of a “fashion-beauty complex” is exactly the type of inauthenticity that Pipher believes the adolescent girl is forced into by the societal and cultural pressures she must live within.

Bordo (1993) also writes of the experience of women in Western culture needing to conform to societal norms of femininity and the price of such alienation from the true self. By looking at the example of women who suffer from eating disorders, we can learn much about the cultural pressures experienced by women in general. Bordo understands hunger as a metaphor for female desires. Thinness is equated with self-control, that is, the ability to control the body. To be thin is “a triumph of will” (p.148) over the body. The issue of control becomes paramount for women. In order to have the body that she wants, the body that is culturally attractive and desirable, she must learn to control her desires. This means controlling hunger, but also in order to conform to the cultural ideals of femininity, she must control her emotions and behavior, in particular anger and aggression. Normal human needs are looked upon as something that must be reigned in and reduced. Inability to control one’s desires is regarded as something sinful. Women

who are overweight are seen as too weak to control their desires.

In light of Boss's concept of human freedom, again we see the female as existing in a world where to simply feel and behave within the confines of what would normally be socially acceptable for a man, is somehow viewed as excessive for the woman. Her existence is restricted to what her society tells her she should be. The consequence for not conforming to this role is to be viewed as unattractive, weak, or sinful. The quest for the slender body then, becomes a way for her to prove herself none of these things. The body becomes the means to achieve a kind of freedom. But at what price?

Bartky (2000) succinctly sums up the cost of existing in a world in which one's body is a focus of cultural expectations. "The project of ideal embodied femininity is a 'set-up' for most women, for its standards are largely unattainable. The taboo on aging may poison a woman's maturity. Her infantilized body must take up as little space in the world as possible., this when women are demanding more entry into and control of public space; her infantilized face must not betray the marks of strong emotion or deep thought. The extraordinary importance given to women's appearance produces in many a narcissistic preoccupation with the body that alternates between infatuation and self-disgust" (p.328).

Not only is the appearance of the female body subject to cultural limitations, but even the movement of the female body seems to be encumbered by restrictions. In a phenomenological discussion of feminine movement in the world, Iris Marion Young (1990) brings together phenomenological thought with a feminist perspective on the body and envisions the space around a woman's body as an enclosure, rather than an area

where her body's intentionality can be realized to its fullest potential. She describes both a constricted posture and movement exemplified in an inhibited style of reaching, stretching, and throwing. A sense of confinement characterizes the spatial field surrounding her body. In terms of bodily experience Young provides an example of what Schilder described in relation to the space surrounding the body. That is, the body cannot be understood simply as an object in space, but rather is always characterized by human attitudes and actions. In terms of the proposed study, it will be interesting to learn whether themes involving restricted movement in the world will emerge. The idea of one's physical body being limited by a sense of constriction, is very much connected to a restricted sense of existence as well. Certainly if there is interference in one's very ability to move freely in the world it follows that one's existential freedom and her ability to allow her potential to unfold will be narrowed as well.

#### Summary of Literature Review

The purpose of the proposed study will be to understand how adolescent girls experience their changing bodies in terms of their relationships with others, their own self-concepts, and their everyday lives in the world. It will also seek to illuminate how these experiences may subsequently influence their lives as women. The ideas of two theorists, Medard Boss and Mary Pipher provide the theoretical foundation for this investigation. Pipher's cultural analysis of female adolescence and Boss' existential understanding of what it means to be human are the most influential theoretical perspectives for this investigation. Boss understands the fundamental characteristic of what it means to be human as openness, that is, one's openness to his or her existential

possibilities. His understanding of human existence is valuable for the proposed study because it can help illuminate the potential consequences of an adolescent girl's existence that is restricted or unfree to achieve its fullest human potential. Boss elaborates on the temporal quality of human existence originally characterized by Heidegger (1962). He points out that there is always a relationship between the events of the past, the present, and the future. It may be said that there is a narrative structure to the human life. This study will attempt to elucidate the unfolding of the narrative, to attempt to understand the way that a woman's adolescent past motivates her to restrict or broaden her existence. The constriction of a woman's existence may result in the loss of freedom, the loss of existential possibilities, and ultimately in a loss of human potential. In one example of such loss of potential, Boss specifically discusses changes in physical embodiment as influencing one's potential for human relatedness.

Pipher's thinking is also central to the proposed study. Pipher's view of female adolescence understands young girls to be at risk for these kinds of losses in their adult lives and may be seen as an example of the kind of existential loss of potential described by Boss. Her belief that during adolescence girls are forced by their culture to split into authentic and inauthentic selves echoes the ideas of Bartky and other feminist thinkers who believe that women experience alienation "as they live out an estrangement from the body" (p.324). Thus, Pipher brings together two ideas central to this investigation, existence characterized by constriction and alienation. These characteristics appear again and again in the literature dealing with the body. Basow and Rubin talk about adolescent girls being "confronted with heightened expectations to conform to a more restricted

female role” (p.31) including pressure to conform to the culture’s ideal female image, which is “virtually unattainable without extreme dieting or cosmetic surgery” (p.35). Streigel-Moore and Cachelin identify that the natural changes of adolescence are at odds with the cultural ideals of female beauty, that there is a tension between the cultural ideal of beauty, and the physical reality of the female body. Freud understands adolescent female development as necessitating both a repression and a shift to passivity. He states that “in order to become a woman a new repression is required which abolishes a piece of infantile masculinity” (p.623).

In fact, when one reviews the literature dealing with adolescent embodiment and with contemporary feminist views of the body, it is striking to note the similarities in thinking about the female body. These themes of constriction, alienation, and subsequently loss, occur again and again no matter what the theoretical orientation of the theorist. They arise consistently from psychoanalytic to postmodern theory. The proposed research will explore how they are lived and experienced in the lives of adolescent girls. It will also examine whether they continue to be lived out in the lives of adult women. That is, what does it mean to experience loss in one’s possibilities for relatedness, in one’s existential freedom? How is an existence that is characterized by narrowed possibilities and inauthenticity experienced? For instance, a review of the research dealing with adolescent body image results in finding strong correlations between body image and self image. This is an example of one way a changing body may influence an aspect of a person’s existence. This study will attempt to concretely explicate the ways in which an adolescent experience of embodiment may give rise to changes in a girl’s life and

subsequently in her life as a woman. Specifically, it will ask women about the ways that their changing bodies influenced their sense of self, their relationships with others, and their everyday functioning in the world. The question posed to adult female participants will ask them to reflect upon the process that occurred during their adolescence and the ways in which it affected and continues to affect their lives in these three areas of self, others, and world. The themes made explicit in the literature review including those involving loss related to inauthentic and narrowed existence, may be lived concretely and raise the following questions. In terms of the self, will the participants reflect on issues related to loss of self esteem and self confidence? They may describe an increased sense of self-consciousness and of being self-absorbed by the changes in their bodies. These changes may place them at risk for resulting feelings of depression and anxiety, or even be the basis for the development of psychiatric diagnoses such as Major Depression, anxiety disorders or eating disorders. Regarding their relationships with others, the question posed to the participants will also ask them to describe ways in which they believe their relations with others were altered as they experienced their bodies changing. Did they experience limitations in or were there changes in the quality of their relationships? It is possible that they may describe a sense of self-involvement that diminished their ability to relate to others, or they may raise issues such as an increased sense of vulnerability or fragility which will impact upon their relations with others. Finally, as their bodies developed, were there changes in the way they experienced their world? For instance, a world that was once experienced as welcoming and inviting may now feel like a more dangerous place. Participants will also be asked to

reflect upon whether any such changes are continuing and ongoing in their lives and to describe how they have experienced the effects of such changes in their present lives.

In summary of the literature, there is an overwhelming view in theory and research related to female embodiment, across different theoretical perspectives, that women are faced with a conflict involving their bodies. That in order to remain feminine, they very often must limit their existential possibilities in order to maintain a cultural ideal surrounding their bodies. Despite the fact that the biological changes in the female body are designed to broaden her possibilities for relatedness and therefore her human potential, there is evidence to suggest that too often individual women do not experience this kind of opening up and broadening of possibilities for being human but rather experience loss or limitation in their lives in relation to their bodies.

This investigation will attempt to learn about how women experience the changes in their bodies during adolescence with the goal that women's descriptions of their life experiences will shed light on what is found in the literature. That is, will the themes illuminated through their descriptions of their experiences echo those found consistently in theory and research, those of loss of freedom and possibility, limitation, and constriction of existence?

The process of answering this question will be carried out by examining Pipher's belief that these types of losses occur not only for adolescent girls but have long-lasting effects which limit the lives of adult women as well. Boss's theoretical understanding of human existence will provide the framework for addressing this question by attempting to understand how there may be the loss of human potential,

initially in adolescent girls and subsequently in their lives as women. The goal of the investigation, then, is two-fold. First, it seeks to understand how adolescent girls experience their changing bodies in terms of how these changes may affect their view of themselves, their relationships with others, and their experience of the world. Second, it will attempt to bring to light how they may have been affected by these experiences in their lives since that time. It will attempt to make explicit how their human possibilities and existential potential as women may be influenced by their experiences of adolescent embodiment. In highlighting the temporal quality of women's lives, this study will seek to illuminate the continuous unfolding and unity of human existence.

## METHOD

A phenomenological analysis was chosen as the method for bringing to light experiences of changing adolescent female embodiment, and for attempting to understand these experiences as potentially transformative in the lives of women. For this study, the following assumptions were implicit in choosing this qualitative approach. I am assuming that by analyzing self descriptions of life experiences, the meaning of these experiences can be illuminated and understood. I am also assuming that due to the temporal quality of a human life, there is a narrative structure to an individual life as well, which can be explicated through a phenomenological analysis. Finally, it is my hope that such a qualitative analysis will contribute to a knowledge base about female embodiment that will potentially give rise to specific clinical interventions with adolescent girls and adult women.

### The Research Question

In Boss's Daseinanalytic view a human being is always engaged in coming to terms with her past, always motivated to conduct herself in ways that are based on past life events which may "restrict, or partially blind her to the abundance of her inborn possibilities of relating so that she fulfills only a few neurotic modes of relation to her world..." (p.192-93). Pipher provides an example of an existence subject to such limitations as she describes what can happen in the lives of adolescent girls and their subsequent lives as women. In her view, "girls attempt to fit their whole selves into small, crowded spaces. They stop thinking Who am I? What do I want? and start thinking what must I do to please others" (p.22). In relation to her body, she may begin to accept

society's right to define her solely on the basis of her appearance and she may begin defining herself that way. Pipher points out that such an abandonment of the self could lead to a sense of feeling disoriented and depressed.

Adult participants in this study were asked to reflect on their adolescent experiences by responding to the following question.

Please think about your adolescence and the bodily changes that occurred during that time. Please describe in as much detail as you can, how these changes altered your view of yourself, your relationships with others, and your everyday life during that time. Also, please describe how your experience of those bodily changes have affected your life since then.

### Participants

For this study, I recruited six participants through word of mouth, newspaper advertisements, and posted notices soliciting research participants. I asked them to respond to the research question by providing a written description of their adolescent experiences. I recruited adult women in order to elicit descriptions that would be able to speak to the issue of what kinds of lasting life changes, if any, participants experienced in relation to their adolescent experiences. I recruited women of different ages in order to examine a cross-section of adult women at different stages of adulthood. Specifically, women ranging in age from their early twenties to early fifties were asked to participate in the study. The purpose of obtaining descriptions from women in this age range was to allow for a comparison of the kinds of issues they raised at different ages. While there were many consistencies in the themes described by all of the participants, it was clear that issues related to weight, dieting, and exercise emerged more prominently for the younger participants, especially those in their early twenties. It was also true that there

were differences that emerged in relation to the particular time periods that the participants went through adolescence, with the eldest participant recalling that when she was an adolescent during the 1960's, there was not the pressure to be thin or attention paid to one's body that the younger participants experienced. Including participants of different ages allowed for the emergence of these sociocultural themes related to the age of the participants. Choosing this range of ages also allowed for the kind of loss of human potential delineated by Pipher, to be illuminated through the participants' descriptions, in that they were able to provide detailed, personal descriptions of their life experiences.

#### Method of Data Collection

I contacted participants through word of mouth, posted notices soliciting research participants, and placed an advertisement in the student newspaper of a large, urban university campus. Notices were posted in retail establishments and restaurants in an ethnically diverse urban area, as well as in buildings on the campus. Posted notices and the newspaper advertisement invited potential female participants to tell their "own story" about their experiences of their own bodies. About fifty responses were received in response to the notices and advertisements. A few of the potential participants elected not to participate when they learned that there would be no compensation for their involvement. Most, however, still wished to be involved, and consent forms were mailed to those interested, following an initial telephone conversation to discuss the purpose of the research and to answer their questions. During this phone conversation, I explained that I was interested in learning about the ways that the lives of adolescent girls may change as their bodies begin to change, as well as how these changes may last into their

adult lives. I also described the means that I would use to protect their privacy should they agree to participate. This included the removal from all written and transcribed materials describing the experiences of the participants, any information which could be used to identify them. All identifying information such as names, dates, and specific personal information was changed or deleted entirely. The participants' anonymity was insured by keeping all collected data stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. I also explained to the potential participants that they could terminate their voluntary participation in this project at any time. The method of data collection; that written responses would be obtained followed by a taped interview in order to clarify the written protocols, was explained to each of the potential participants. The procedure for obtaining data through the written protocol descriptions essentially followed the steps outlined by Giorgi (1985), for collecting phenomenological data. However, I also attempted to examine the cultural aspects of the phenomenon, both by eliciting these in the interviews and through my own reflections as a researcher.

Initial responses were received from a fairly ethnically diverse group, which included at least one African-American female, two Asian females, and one Turkish international student. Consent forms with stamped, self-addressed return envelopes were sent to all potential participants, but none of these potential participants returned a consent form, and so had to be eliminated as potential participants in the study. One of the expectations, prior to the collection of data, was that the sample would be more ethnically diverse, and this was sought through the posting of notices in an extremely ethnically diverse neighborhood. However, the final group of participants had to be limited by including

only those who returned consent forms, and so included only Caucasian participants. This final sample also included participants who represented a range of chronological ages. Participants were limited to six, to allow for a more thorough, in-depth phenomenological analysis of each participant's response.

Once signed consent forms were received from potential participants, the research question was sent to them with a stamped, self-addressed envelope for them to return their written responses. Individual written protocols were solicited from each woman in order to allow for the uniqueness of her adolescent experiences to be described. I found that very personal stories emerged as the participants described their experiences. Obtaining written protocols allowed for the participants to describe the very different ways that they had lived the phenomena under study. I read each protocol description multiple times, in order to get a sense of the whole description. I then divided the descriptions into meaning units to allow for the emergence of themes in the experience of each participant. I found great variation in the content of the written protocols. While some of the written responses stayed close to the content of the research question, others included areas that were not specifically asked about as part of the research question. They also varied in terms of how explicitly they responded to the research question, with some responses appearing to be more global in content.

As their written responses were received, the participants were contacted by telephone in order to schedule a time and place to conduct the taped interview in order to elaborate on their written descriptions. The participants were advised that the interview could be conducted at a time and place of their choosing. Five of the participants elected to come

to the researcher's office for the interview, and one participant, who lives out of state, was interviewed over the phone. Questions were open-ended to allow for freedom of responses and attempted to make explicit the ways in which the participants' living of the phenomenon affected them in three different ways. In conducting the interviews, I attempted to help the participants describe the ways in which their self-concepts or sense of self, their relationships, and possible ways that their experience of the world were influenced by their changing bodies. In particular, I was guided in the interviews by the questions raised in the summary of the literature review pertaining to these three areas of functioning. The distinction, then, of Self, World, and Others, which is the organizing framework through which the results of this investigation are presented, arises directly out of the research question itself. These dimensions of one's experience, in turn, were delineated by Binswanger, and include the *Eigenwelt*, *Umwelt*, and *Mitwelt*, or that which comprises the individual's 'world design.' (Cohn, 1997).

In addition to asking open-ended questions in the interviews, I also asked more direct questions, especially in areas where I felt unclear about any aspect of the participant's experience. I was also more directive in the interview process where I believed that the participant could provide greater detail and depth in her description of her experience of adolescent embodiment. I was especially attuned in the interviews to how the participants described experiences that reflected a broadening or constriction, as well as other changes, in their existential possibilities and human potential.

Prior to conducting the study, I was uncertain how open and descriptive the participants would be of their experiences. While the written protocols varied in the

amount of detail and level of description they provided, each of the participants was quite open and descriptive of their experience in the context of the interviews. They were each quite responsive to both open-ended and follow-up questions related to their experiences. Each of the interviews were taped and the cassettes were kept in a locked file with all other confidential materials such as signed consent forms for each of the participants.

### Method of Data Analysis

After completing all of the participant interviews, the interviews were transcribed and combined with the written protocols in order to create an edited synthesis for each participant. The written protocols had been divided into meaning units, and each meaning unit was used as the source for an open-ended question that was asked as part of the interview. The responses of the participants were also included, and this combination of protocol meaning units, interview questions, and participant responses, were organized or synthesized according to the themes that emerged for each participant. These edited syntheses were analyzed phenomenologically, meaning that themes were identified through an analysis of each edited synthesis. My goal was to understand the psychological themes that emerged in the context of the developmental and feminist literature reviewed, as well as the existential-phenomenological literature relevant to embodiment. I anticipated and found that the protocol descriptions contained narratives that have the quality of a temporal unfolding since they deal with a particular developmental phase and its long-term influence on the lives of adult women.

Next, I wrote a situated narrative based upon each participant's description, in which

I attempted to summarize each participant's experience. This was done in order to maintain the unique, individual narratives found in the personal descriptions. I also anticipated and found that the individual women experienced the phenomenon of their changing adolescent bodies and its continuing influence in profoundly personal ways. For this reason, I analyzed the situated narratives into themes in order to arrive at a general narrative representing the experience of all of the participants. Consistent with the literature review, I found themes of loss, as well as narrowed and inauthentic existence in the experiences of the women. I also found that the general narrative was characterized by an explicit sense of temporality, which was in line with the way that I approached collecting data, i.e. asking women to reflect on a particular process occurring during their adolescence. Similar to the individual protocols and situated narratives, the data presented in terms of how their experiences of adolescent embodiment influenced their lives in terms of their selves, their relationships, and their experience of the world in general. In addition, I was aware that the perspective I brought as a researcher to the analysis of data, reflected my own cultural context.

The results of the investigation are presented in the following way. First, the participants in the study are introduced, and a situated narrative for each participant is presented. (Edited syntheses are located in Appendix A). Following the situated narratives, the general narrative is presented, followed by a presentation of the general narrative with illustrative quotes. Finally, the results are discussed in terms of the psychological themes that were delineated under the three spheres of experience included in the research question, including Self, World, and Others. Based on these themes,

recommendations are made in terms of clinical interventions that may be useful in an existential-phenomenologically based psychotherapy with adolescent girls and adult women. Results are also discussed in terms of the strengths and limitations of this particular study. Also, at the conclusion of the study, I will offer to provide a summary of the results of the investigation to the participants.

## RESULTS

### Description of Participants

There were six participants in the study, and the following is a brief description of each of the participants. (Pseudonyms were chosen for each of the participants in order to maintain their anonymity).

Participant #1 is “Tina.” She is a 24 year old graduate student. She is single, has never been married, and has no children. She attended an Ivy League college and has always done well academically. She would like to feel as confident socially as she does intellectually.

Participant #2 is “Lisa.” She is 34 years old. She is single and is a college graduate. She has never been married and has no children. Her father died when she was very young and she feels that this has influenced her later relationships. She has experienced periods of depression and anxiety in the past. Her weight has fluctuated over the years and this has been a concern for her.

Participant #3 is “Chris.” She is 37 years old and has a masters degree in psychology. She is divorced and has no children. She currently works in an administrative position, and after many years of living in another city, recently relocated to her hometown in the Midwest.

Participant #4 is “Sue.” She is 51 years old and works in a management position as a nurse. She is divorced and has two grown children who are twins. She became pregnant while in nursing school and described how difficult this was for her to tell her parents. She described her experience having liposuction, and how meaningful it was for her to have the surgery before seeing her ex-husband at their son’s wedding.

Participant #5 is “Kelly.” She is 22 years old and is a senior in college. She has a steady boyfriend, has never been married, and has no children. She described her frustration over losing weight and having people wonder if she had an eating disorder, which she indicated in her protocol was not the case.

Participant #6 is “Jill.” She is 20 years old and is sophomore in college. She has a steady boyfriend, has never been married, and has no children. She described her mother as being quite influential in the shaping of her eating habits, and her parents’ divorce when she was twelve as one of the most significant events in her development.

## SITUATED NARRATIVE #1

### Tina

#### **Relationship of Body to Perceived Perceptions of Peers and Relationships With Others**

For Tina, a vivid moment occurred for her, the first time she wore a bra. In addition to the pressure she felt, caused by the straps and hooks, she was also quite self-conscious, feeling that everyone around her was aware that something was different on that day. She did not feel a sense of pride, as she believes that some girls do on this occasion. For Tina, this is connected to her feeling of not being “real big on change in general in life.” She was “convinced” that everyone around her knew that she was now wearing a bra. Her experience of self-consciousness and the feeling of being somewhat uncomfortable with this change in her life was reminiscent for her of an experience she had had several years earlier. She was in elementary school at the time, and a boy sitting beside her in music class suddenly turned to her and asked if she was “blossoming.” Just the way that he said it made her feel like it was something that wasn’t good, and she felt uncomfortable because she wasn’t sure what it meant. She had only a “vague notion” that he was referring to something that only happened to girls. She wondered if it was just something he had heard people talk about, and that maybe he was curious and trying to find out what it meant. Her discomfort led her to sharply respond “No!” and with this she felt that she “shut him down,” before he could ask her any more questions. This interaction with the boy in her music class created a sense of anxiety for her because she worried that she would look like she had “no idea what he was talking about.” Tina wanted him to stop before he asked her any more questions that she would not be able to answer. Since it was her impression that he was asking her about an experience that was unique to girls, “something that girls did and boys did not,” she felt pressure to be able to provide him with an answer. She was anxious about the fact that, although she was a girl, she didn’t have the knowledge that he might expect her to have regarding this issue.

During her early adolescence she began to have the sense that she was being looked at differently by the world, that in essence the rules had changed. She was now “being judged on how I looked, on whether I used makeup or had developed a nice figure – instead of how well I did in school or whatever.” This new experience of feeling that she was being judged in these ways did not immediately result in her feeling uncomfortable with herself or not liking how she looked. It was more a sense of “confusion and not quite knowing what I was supposed to do and what I was supposed to think.” At the time she wasn’t necessarily so conscious or aware of a sense of being judged, but rather she developed an awareness that she was not a part of a new phenomenon that some of her peers were experiencing. She has the sense that “there were these girls that seemed to be more with it, and more put together, and the awareness that people were getting a lot of attention and that my classmates would talk about them or look at them or whatever, and that was not happening so much for me.”

Tina’s initial confusion during early adolescence eventually evolved into a lack of acceptance about her appearance, which “makes me feel poorly about myself.” She has

had the idea that if she only “looked like people look on TV,” that her life would be “better.” She much prefers activities like reading a book, but wonders if she “should spend more time making myself up or whatever.” This has led to a feeling of guilt in relation to how she has chosen to establish her priorities. But ultimately, although she has questioned whether her priorities are “in the right place,” for her, the answer is “yes,” because “that is what I prefer to do.”

Tina’s lack of satisfaction with her appearance can be further broken down into what she calls her “hangups,” or specific things that she wishes she could change about the way she looks. For Tina, this is connected to her sense of shyness and her belief that she is “socially inept.” She would rather “be off reading a book by myself,” than “do the small talk at parties.” She has an awareness that she avoids putting herself in places “where I have to do the small talk thing.” The connection between her lack of acceptance or “hang-ups” about her appearance, and her shyness or “social ineptness” is found in her avoidance of situations which will likely involve social interaction.

Although it is now difficult for her to say, she believes that the changes in her body during her early adolescence “probably” altered her relationships with others in some fundamental way. In the present, it is easier for her to think about “how adolescence changed her perception of herself than to think about “how it altered relationships with others.” She finds it difficult to determine “which came first.” She makes the “educated guess” that the changes she experienced in her body altered her social relationships. It may be a matter of “remembering that one moment when the guys laughed at me and maybe the assumption that people are a little more inclined to laugh or whatever.” But whatever the sequence of changes during adolescence, the end result was that she found herself more at ease and comfortable in situations which do not require her to interact with others.

By the time she was in high school, however, she had “grown accustomed to a new me,” and had gotten “used to a new me.” For Tina, this “new self” includes both physical and social changes. High school was “better,” because she had adjusted to the physical changes in her body as well as found a peer group within which she felt comfortable. “I was a card-carrying member of the band geeks.” She found a sense of security in finding a “niche” and knowing where she “fit in the social world of high school.”

This was in contrast to middle school where she experienced “a desperate desire...to physically be like the ‘popular kids.’” She wished that her own body would look more like theirs. There was uncertainty and the sense that they knew something that she didn’t. “It was kind of like a puzzle that I wanted to figure out. How do they do that? How do they get their hair to do that? How do they get that look?” She wondered what they knew that she didn’t know, and still, at this point in her life, feels like she doesn’t know. She envied that they were “developing nice figures” and “had clear skin.” This was “important” to her because these were things that she felt she “never had.” This brought a sense of confusion and a worry that she lacked some essential knowledge that would have helped her achieve the results she wished for, as well as an awareness of a sense of unfairness in the world. She asked herself, “Is it something that they’re born with and it just happens, which I’m sure is part of it. Do they use a magical product that they haven’t told the rest of us about, and why is it that they get the clear skin and I don’t?” In the world of middle school it felt like an equation, “that clear skin equals I will be more popular.”

Tina's acceptance of her body has grown with each educational level and its accompanying social culture. She felt the most self-conscious in middle school when the changes were still very new. As she moved into high school and found a peer group she felt comfortable with, she also felt more comfortable with the changes in her body. At an all-girl Ivy League college, she was exposed to a whole new environment and level of acceptance of the female body.

"I can credit my undergraduate experience at Vassar with helping me a lot. Here was a group of brainy, beautiful women who are not ashamed of their bodies. I saw women who did not wear bras or shave. I heard women speak unabashedly of menstruation and sex." She found this "shocking" at first, to go to "a place like Vassar, with all this 'woman power' hanging over it." She initially experienced uncertainty about how to respond to this, but then came to appreciate being in this all female environment. She came to "really like it there," and "really enjoyed the experience." She was surrounded by women who were not "slaves to fashion," and who believed very strongly in being yourself. She didn't necessarily experience all of this as "liberating" at the time, but it was "really traumatic" for her to graduate. She didn't want to leave, and it was also at this point that she realized she was "kind of unhappy" and wanted to "do something about it." She doesn't know if this self-realization would have occurred had she not gone to Vassar. This idea, that "I'm better than I think I am" may not have developed. She isn't sure if she would have come to this conclusion if she had not attended a women's college. She credits the thought and theory that she was exposed to there with having influenced her. It was the experience of attending a female college that caused her to do "the thinking" that she has done. For Tina, it was a quite positive experience.

### **Relationship of Bodily Changes to Self-Image and Self-Concept**

This differed significantly with her everyday life during adolescence, which was "not a happy experience." She felt "really, really self-conscious and unsure" of herself. It was so unpleasant for her that she feels uncertain that she even wants to describe it. She wanted things to be different. She wasn't interested in the things that her friends were interested in, such as teen magazines and the kind of music that they liked. She began to question herself, wondering if she should be interested in those things. She felt a sense of obligation to maybe try to become interested in these things "just to make other people happy." She didn't become interested in boys "until very late," which prompted her to ask herself the question "is there something wrong with me?" She felt quite unsure of herself, which made her anxious and created "a lot of questions about 'should I be different than what I am.'" Trying to fit in by making herself "look the way the popular girls looked" was also a source of unhappiness for her. She imagined that they were different from her, that it seemed "to be so easy for them, why isn't it easy for me, too?" Tina wonders if it actually was easy for them, "but it looked like it was." This was such a difficult time in her life that she is "aware of a subtle reluctance even to think back to middle school."

However, high school was easier because of her adjustment "to a new me." College represented yet another evolution in her thinking about herself. It was during her junior year that she developed an awareness that she was "unhappy and should do something about it. "Looking back, I think I was depressed for a long time." She had a realization

that she wasn't happy "thinking down about myself all the time." She experienced uncertainty about what she could do to change it but resolved that she would find out. Her feelings of depression were in part related to her appearance, "the idea that I really didn't like the way I looked." So she began wearing makeup and started thinking about being more physically active, doing things like yoga and ti-chi. She hasn't "gotten to that point yet, that's probably somewhere further down the road." For her it has been a "road of discovery to a more self-accepting me, for about three years. It hasn't been easy, but I believe I'm making progress." She thinks that she is somewhat more accepting of herself in terms of her body, "not a whole lot, but I'm getting there." There are times when she is aware that she is more accepting of her body. She can look at herself in a mirror wearing a bathing suit and think "that's not awful, that's not bad. And I don't think I would have done that before. I like myself when I wear makeup now. So I'm making progress, I think."

Tina wonders if she "lost" herself somewhere during her adolescence. She has heard people say that this is what can happen to girls and "while I hate to think that that's what happened to me, I don't know what else to call it." It's an idea of which she has become aware. "It's just the idea that girls kind of lose their self-confidence. They learn to be critical of themselves." Her understanding is that this experience comes about because it is "taught and is not something that comes naturally." She doesn't like to think that this happened to her, but she has given it some thought and it "seems to fit."

### **Relationship of Bodily Changes to Lack of Knowledge**

A part of this experience for Tina was feeling that the girls around her "inherited a natural knowledge" of how to do things such as "properly apply lipstick or achieve perfectly tanned legs." There were so many new things to think about, and "even now, I think that there should be a handbook that explains how to apply mascara, how to avoid razor burn, or what to do if, eek!, you have hair on your nipples." She felt that there were other girls that had knowledge that she simply didn't have which resulted in her feeling that she was at a disadvantage. "I think that it made me feel that if I only knew this stuff, that I would be able to achieve what they did...I don't know if it was a matter of thinking that I should have been able to naturally be able to do what they did. I think it was more the idea that, if only I could learn what they do, that I would be able to do it too." This is something that she still believes today as a young adult. But it is no longer as distressing as it once was. What has changed is that she thinks that she could "probably learn to do these things if I wanted to. But I think I'm at the point where I'm not really sure I want to, and that is really not a high priority for me."

### **Relationship of Body to Mother**

Another aspect of her middle school experience, that made it difficult for her was being teased by boys. Tina felt angry at her mother for not letting her shave her legs and pluck her eyebrows. Her mother thought she was too young, and she was laughed at by boys at school for having dark hair on her legs. "I was very upset with my mother." She felt very self-conscious because there were other girls who were starting to shave. She inherited "very dark hair, and wanted to be able to wear shorts and skirts but "I felt very

self-conscious then that everybody would be able to see that my legs were all hairy.” But she felt conflicting emotions because “I wanted to be obedient to my mom and make her happy...” It was her mother’s opinion that shaving her legs was something that she would have to do forever and that she would end up hating, so she should wait as long as she could. She wore panty hose to try and cover up the hair. It bothered her that her mother said that she couldn’t shave her legs. She was also angry at the boys who were giggling at her but she also had a sense of resignation about it. She had the expectation that they would laugh and that there would be nothing she could do about it unless she shaved her legs. Although she didn’t like it, she was more upset with her mother, who wouldn’t allow her to shave.

During her adolescence Tina was strongly influenced by her mother and the rest of her family when it came to things such as style and makeup. She followed the example of her mother, who wears only “a little bit of makeup,” rather than the other girls around her. She was “resistant” to “following the crowd.” She was conscious of “applying or following values that my family had, as opposed to the other people in my age group.” Consequently, during her adolescence she didn’t wear much makeup or style her hair that often. It has only been recently, as a young adult, that she has begun to wear clothes that accent her figure. Even now, she doesn’t feel that comfortable wearing these kinds of clothes.

Tina’s sense of discomfort with paying attention to her appearance by doing things such as wearing makeup, styling her hair, and wearing flattering clothes, began in her early adolescence and, although she is getting more comfortable, continues today. “It’s a continuous movement... Whatever I experienced back then, I carry with me and it does shape who I am today.” She believes that it was during her early adolescence that she “learned to be shy,” and she is currently focusing on trying to be “more confident and more self-assured.” “Somewhere in there, I don’t know where, I kind of learned to be shy and to try to not get people to notice me just by what I’m wearing or whatever.” She is currently conscious of an attempt on her part, “to change what I was before.” Her increased comfort with her body and willingness to allow more attention to be focused there by others, is correlated with her greater self-confidence. She now has the “idea that there is nothing inherently wrong with me.” She is unclear where “these ideas happened. I don’t know if it was directly related to what was going on with my body,” but she believes that “learning to be shy” and “trying to not draw attention” to herself occurred in “very late elementary school and middle school.”

Feeling that she lacked essential knowledge and information about fashion and beauty tips, her adolescence “was an adventure in learning what I most needed to know, and pretending everything else didn’t matter.” Tina points to her mother’s lack of being “fashion-conscious”, or her not having a “big sister” who could provide her guidance in these areas, as significant in her lack of confidence in attending to her body. It was simply easier to do what she had always done. Because she lacked knowledge and didn’t feel confident, she told herself that things like academics were important and areas such as fashion “didn’t matter so much. It was what I told myself, kind of a self-selecting of what was important. Because I chose not to make myself up or whatever, I told myself that that’s not so important.”

### **Relationship of Bodily Changes to Negative Feelings Regarding Changes**

Overall, she “didn’t like” the changes that occurred in her body during her adolescence. For Tina, these changes represented the inevitability of having to grow up, go off to college, and become an adult. She also experienced her developing body as an intrusion into her life, in which she was happy “being a little sheltered girl.” Physical changes meant a loss of control, forcing her to move beyond a life in which she felt happy and secure, towards an adult life with all its unknowns in which she would be required to have responsibility for things she simply didn’t have to think about at that time. She equated the changes in her body with interfering with a lifestyle with which she was content, i.e. being able to read and study, and pushing her towards a new kind of life where she would have to spend time shaving her legs. She feels a sense of frustration over the additional time and expense that she is required to spend on things like makeup.

One of the unwelcome changes that came with adolescence was a change in the significance of body hair. She feels that she has been “unfortunate enough to inherit more than my fair share of body hair.” It’s not “socially desirable.” She has felt uncomfortable enough that she recently started bleaching the hair on her arms. This is something that her mother also does and “I know that I got it from her.” Bleaching her arms was prompted by an incident that happened last year when, a little boy at a picnic came over and looked at her arms. He was touching the hair “like he can’t believe that a woman would have hair like that.” He said he didn’t know any other women that had hair like that. “It made me feel really bad just because it’s considered terribly unattractive and it makes me feel very self-conscious. Her feelings about her body hair are quite negative, to the extent that she initially recalled feeling that it was “morally wrong,” but then distanced herself from that belief, saying that it was probably “an exaggeration.”

### **Relationship of Body to Men**

Attention from men has created mixed emotions and uncertainty for Tina in the past. While on a vacation in France with her family when she was a teenager, she became aware that a man was “checking out” her legs. She wasn’t sure if she liked it. She was about fifteen and it was the first time that she was aware that a man was noticing her. They were coming out of a train station and her mother told her, “this guy is checking you out”. She felt embarrassed because she was with her family and because it was the first time that it had ever happened. She wasn’t sure if she was supposed to do something. But it also felt “kind of nice”. But she qualified the experience in her own mind, attributing the fact that it happened at all to her being in France. She saw it as an isolated incident, one that would never happen again. It felt awkward to her to discuss it with her parents. She wasn’t sure what to say to them. She felt a sense of confusion in that she liked the fact that a man was looking at her, but she felt embarrassed because it was all new to her and she didn’t know what to do. She didn’t have “any guy experience”. She wondered if she was supposed to indicate that she noticed him or pretend that it just didn’t happen. She was filled with uncertainty as she weighed all of this in her mind. On top of all that, she considered the possibility that there was a whole different set of expectations for how one should respond in a situation like this among the French.

Tina has experienced a lack of confidence over the years in relation to her body. She has never been in a serious relationship and sometimes wonders if her body is “capable of turning a guy’s head”. She wonders if her figure is one that men will find attractive. This has given rise to feelings of ambivalence for her as she tries to decide between wearing things that she believes men will find more attractive or going with clothes with which she feels more comfortable. Her experience has been one of almost feeling let down by her body. She has focused her energies on creative writing and excelling in academics and wonders if her emphasis in these areas has led to a displeasure with the changes in her body, or whether the changes in her body simply heightened her awareness of her reliance on relating to the world through her “natural inclination for thinking and brain work”. Her own analysis of this question has led her to the conclusion that it is “probably a combination of both”.

### **Relationship of Bodily Changes to Increased Focus on the Body**

Nonetheless, the reality of her body’s maturation required her to pay attention to it. The effect of this process was that it interfered with her ability to distance herself from her body, viewing it as “something that I can just use and walk around in”. Physical maturation during adolescence meant that her body was no longer behaving or cooperating in that way. Suddenly, she had to pay attention to her body as well as her mind. She needed to think about things like “shaving, plucking my eyebrows, and buying feminine hygiene products”.

### **Relationship of Body to Feelings of Competence**

Adolescence and its associated physical changes brought a new experience of feeling less competent in the world. She would do things like forget to buy supplies for her period. Tina felt confused back in high school as she negotiated the social hierarchy of that time and place. She was not part of the “popular crowd,” but was part of the “band crowd”. She was one of “the smart kids,” as opposed to the popular kids, who, it seemed to her were just “naturally born with the ability to look good.” This was not something that the rest of them had “inherited or whatever,” and this was upsetting to her, because she “wanted to be smart and look good.” It made her unhappy because up to that point in life, things that mattered like school work, came easily to her and “these were things that didn’t come easily to me.” It created uncertainty and a lack of confidence in herself as she began to question whether there was something “suddenly wrong” with her. It was difficult for her as she began to form the opinion of herself that she was not “really good at this.” She also came to realize that she didn’t necessarily want to be good at things like making herself up, wearing makeup and having her hair look good. The area of “self-presentation” was new to her. She was used to being competent in life, being intelligent and being good at things. She attributes her new found sense of incompetence to the idea that she felt that she “should” be good at this, and felt that she wasn’t.

Tina’s lack of confidence in her body has continued into her present life as a young adult. As a teenager she felt that “there was no place for me in sports or physical activity.” Occasionally she thinks about taking a yoga or dance class, but worries that her body would “embarrass” her. Her feelings about this originated when she was in school

and there was a “‘jock versus the smart person’” stereotype that was developing at that time.” She didn’t attempt to go out for a sports team as she lacked confidence in her ability to contribute in that area. This belief has persisted as she worries that she would “get the steps wrong” or wouldn’t be able to do what was required, that her brain would think but her body wouldn’t follow. She feels like “the spirit is willing, but the body is not able.”

### **Relationship of Body and Mind**

She has always experienced a sense of separateness between her mind and her body. She considers herself to be “a cerebral kind of person,” one who prefers “thinking to doing.” She wonders if this created in her a “greater dislike for what was happening” than it did for others experiencing changes in their bodies. She is uncertain about this. Her perception of herself as “cerebral” is such a part of her identity that she sometimes has thought that if she could, she would simply use her body “as a vehicle to move my brain around.” But Tina views this as inherently impractical and unhealthy, observing that “if you neglect what is going on with your body, then the mind can go too.” During adolescence, her changing body required her to pay attention to it in a way that wasn’t necessary before, forcing her to alter her view of herself as a totally cerebral person. For her, adolescence brought with it a sense of disruption, creating a “rift between my thoughts and body.” It makes her think of the term “mind/body divide.” In an ideal world she would use her body “as a carrier to carry my brain around in.” She derives much greater enjoyment from reading and thinking than from activities like exercising or playing basketball. She feels that she tries “to care more” for her mind than her body, and that it is “a great effort” to do things like put an aerobics tape on.

This is in contrast to her memories of her childhood. Tina recalls being much more physically active, taking swimming lessons and doing gymnastics. It makes her believe that it was something that occurred during adolescence that interfered with her becoming someone who could “do gymnastics or dance lessons” into adulthood.

Her reticence about engaging in activities that bring her body into focus has led her to look “for other sources for recognition,” such as academic and intellectual pursuits. When she was in school, she excelled in the academic arena. Every year she would get an award for being one of the top five people with the highest GPA. She was so proud of these awards and she would take them home and put them on her bookshelves. She still keeps them in a drawer under her bed. Every year they would also give out awards for the presidential physical challenge, which was conducted in gym class and involved physical activities such as having to run the mile and doing pull-ups. One year a special award was given to one of her female classmates because she had won the Presidential Fitness Award every year. The principal “specifically mentioned that it was the highest award that they would give out at the awards ceremony.” The participant felt very badly because she had won a highest GPA award every year that it was given and she didn’t understand why her academic achievement was not considered to be the highest achievement as opposed to the fitness award. The fact that her academic accomplishments were not considered as being equivalent to the fitness award still bothers her.

Overall, she has experienced a disconnection between her mind and body that she believes may contribute to a “disconnect” between herself and others. For her, this is a

“working theory,” and the way she sees “my own situation.” She is engaged in a process of self-examination in an attempt to understand her current life situation. For her this includes coming to an understanding of her shyness and her comfort with activities that allow her to use her intellect. Her father calls her a “raging introvert.”

### **Relationship of Body to Being Self-Conscious**

She feels a sense of shyness about her body and this has led her to avoid those things that will draw attention to her body. This includes rarely wearing clothing such as “shorts or sleeveless shirts or outfits that expose my stomach.” It means not playing sports or doing things like speaking in front of others.

### **Relationship of Body to Cultural Expectations**

This sense of shyness was fueled, in part, by expectations she developed about herself which were based upon cultural examples of the female body. As a teenager, she read a book series about twins who wore a “perfect size six.” Ever since that time, “it has remained in my mind that I should wear a perfect size six, too.” She feels that this would not be an easily attainable goal and one that would require “drastic measures.” She started reading the books in middle school and it gave her the idea that when she became a junior in high school that she would “be tall and blonde and wear a size six,” just like the characters in the book. Now that she’s been out of high school for awhile, it remains in the back of her mind that this is what should have happened. She attributes this idea to the fact that the books were quite popular and that the characters were described as “All-American high school teenage girls.” It made her think that all of these changes were supposed to happen to her, and it made her wonder why it didn’t happen that way, why she developed differently. She compared herself with the book characters, in part, because she they were twins and she herself is a twin. Moreover, the personalities of the twins in the books were very much like those of her and her sister – one being quite outgoing and social – the other more reserved and studious.

Her perceptions of what constituted an ideal female body were also influenced by her play with Barbie dolls when she was young. She notes that many people criticize Barbie for having “unrealistic proportions,” but she has also noticed that Barbie has no hair on her body. This was not something that occurred to her as a ten year old, when she was actually playing with Barbie, but rather over the last four years, it was something that she began to think about. “It was just so odd.” When she played with Barbie she used to think “when I grow up I’m going to have breasts and hips and whatever like Barbie. And suddenly I have hair, too, and where did that come from?” She eventually realized that she had expected to look like Barbie, “perfectly hairless in every way.”

Her expectations about the way her body would mature, her beliefs that it had somehow “matured incorrectly, have made me very shy about myself.” Specifically, she had expected to be a size six and not have body hair. It was not what she expected and this created a sense of anxiety for her that it was not what other people expected either. But for her the relationship between her body and her sense of self is a complex one. She is uncertain about whether her shyness grew out of her feelings about her body or if she is “just naturally shy.” She experienced the changes that occurred during adolescence as her

body matured as a “disconnect.” There was a disconnect between the way her body actually developed, and what she was assuming would happen. Whether it was “naturally” being shy, which she “projected on to wearing long pants and sweatshirts,” or “my feelings about my body that made me shy,” is ambiguous for her. Sometimes she wonders if it was rather a kind of combination of these two possibilities in that it was “a progression of things that made me shy,” or specific memories that stand out for her such as guys laughing at her because she didn’t shave her legs.

Regardless of the complexities of the relationship, her experience of her body is characterized by a sense of separateness from that of her sense of self. Since her body began changing as an adolescent she has felt that “my life since then has been a process of trying to co-exist happily with my body.” This has meant developing a sense of acceptance about certain things as well as the motivation to change the things with which she is dissatisfied. She tells herself that she is not going to be a size six, that the average woman in America is a size fourteen, and that what she sees in the movies is not the average person.

### **Relationship of Bodily Changes to Expectations About Changes**

Bodily changes during adolescence led her to begin “stereotyping” herself. Experiencing the changes in her body as it began to mature, opened up whole new areas for her. For most of this process she did not experience herself as having the same sense of competence she experienced in other aspects of her life. She knew that she was good at academics and school work and had the idea that “I’m a little brown-noser studying person.” She felt that that’s “really where I should spend all of my energies.” Her belief was that she was not one of those people who are good at sports, that are “snappy dressers and accessorize themselves well,” and who “gain attention through looking good.” She came to think of herself as someone who would “gain attention” through excelling at school. Her belief system was based upon the idea that there are “two kinds of people in the world, and I’m one person and I’m not the other person.” She resigned herself to this belief and felt that she should not devote “a lot of energy trying to be that other person because it’s just not going to happen.”

As a young adult, this continues to be her perception, but there has been some integration of her beliefs about what is possible for her. She does not think that things are as “cut and dried and black and white,” as she used to believe they were. She believes that she has more autonomy and a sense of control in relation to her circumstances than she did as an adolescent. She thinks that if she wants to develop certain characteristics then “why don’t you just get up and do something about it.” For instance, she has had the realization that “there’s no law” that says she can’t wear makeup just because her mother doesn’t, or that she can do something about the hair on her arms if it is what she chooses. However, her sense of freedom is tempered by the idea that she will never be good at sports or “be one of those people who just naturally seem to accessorize themselves well or whatever.” Overall, her thinking has moved from a very dichotomous view of what may be possible for her in life to a more autonomous, integrated understanding of what possibilities exist for her. She has come to believe that if there are attributes or characteristics that she would like to develop, that she has a kind of ability to move towards them.

Her belief that she could only do well at school began to take root during middle school. She had always done well in school, but previous to that she had also participated in swimming lessons and gymnastics. It was in middle school “that I decided that academics is for me, that I didn’t do sports...and then I really strove to be the person with the high GPA or whatever.” For her, this shift in her identity came about in relation to her perception that her body wasn’t developing in a way in which she expected.

### **Relationship of Body to Recognition By Others**

Her ideas about her perceived lack of competence and confidence related to her body and appearance led her to behave in ways that did not draw attention to her body. She got in the habit of wearing “big sweatshirts and old jeans.” It was during college that some of her beliefs about herself were influenced and she began wear brighter colors. She “began to think that I might deserve brighter colors.” Up until that time, she “never saw myself as the type of person who could wear red.” She associated the color red with being a color that people wear when they want to be noticed, “and I don’t really want people to notice me and I’m not going to wear red. I don’t wear a lot of red. Sometimes I do”. Her willingness to occasionally wear red is an indication that her comfort with having people notice her has somewhat grown.

### **Relationship of Body to Freedom of Movement**

This is in significant contrast to how she experienced her body during childhood. “I don’t remember worrying about my body when I was little. I ran around and used my body however I wanted.” She has memories of running around on the beach and climbing on the jungle gym without worry or giving “it a second thought.” She “just didn’t really think about it.” It was during adolescence that this sense of freedom of movement was altered. She became more self-conscious, less free to run around.

This constriction of movement has been perpetuated to the present, in early adulthood. She feels that she “doesn’t have the courage to change.” She uses words such as “pidgeon-holed” and “cramped” which for her resonate with her present life. Although she believes that she would be able to do some of the things from which she feels restricted, “if I put my mind to it and worked at it,” she feels that she is not doing some of the things that she could be doing. She imagines that “there are things out there, yoga or whatever, that I would enjoy, but it’s my own hang-ups and my own preconceived notions about myself that aren’t allowing me to do these things.” Overall, her life since adolescence, in contrast to her childhood, has been characterized by a more constricted freedom of movement, resulting in a restriction of life experiences.

For her, not having the courage to change means that there are probably things “out there” that she would like to do, but because she has “spent so much time building myself up” as an academic, a person who likes to read, that she feels that she would be going beyond her “comfort zone.” At this point in her life, “the risks outweigh the possible gains.” Making changes would require her to alter some of her fundamental beliefs about herself, creating anxiety for her. The risk to her would involve venturing into areas from which she now feels restricted, areas which would draw increased attention towards and require her to use her body. Her primary worry is that she would embarrass herself, that

her body would not do what she wanted it to do. She experiences a lack of trust in relation to her body.

She feels a sense of frustration arising from the experiences and areas of life that are restricted or closed off to her. She believes that because she is not “comfortable” with herself, and that she is just beginning to learn to do this, she makes an “assumption” that men will feel similarly towards her. She wishes things were different, that she could “just snap out of it.” She feels frustration that “the shyness, the insecurities,” may prevent her from fully experiencing life.

### **Relationship of Body to Time**

She feels anxiety in relation to the passage of time. She has an awareness “that time is passing by,” and worries that “time might run out.” Her frustration has given rise to impatience. She feels “impatient to experience all of the things that I have not experienced yet. I want to do everything.” In addition to her academic and career aspirations, she looks with a sense of longing at her friends who are in committed relationships. She wonders why she hasn’t experienced that yet.

### **Relationship of Body to Comfort Level About Body**

Her lack of comfort with herself encompasses a lack of acceptance in relation to her appearance. When she looks in the mirror, she wishes she looked “better,” and she is “just not always happy” with the way she looks. Specifically, she wishes she didn’t have “so much hair” and she’s always wanted to be “small and petite.” But she also has the sense that whatever her appearance, she would probably want to be something different. “If I were small and petite, then I would probably want to be tall.”

For her, her lack of comfort with her body plays a direct role in the limitations she experiences in her social world. She thinks that it is unlikely that she will “find a guy” in the library. She has friends that go swing dancing and they talk about the guys they meet. She went with them once but felt it wasn’t for her. The activities that she enjoys do not necessarily place her in situations where she is likely to meet a lot of people. She really enjoys going to the theater but has noticed that “people don’t usually stand around and chat.” She thinks she would be more likely to meet people at activities like swing dancing and sporting events, but these are not places where she feels comfortable. She has the sense that her feelings of discomfort in these settings is “limiting.” Her discomfort is founded upon the idea that she feels unable to trust her body to perform as she would like it to. She experiences a lack of confidence in her body.

She worries that the sense of limitation that she experiences socially in relation to her concerns about her body will in turn limit her ability to experience “key life events, like a meaningful relationship and marriage.” She views the fact that some of her friends are already married as “frightening,” and it creates feelings of self-doubt for her as she wonders why it has happened for them and not for her. She identifies her discomfort with social activities as the “connection,” and the thing that could cause her to miss out on these life experiences. But at other times, she distances herself from this worry, saying she’s “not terribly concerned at this point” in her life, that it is simply more of a question she has.

However, there have been moments and experiences along the way which have helped her feel more comfortable with her body. When she was in college she went to see a performance of "The Vagina Monologues." As part of the audience, she screamed "cunt" at the top of her lungs. This was something she "never expected" to do. She experienced some uncertainty about seeing the play. The title "made me a little unsure." Although she would not characterize it as "a major life-changing moment," it created a "realization" for her that it was okay for people to talk about these kinds of things.

### **Relationship of Body to Shame**

**When she was younger, during childhood she doesn't remember feeling that her body was abnormal or shameful in any way. As an adolescent it wasn't something that she remembers thinking about but nevertheless, "somewhere I learned to be ashamed of myself and my body." Today she traces the possible origin of these feelings to experiences like "the guys giggling when I didn't shave my legs," which left her feeling that "I shouldn't let them see." But the evolution of her feelings remains unclear. She is uncertain whether it "happened all at once or gradually." She only knows that "it happened without my noticing." She doesn't like feeling ashamed. She feels angry about it, as she is aware that "there is no reason for me to feel this way," and because she doesn't really know what created these feelings. But she doesn't want to simply be one more woman who is unhappy with herself. She doesn't want to "be a statistic." She feels a sense of loss, wishing that she didn't have to feel "this way." She feels a sense of wistfulness and wishes that "I could have gone directly from running around on the beach being happy, even beyond where I am right now." For her, the transition from the carefree life she experienced as a child to the more constricted existence she experiences as an adult, has meant loss on a number of different levels. "The idea that I kind of lost a number of years where I could have been very happy with myself and outgoing, maybe not outgoing, but doing more than I've been doing. I don't like that." But she wonders if it is just an inevitable, necessary part of living. To have gone straight from being the little girl free to run around on the beach, to being an adult who is happy with her body seems like a transition she is not sure is even possible. "Maybe you have to go through this process to get from one point to the other. I don't know. But in my perfect world that I talk about sometimes, that's the way it would be."**

## SITUATED NARRATIVE #2

Lisa

### Relationship of Body to Lack of Knowledge About Changes

For Lisa, thinking back to her adolescence and the accompanying bodily changes brought “only pain.” For her, this feeling centered primarily around her sense that she was far less informed than her peers about what to expect. This feeling of inadequacy encompassed issues such as knowing “the facts of life,” and what to do if she got her period at school, to feeling that other kids were “more experienced” than she was, which she experienced as “even more painful.” There was also pain for her associated with being ashamed of changes in her body such as her breasts getting larger.

Lisa thought that there was “a gap” between what she knew and what some of the other kids knew. This made her feel out of control because she saw “no way to remedy” this. She and her friends didn’t discuss these kinds of issues and she didn’t know of any books she could read that would help her understand what was happening. She wishes that there had been “a nice book” that would have answered some of her questions.

There was one especially painful experience that occurred when she and her mother went shopping. They were in the dressing room and she was trying on clothes. She still thinks of it when she is in a dressing room today. “My mother got on my case.” She “hissed at me” because “I didn’t have a waist.” It was especially painful for her because she “wasn’t even fat.” Her mother’s comment has “stuck” with her and is “still in my brain.” After all of these years she still feels hurt by her mother’s words and her lack of explanations about what was happening to the participant’s body. Lisa “hates” wearing belts because of the incident in the dressing room and when she does she feels “weird” and not “feminine.” She’ll never forget “that moment.” She felt confused about what could be wrong. Her own attitude toward her changing body was much more nonchalant than her mother’s. She felt that she was simply growing and that there should be no problem or need to comment on it. She wished that her mother could instead just be proud. Her mother’s statement “didn’t make me feel good that day.” As a result, to this day she “hates” shopping for clothes.

As Lisa began recalling her adolescence she found it more difficult than she realized it would be. She was surprised at how “difficult this subject still is, after all these years.” She has tried to avoid thinking about it, has tried to “keep all this blocked out and just be grateful that era is gone forever.” She feels that it has been easier for her to not have to think about it because she does not have children of her own and will not have to experience any “triggers.” But she cannot separate herself from her adolescent experience entirely. “The old tapes...will still be there.” She feels a sense of frustration about this. She is aware of what feels like “old tapes” still running in her head, and she is “kind of mad that they’re still there.” Lisa has the sense that at her age this is something she should be “done with” by now.

### **Relationship of Body to Shame**

In the present, her feelings about her body are conflicted. She feels a sense of “shame and disgust” in relation to her body, but beneath this she also she “secretly” feels both proud and safe. The sense of safety she experiences is due to her current weight, which she believes “keeps men away.” But she also feels pride in her German-Hungarian heritage. She has observed that German women “were strong and big,” and that historically this was accepted. Lisa has felt frustrated that whenever she begins to lose weight and get into shape, she feels unsupported by her mother who has made comments such as “You look sick.” Her attempts to make changes that would allow her to feel better about her body have been complicated by a lack of support or approval from her mother. She has the sense that her mother would be unconcerned about her gaining weight, “She probably wouldn’t care if I blew up to 500 pounds,” and she has felt confused by her mother’s comments about her attempts to lose weight. However, she also has not had an expectation of approval from her mother or felt that she needed it. Despite “negative feedback” from her mother, she feels a sense of pride about being part of her German heritage. “I want to be a strong woman.” Lisa likes the prospect of being able to develop some muscle mass, but this conflicts with what she believes men are conditioned to want from women based on what is “fed to them” through movies and television.

She values the safety that she believes weighing more will bring her. This involves her feelings towards men. “I have a big problem with men.” She does not want to “be hit upon.” There was a time when she believed that she was “cute and adorable,” but no longer views herself this way. Lisa’s beliefs about her body image have been strongly correlated to a changing self-image as well. There was a “naivete” that went along with being cute and adorable. She now experiences herself as “more sarcastic, the bitter old woman.” She believes this will only become more true with age.

### **Relationship of Body to Mother**

Lisa’s feelings about her changing body and becoming a woman were strongly influenced by her mother. In school she began to notice changes in her friends and some of the other girls. One of her friends who “blossomed early,” always had make-up on and her hair always looked nice. There were girls who got up early to do their hair. Her awareness that nobody ever showed her things like how to put on make-up gave rise to a lack of confidence. As a girl, she stood in the doorway, with “big eyes,” and watched her mother powder her face and get dressed. She came away with the message that it was “a chore” to do things like wear a girdle or wear pantyhose. “It was painful.” It was uncomfortable to be dressed up and “terrible” to have to wear heels because they would make your feet hurt. Lisa felt that her mother did these things because they were necessary for her to look “presentable” as a professional woman. She felt that she learned from her mother that “it was a chore to be a woman.” She came to understand that doing things like putting on make-up and getting dressed up did not seem to be highly valued by her mother, and consequently this negatively influenced her own feelings about what it meant to become a woman.

She made some attempts to learn from her mother about the specifics of how to apply make-up but she felt her concerns were dismissed. “Of course my mother wouldn’t go for

that. She would say you're just fine the way you are." But something about her mother's response left her feeling less than positive. She knew girls at school, good-looking girls that wore eyeliner underneath their eyes. She always wondered how they did that.

Along with what she perceived as her mother's negative view of being female, Lisa was also heavily influenced by the Church. In her Catholic school environment there were a couple of girls who got "knocked up" and they were "ostracized." She didn't understand why they weren't more supported, but rather were given "the Scarlet Letter 'A' message." In her experience, "the bad girls" wore heavy make-up and had big hair. This type of attention to oneself came with quite negative connotations for her. The messages she received from both her mother and her church seemed to be that good girls didn't draw attention to themselves. Spending hours doing her hair was something that her mother would view as "frivolous" and was not encouraged. She did not want to draw attention to herself, a desire that is still present today. "I was just Plain Jane."

### **Relationship of Body to Anger**

Her mother has been a powerful influence for her in many ways that have affected her body. Lisa has always had the feeling that it wasn't safe for her to express anger. "My mother never allowed me." To this day her mother will tell her she doesn't like the tone of her voice and won't talk to her if she gets angry. This was also true when she was growing up. She became like "a mouse," staying in her room, trying to stay out of the way. Her world became her highly developed imagination. She was "not allowed" to talk back to her mother, including when she was a teenager, so she developed alternative ways of expressing her anger. From a very early age, around one or two, she began picking at her face to the point that she still carries a barely discernible scar. She was quite self-conscious about for a long time, until she "came to terms with it." She believes that her sense that it wasn't safe for her to express anger led her to "channel" it through her body. Her body has been a means for her to express emotions, especially anger. She keeps her nails short because for the longest time she couldn't stop biting them.

As an adult, Lisa "has anger issues," and her mother has been a source of great frustration for her not only due to her disapproval of anger but for not teaching her how important it is to be able to express anger. "...I was not allowed to get angry, literally as a child, a pre-teen, as a teen, and even into my twenties. Even normal anger." For her to become angry would mean distance, a disconnection from her mother. The anger that she felt she was unable to express for years is "...all coming out now. It's starting to erupt..." Because she was unable to safely express it for so long, she experiences it more as "rage." As an adult her experience of anger has changed. "Anger for me is power." Lisa feels like a "powerful woman" when she's angry. Her current weight, which has served a protective function for her in terms of her relationships with men, also allows her to feel "more powerful" when she's angry. She feels she wouldn't be taken seriously if she were "skinny and angry." She has the perception that she would not appear as threatening and that people would not think she could "do much damage" if she were thin, but at her current weight they would probably worry that she might "crush me to death." As an adult, then, maintaining a heavier weight has meant for her a sense of safety and power.

### **Relationship of Body to Weight**

But her feelings about her weight are complex and characterized by ambivalence. Just as her weight allows her to feel safe and powerful it is also “awful” for her to be at her current weight. At thirty-five years old she weighs two hundred and ten pounds which is a “new world’s record” for her. Lisa has never been this heavy before. She attributes her weight to eating junk food. The weight just slowly crept up and she had to get bigger jeans. She is adamant that “...it has to stop at this level.” She’s fearful of gaining any more weight because that would require her to go out and buy new clothes. The prospect of having to try on clothes is associated with anxiety for her. She experiences a sense of longing in relation to the fact that “they have very beautiful clothes,” which do not fit her. She likes wearing baggy clothes, which are a way “of hiding behind clothes.” She finds it “ridiculous” that she weighs what she does and worries about the effects on her health. She feels conflicted about her weight. Although she finds comfort in the safety and sense of power it brings her, the anxiety associated with being at this weight appears to have a greater influence upon her. “I cannot get any bigger. I just can’t.”

### **Relationship of Body to Peers**

She can trace her concerns about her weight as beginning at a dance recital when she was in the eighth grade. She was “appalled” one day when she saw a video of herself and how “fat” she was in comparison with the other dancers. She still feels appalled when she thinks about it. Up until that point she didn’t have a clear image of her body. It wasn’t something she thought about. She didn’t have a full-length mirror in her room and she wasn’t used to seeing the image of her body. Lisa loved dancing. But when she saw herself with the other girls, wearing a tight-fitting, spandex costume, she saw herself as just a “blob.” She was the “biggest” and the “widest” dancer in the group. The effect on her was so profound that she stopped dancing. She thought that she was “ugly” in her outfit compared to the other girls who, from her point of view, were taller and thinner.

She had been dancing with the same girls since she was four or five. When they were ready to go “on toe point” she was told by her ballet instructor that she was “too heavy.” Lisa was crushed. Her possibilities and potential as a dancer were extinguished. She feels a sense of frustration and disappointment when she considers that she had “excellent balance” then and could have been a “great” dancer. But because of her weight, she wasn’t encouraged. She was “shot down,” while the rest of her friends got to continue. She was in the dance studio and “it was explained” to her as “nicely” as they could. The meaning that this had for her gave rise to unrealistic images of herself. “...obviously that meant I was a cow, I was a hippo.” It hurts her that she wasn’t given the chance to try. She watched the girls in high school perform their ballet routines and do their pirouettes. But she was left out. “I didn’t get that chance.” Lisa had friends in high school, but she had the sense of being excluded since she wasn’t participating in the dance activities.

### **Relationship of Body to Men**

There is a strong relationship for her between her weight and her self-image. This has also had significant implications in terms of her relationships with men. Ten years ago,

she weighed one hundred and fifty pounds and was “quite cute.” She was involved in many relationships with men and she felt very much in control in these relationships. “I was the dumper, not the dumpee.” But she would enter into relationships that were “chaotic.” She was “non-discriminant.” She liked hearing that she was cute. She valued hearing that from a man, any man. She needed “outside validation” and found herself connecting with men whom she now considers “the bottom of the barrel.” It was important to her to maintain a sense of control in her relationships. Consequently, she chose men who allowed her to feel that she was accomplishing this.

At this point in her life, Lisa feels that she uses her “heaviness to keep men away.” She doesn’t view herself as matching a cultural ideal of what she perceives is attractive to men. She doesn’t wear heels, is not “tall or svelte,” and is not blonde. She believes that men will “immediately...stop for blondes.” She sees women with blonde hair as her “competition.” She feels some contempt for both men and blondes. “You’ve gotta watch their behavior sometimes, but I’m very, whatever, against, blondes.” She also recently discovered that “men will f--- anything regardless of body size and without regard for a woman’s feelings.” Her relationships with men have been characterized by a sense of mistrust. She has “always looked just for physical affection in my relationships and had sex early in them to avoid any violence.” She experiences a sense of vulnerability in relation to sex. Lisa is uncertain why she is as worried as she is about the possibility that a sexual encounter will deteriorate into a violent act. She feels that she has used sex in order “to get physical affection.” This was her experience of sex when she was younger and she feels a sense of frustration that she is currently unable to resolve these feelings due to her present lack of opportunities. She would need “...a boyfriend, and one that has insight. But I’ve basically taken myself off the market.” Her sense of bodily vulnerability has given rise to her living a more isolated existence in terms of her relationships with men.

In the past, her desire for control in her relationships led her to choose men whom on two occasions, began “stalking her.” This made her feel “powerful.” She was “physically strong” and felt “able to fight back.” The stalking never resulted in any physical violence, “but it did take a toll on me, emotionally.”

### **Relationship of Body to Father**

Lisa feels her relationships with men have been complicated by not having her father around. He died right before her first birthday so she never got to know him. From what she has read in her psychology books this has resulted in her missing out on the things that come with a father-daughter relationship such as “complexes,” “vying for your father’s attention against your mother. Sitting on daddy’s lap, being held. Feeling safe at home...” She believes that this is what “came out” in her later adult relationships with men, that she was looking for “just someone to hold me. To be the daddy kind of thing.”

### **Relationship of Body to Brothers**

Her longing for acceptance and affection from a male figure was intensified by the teasing she received from one of her brothers. She didn’t gain weight until the eighth grade, but even before that, as a child, he would tease her and call her names. The other

kids in the neighborhood would sometimes join in. Lisa felt unable to defend herself. The teasing occurred repetitively and it was “enough to grow inner hatred” towards her brother. He would tell her that she was as “big as a blimp,” and that she had “fat calves.” She felt confused about why he would do that to her. She believes now that it was his way of coping with all of the stress in their house. Her brothers were several years older than her and she felt that she “could not compete.” She is still affected by her brother’s teasing today. “I still don’t like him for that.”

### **Relationship of Body to Sex**

As an adult Lisa experiences a sense of vulnerability in relation to sex. Sex was never discussed in her house when she was growing up and this became another area in relation to her body where she felt that other people were better informed than she was. In her Catholic school, there was also little discussion of sex. When sex was mentioned at all, she came away with the impression that it was “dirty,” “trouble,” and something from which she should “stay away.” This gave rise to some false beliefs on her part. She mistakenly believed that she had to have sex with her prom date. Consequently, she did not attend her prom. She was “scared to death.” She felt unable to talk to her mother or anyone else about it and kept her fears to herself. Lisa feels some resentment that her mother didn’t take the initiative and help her with this. One boy asked her, but she turned him down. “I was scared.” She avoided the situation of the prom because as she imagined it, it would have been difficult for her to feel safe. Not only was she worried about having to have sex, but there were the other details of who would drive, and who would she be with, and being out late at night. Again, she experienced a sense of vulnerability in relation to these issues. So it became easier to avoid the prom. She found ways to devalue the boy who asked her, making it easier for her not to go. The lack of information made her feel frightened of sex. She didn’t understand that it was a choice, that she could make decisions about it. Even today, she feels that it’s hard “to integrate.” She wishes she and her mother could have talked about it. But, as a teenager, she felt unable to discuss it with her mother. Lisa didn’t want to “stir anything up.” As a result, she continues to “struggle” with sex today. This is still evident when she goes on a date. She experiences “pressure” if she goes out to dinner. If a man pays for her dinner or spends a lot of money on a show, “then I guess sex is in order.” She insists on going “dutch” so that she will not owe him sex. She feels confused about what men will expect from her in terms of how long they should wait before having sex. “Weeks, months? What do they expect? What’s the criteria?” She feels unsure of herself. “I don’t know what to do.” At present, she doesn’t want to have sex because she feels that she is too “fat” to let anybody see her body. But she has the realization that she is missing out on an experience that she would like to be a part of and that she should not be allowing her feelings about her body to interfere with it. She looks “at couples out there, and I say they’re doing it. There’s more to it than just sex. Get over it. Don’t worry about it.” She has an awareness that her feelings of self-consciousness about her body are contributing to a pattern of avoidance and isolation in relation to sexual relationships with men.

She had her first kiss when she was a freshman in college and it made her feel “wonderful.” She lost her virginity at twenty-one “just to get it over with.” She wanted to find out what “this whole thing is about.” She also felt frustrated. She knew that a lot of

the people she knew were “doing it already,” and she wanted to know what they were talking about. Lisa felt that sex would always just be “an act” for her and wanted to just get it over with. She felt left out, since most of her friends were already having sex. She felt like a “statistical outlier.” She waited until she was twenty-one, because she then felt “safe” from her mother. She was now an adult and could make her own decisions. However, her first sexual experience “wasn’t very pleasant,” and she wondered to herself why she had done it. She felt “bad” about herself at the time. Because she was “the Catholic girl,” she felt that she had committed a sin since they weren’t married. She felt naïve and believed that they would get married since they had had sex.

She regrets “doing it just to get it over with,” and also regrets it because “it hurt.” She found him to be insensitive to her needs and now feels that he took advantage of her. Sex makes her feel vulnerable. She feels “that being a woman, you’re a target.” Lisa felt so vulnerable and out of control that she would sometimes have fantasies of revenge. “...not that I ever thought about carrying it out, but I would think, if I kill you now you won’t ever hurt me again.”

Her feelings of being vulnerable and unsafe led her to choose an older man of thirty-eight for her first sexual experience. She thought that he would be more “patient, understanding, more verbal.” She experienced a sense of disappointment when he turned out to be none of these things. But having sex gave her a feeling of being in control. “It was something I could do so they could find their release. And they were vulnerable after, in my mind. So I was proud of that.” But she would not allow herself to be vulnerable in sexual situations. Or “they’d be in control.”

### **Relationship of Body to Menstrual Period**

Like sex and other subjects associated with her changing body, having her menstrual period “wasn’t really explained a lot.” She wishes things had been more “open.” For a long time she didn’t know what a tampon was and she had “a couple of accidents” at school. “It was just awful. It was just very humiliating for me.” She didn’t have any sisters, and her mother wasn’t “open about it.” But she knew from one of her friends who had “developed” earlier, that it was normal. Her friend had four older sisters and was far better informed than she was. As far as having her period, she just knew that it was something that was going to come and that she would have to deal with it. It was not a positive experience for her or something about which she felt proud. “So, I didn’t think it was the greatest thing in the world to be happening, bottom line.” Having her period was characterized by a sense of uncertainty that came with the feeling that everyone else was better informed than she was.

When she got her period her mother made a “perfunctory” call to one of her friends. “She was so proud...” Lisa had a sense of being part of history, of being part of something larger than herself. When she told her mother she envisioned all of the women in the past who have had this conversation with their mothers. Her mother was happy about it but she wasn’t.

Again, she felt uninformed. She would have liked to have been educated about what was going on, to understand something about the physiology behind it. Nothing was said about PMS. She tried to figure that out, later, on her own. She felt that having to deal with menstruation placed her at a “disadvantage” in comparison with boys. “It’s just one

more thing you have to deal with...” Having a period and not being informed about it contributed to an increasing sense of vulnerability in relation to her body.

When she first heard the word, she thought it was “yucky.” She always called it “the curse.” It influenced what she wore to school because she was afraid of having “accidents.” Her sense of vulnerability was apparent in how she chose to dress for school. She wore pants and usually had her school sweater with her to cover up any accidents. They were free to wear either pants or skirts but she restricted herself to pants, not feeling “safe” enough to wear a skirt in high school.

The fact that she thought of her period as a curse, and “hated” it, for Lisa turned into the idea that she hates being a woman. Although she thinks about it this way now, she’s not sure she thought of it that way as a teenager. She distances herself from her period today, calling it a “thing,” and feels that it’s not “integrated.” Having her period is connected to her feelings about sex, which she has a difficult time talking about to the extent that it is difficult for her to say the word s-e-x. She feels that she is “having problems in that area,” problems that she believes she should have worked out at this point. “It’s still there, in my mid-thirties. That’s a problem. That’s not right. That’s not normal.”

She wishes men could experience the same pain. She had cramps that were “absolutely blinding,” but she “toughed it out.” She didn’t want to draw attention to herself. There were other girls, “the thin cheerleader types,” who would go up and talk to the teacher and “all of a sudden they would be in the infirmary.” They were having severe cramps. But Lisa never did this because she didn’t want anybody to know that she was having her period. She wasn’t trying to “prove” anything, it was more of an “avoidance behavior.” She uses Ibuprofen now, to relax the muscles, but back then, in her desire to avoid drawing attention to her body, she chose to experience the pain rather than draw attention to herself or her period. She found other ways to keep from drawing attention to herself. She never wore white pants, but instead wore dark blue jeans all through high school. She hated clothes shopping and didn’t want to “bother” her mother. “I was a good child. That was the goal.”

### **Relationship of Body to Comparison With Boys**

Lisa continued this pattern of not drawing attention to herself in high school. She didn’t feel that she was attractive and she spent time “just observing, sitting on the sidelines.” It “wasn’t fun” for her and she holds her mother partially accountable for this. Her mother worked at the school and “she was a very tough cookie, she was a bitch.” She felt this was intimidating to the boys, who wouldn’t want to get in trouble. She had a couple of crushes on boys at school but never had these feelings returned. She never had guys “hanging around” her locker, and she had the experience of being left out. Other kids were pairing up and dating. She was “just an observer.”

### **Relationship of Body to Potential Pregnancy**

Lisa’s feelings about menstruation and her past experiences with boys and now, men, have converged into strong feelings towards the possibility of pregnancy. She has wanted a hysterectomy since her early twenties. She was told by a doctor that she was way too

young to be considering such a thing. But for her it represented freedom. She wasn't planning on having kids. "I don't want kids," and she wanted "this monthly stuff" to stop. For her, a hysterectomy "would mean I'm safe. I'm free of monthly costs, monthly pain, monthly 'thing,' monthly surprise. I'm free of ever getting knocked up..." She imagines that many women would feel that doing something like having a hysterectomy would make them feel like less of a woman. But for Lisa, her sense of herself as a woman would not be affected by an alteration in her body such as the loss of her uterus. She doesn't think it would matter to her "one bit. I'm still me." It would not be a bodily organ, but her weight that "would be the big thing that makes me feel more or less of a woman..." She has a consciousness of the potential physical effects that the loss of her uterus could mean, but the sense of freedom and safety she believes it would give her outweigh any concerns. "I'll deal with whatever comes down the pike as far as the changes." For her it would mean freedom from a sense of being vulnerable. Her experience has been that her body became a means for her to be hurt. "It means a man can't ever hurt me anymore, or entrapment by pregnancy kind of thing." Having a hysterectomy is something about which she still thinks.

She actually did become pregnant at one point. Although she told her boyfriend at the time that she had a miscarriage, "technically, since this is anonymous, it was an abortion." It is something that "affects me to this day." For Lisa, it was "an awful experience," one for which she did not feel ready. Having a child would have meant a loss of freedom for her. "I didn't want to be roped into the relationship because of this." She also didn't trust herself in relation to raising a child, feeling that she wouldn't be capable. "I wouldn't have been able to handle it." Again, she felt at a disadvantage and felt frightened by a lack of information about the ways in which her body would respond to pregnancy. She had vertigo in the mornings, and had difficulty climbing a flight of stairs. "It was awful, and again, I had no information. It was scary. I didn't have any support system. Nothing was positive." Being pregnant also meant feeling out of control. She felt like her "body let me down. It turned on me. I got knocked up. I was careless. It's a vulnerability I'm talking about." But she experienced tremendous ambivalence about whether to continue the pregnancy. She went "back and forth." She felt guilty about it, and felt that she should have gone through with it. She knew that there were services available for single mothers for which she could apply. But she was afraid there would be pressure for her to marry the father, and anger towards her mother precluded any desire to go through with the pregnancy. "I would never want to bring a child into this world and have my mother near it. Never."

The fragility and sense of vulnerability associated with being pregnant was quite frightening to her. It "scared the hell out of me. A woman is so vulnerable to being attacked. There is no way." But, even now, she has some feelings of regret. Every now and then, she thinks to herself that she should have gone through with it. It would have allowed her to have a bond with other women. She could have been "a nurturer." She could have sat around with other women and told stories about how she made it through labor without any medication. Sometimes her desire to be able to do this is strong enough that she thinks she should "do it." Despite the complexity of her feelings about becoming pregnant, actually giving birth would alleviate a sense of isolation she presently experiences. She "could sit with some of these women my age now."

### **Relationship of Body to Emotions**

Overall, Lisa sees the changes in her life associated with the development of her body as creating a great deal of pain for her. The amount of “adolescent pain” that she experienced was so significant that she “attempted suicide at age thirteen by taking four antihistamines.” Nothing happened and she told no one. She was in a lot of pain at the time and was crying a lot. She took the pills with some vodka and went straight to bed. She is unsure of all of the reasons for it, but just knows that she wanted to be “pain-free.” She knew she didn’t want to be around.

### **Relationship of Body to Food**

She thinks this is around the time when she started overeating. It was somewhere around the eighth grade. This was a painful, confusing time for her. “Obviously, I was crying out for something, someone’s attention, or something. I don’t know why. I just know I was in pain.” Lisa remembers “being in pain, but feeling like she couldn’t deal with it and couldn’t “figure out what the hell was wrong with me.” The source of this “emotional pain” was a sense that she didn’t know things, that she didn’t know what was going on, or what was going to happen. She felt that this “not knowing” was further complicated by “hormones, whatever hormones do.” There was no discussion of the bodily changes that she was experiencing. Everything was “swept under the rug.” No one was “forthcoming” about what was happening to her body. She doesn’t remember how she “dealt with bras.” She felt “out of place,” like there was “something wrong” with her. She drank wine coolers to try and “numb myself out.” She was trying to numb herself from feeling angry and potentially “lashing out” at people. But she believes that “underneath anger, once you get through all the layers,” that she “was feeling hurt.” She just tried to get through things. She felt as though it took all of her energy just to get through things. If they had people coming over, or during the holidays, she was just worried about keeping herself “steady.” There was a feeling of disconnection, both from herself as well as the people around her. She would “just kind of be there, but not be there.”

Lisa also views her “overeating behavior” as a response to her feelings of pain and confusion. She would come home from school and make herself a box of macaroni and cheese that she would eat in front of the television. Then her mother would come home and they would eat dinner. For her, this marked “the end” of her dancing days. She continues this pattern of overeating or “emotional eating” today. Ever since childhood, she has used food to “soothe” her anxiety. She still does this today. She uses food as a way to “stuff down feelings of anger...feelings of pain. It’s a way of numbing yourself.” She doesn’t drink or smoke but food became a way for her to numb her feelings. Also, the feeling of fullness that came with eating made her feel as though she had something “to hold onto.” Lisa doesn’t want to stop overeating because it would create a void, a “hole” in her life. “I have no physical affection. So that takes the place of it. And that always took the place of it.” She knows that some people attend self-help groups to deal with their overeating behaviors, but she “doesn’t want anyone taking away my ability to soothe myself through food.” The thought of attending such meetings is frightening for her because “what else would I have left?” She wants the freedom to be able to “eat my

chocolate when I want to.” However, she does experience guilt when she feels that she has eaten too much. “I’ll eat three boxes of Dove bars. You know how many calories that is?” She equates food with love, but differentiates that “it’s not psychological love.”

Lisa connects her eating patterns to “the end of my dancing days.” She was so upset by the image she had of herself dancing in a video with her peers that she “still feels sick” when she thinks about how she looked at that time. She will “never forget that image.” She has the sense that her view of herself that day is somewhat distorted. She thinks that anyone else watching the video would simply see a dance routine and not necessarily focus their attention on her. But in her own mind, although she has some recognition that she is being “hard” on herself, it still creates embarrassment for her and she wonders “how could they allow me to look like that with the rest of the girls.”

### **Relationship of Body to Body Image**

Lisa has very definite ideas about body image and what constitutes an attractive body. She projects some of her own ideas onto men in general, believing that “as long as you have blonde hair, big breasts, are thin and have a tight ass, men will get whiplash to look and will give you anything you want.” This is “what I’ve learned so far about body image.” She has a sense of resignation about all of this. From her point of view, it has always been this way and always will be this way. It’s something that started “in caveman days.” But she considers the possibility that she herself may play some role in this. “...it’s almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy – if you look for it, you’ll see it.” She has some self-awareness that if she approaches men with this expectation that this may be what results. For Lisa, these feelings are connected to a sense of inadequacy. “...I’ll never be enough for anybody.” This belief is based upon her image of her own body. She will not be enough “not the way this body is.” But, again, she has a realization that this idea is not consistent with the view that others might hold. “And I know that’s such skewed thinking. I know it’s the emotions and cognitions just clashing.” She feels at this point in her life that she should have moved beyond this type of thinking. She has a sense of weariness at trying to sort out her thoughts in this area. “I’m getting too old for this, to be struggling like this.”

Her belief system about what men find attractive even led her to take the step of dying her own hair blonde. Last year, as she was building her consulting business and was very focused on developing a professional image. Lisa believed it would bring her more attention for her business. She wanted to look “successful” and was “presenting” herself to people “thinking that blonde hair would definitely get me in.” She was doing everything that she could do to improve her chances for success. What resulted was that she “lost a lot of hair trying to dye my hair blonde.”

### **Relationship of Body to Self-Esteem**

She lacks confidence in her ability to be satisfied with her appearance day in and day out. She would like to be a “high maintenance female,” but doesn’t believe she will ever be able to achieve this. For Lisa, this would mean having her hair and make-up done and looking nice. It would mean having her nails always done, wearing heels, and to be dressed in something “flashy.” This is the picture of what she always imagined for

herself. She would like to wake up in the morning looking like this. But there is a disconnection between what she longs for and what she feels like she is willing to do to turn it into a reality. "I can't be bothered trying to do that day after day after day." Her reluctance to attempt attaining this image is grounded in her belief that she would be unable to maintain it everyday. This would create anxiety for her about getting everything to turn out "perfectly" everyday. For her, the danger in this would be that in not being able to "look good" consistently, she would draw attention to herself. People would notice something different. She doesn't spend "more than five minutes" on her hair. She feels "afraid" of trying to keep up a certain appearance. She believes that "there's no way" that she would be able to accomplish this and that it would then mean that she would be "ugly" and "not together." It would also appear that she was neglecting herself, not taking care of herself. The alternative for her has been that she has decided that it is "safer" to stay on a "basic maintenance level" so that she doesn't risk falling and therefore fail to maintain her appearance. She believes that this would have a negative effect on her self-esteem.

Lisa has similar feelings about her struggle to lose weight. She exercised and worked very hard to lose weight, and then due to her work schedule gained the weight back. She now weighs over two hundred pounds and feels enormous frustration over all of the effort she expended to lose weight. She's angry that she has nothing to show for it and now feels "Why bother?" She would come home from work, and although she felt exhausted, she would exercise and go walking. She enjoyed walking and every year she would buy the latest exercise equipment.

Lisa has lately begun to move towards an acceptance of her appearance. She has been trying to give herself some "leeway." She has decided that it is "maybe okay" to have some anxiety about what she will wear and how she looks, and that she doesn't have to rise to the level of perfection all of the time with her clothes, make-up, and nails. "It's okay to have short, stubby nails." She had her nails done professionally once, and she felt "very feminine and very sexy." She felt "ten pounds lighter." But she found them to be impractical. She pulled them off after a week because they interfered with her being able to touch things and do things like cut the grass.

As an adult, she is now beginning to find that she can "make the effort" to curl her hair and put on make-up and on some days "I don't have to." She is moving towards allowing herself the freedom to live as her authentic self. "Because I'm kind of a down to earth kind of gal anyway." "I don't need that much to keep me happy."

For Lisa, her body and her appearance are very much related to her sense of self-esteem. She has "hidden" in the scrubs she was required to wear on the job. "How asexual is that?" This allowed her a feeling of safety. She never wanted a nine to five job for which she would need to be well-dressed. "I didn't want to show off anything." But now she feels more willing to allow attention to be focused in her direction but "there are no clothes for that in my size." She has a realization that her worries and concerns about her appearance require a substantial amount of time and energy. "I suppose with high self-esteem I wouldn't be doing the treading every night, or checking the mirror all the time, looking at every little blemish." She feels a sense of futility about it all, reminding herself that she "lost all that weight and I have nothing to show for it. I'm right back where I started, and I'm angry about that."

### **Relationship of Body to Religion**

Complicating her feelings about her body and her appearance, and contributing to her tendency to not want to draw attention to herself, has been the influence of her religion. “It was a very repressive upbringing, the whole fire and brimstone.” In high school, where she was taught by nuns who were “running around covered head to toe,” girls wearing eye liner or dark eye shadow was “the big thing.” Lisa finally came to the conclusion that “it’s not a sin to look beautiful or wear mascara.” She lived in a small town and was “impressionable.” It didn’t occur to her to rebel or do “anything wrong.” She has the impression that her brothers got away with much more than she did and that they “experienced a lot more life than I did growing up.”

### **Relationship of Body to Feelings of Envy**

This sense of missing out on life experiences has created some feelings of regret for her as an adult. In high school she was jealous of the girls that “looked good” and “still carries” that with her today. She was jealous that they got attention from boys and seemed very animated and popular. “Because of my body I didn’t try out for cheerleading.” She knows this is something she would have been good at and feels frustrated that she let her concerns about her appearance interfere. She was “really strong” and “...can still do a split.” She would have been able to help on the pyramid. But, in her own mind, she was “too fat for that.” Lisa believes cheerleading would have been a means for her to express her “anger and energy.” Instead, she “hid” in the band. The uniform was “real asexual” and she was able to not draw attention to herself.

She felt anger and resentment towards the cheerleaders. “Who cares if they freeze their little asses off in the wintertime in the parade?” Whenever she watched them she was aware that they got attention and “...got to look good.” But she felt participating in something like cheerleading was simply not an option for her. She was not significantly overweight, but in her own mind was “just totally looking outrageous.” There was another girl who was overweight, who carried a baton. The outfit was usually a leotard or something sequined. She didn’t care. But the participant didn’t think that she could fit in with the cheerleaders or the girls who did their hair and make-up. She “missed out,” and now feels that “it’s a damn shame I didn’t go for it. I regret everything. Does everybody? I don’t know.” Not only does she regret experiences that she missed in high school, but as an adult, she sometimes regrets not making the effort to do things like get her nails done. But she worries that it would interfere with doing things like the laundry. “...I can’t be bothered.”

### **Relationship of Body to Boys**

Another experience that Lisa has felt restricted from has been in relating to men. She didn’t date in high school and never kissed a boy while she was in school, which she views as “a shame.” For her, the consequence of this is that it “just kept me naïve. It didn’t prepare me for the real world.” She feels this placed her at a disadvantage in terms of having future relationships with men because high school is the place where she feels she should have learned “...how to connect with the other sex, how to kiss and have

fighters, and how to have a relationship.” She didn’t have that and now wonders “how else are you going to learn?” This became another area in which she felt she lacked information that others had. Intensifying her lack of confidence was the fact that, because her father had died, she also didn’t have the experience of growing up in a home with both parents. She felt she had no model for an adult relationship between a man and a woman. “I lacked seeing parents argue, fight, make up.” Her mother even reminded her of this a few times. She wonders how it is possible to make up for this, and “how she will learn to get along in the world...” Because of her lack of experience with boys at school and not having a parental relationship to observe, she is taking “baby steps” and “it still affects my relationships to this day.” She sees high school as a time when people are supposed to go on dates. She saw this all around her but didn’t get to go on any herself. She feels frustrated that she “didn’t get a little bit of a jump start.”

It was difficult for her to interact with boys in high school because she felt “repulsive.” She didn’t feel capable of attracting anyone and felt frustrated that she couldn’t even get “a hello.” Lisa felt like “just a blip on the radar, a little blob.” She believed that she wasn’t “pretty enough” to attract a boy. As an adult, Lisa has a different perspective on this and now believes that this really wasn’t true. She thinks she was actually “okay” in high school. At the time she felt confused and began to wonder if she had done something wrong. Out of her feelings of confusion eventually came a sense of acceptance. “And then, I just accepted it really.” She didn’t have the expectation that anything would change. She felt unable to approach her mother and talk to her about how she was feeling. She couldn’t go to her and say “I don’t feel so good about myself.” She thought that her mother had more important things to worry about than her “teenage crisis.”

Today she has a more realistic image of herself. “I don’t look like the Hunchback of Notre Dame.” She sees herself more as blending in, fitting in with the rest of society. This has raised the question for her of why she is not attracting nice men. “...Why is that not in my energy field?” “Why am I not drawing that?” She feels “permanently cursed” that she is “the beauty queen for dysfunctional men.” But there is safety in this belief for her as well. She has insight into the idea that if she was involved with someone “normal,” that she would have to “deal with real stuff – that’s how relationships are.” For Lisa, this would open up “a whole other Pandora’s box.”

### **Relationship of Body to Cultural Expectations**

As an adult, she has experienced quite different responses to her appearance when she has, on occasion, gotten “gussied up” and gone to the mall. She conducted her own experiment “to prove how society treats people.” She was never interested in meeting society’s expectations, and believes people are judged by how they look and dress. She was feeling good about herself and got dressed up and went to the mall. She imagines she must have looked more confident. Lisa felt powerful and important using her credit card to get what she wanted. She felt like she was “somebody.” “I was a real person, someone of worth.” She was “out in society, playing the little societal rules, the little games, whatever we have set up on this planet.” She felt like she was “fooling society” with her appearance.

### **Relationship of Body to Feelings of Disconnection**

There have been times when she has felt disconnected from her body. Because of the lack of knowledge she has felt she has in matters related to her body, this has made her especially vulnerable in relation to sexual relationships. She was a victim of ‘acquaintance rape’ which she believes occurred due to her lack of knowledge about sex. There were times when she wanted to say “stop,” but just kept her “mouth shut until it’s over with.” She wondered if she had the right to say “stop” when there was nothing “violent going on.” During these experiences she found that she could just “disconnect.” She felt she learned that something could happen to her body, that it could be “violated,” and that she could “separate out from it, and just move on.” As an adult, Lisa continues to experience a sense of vulnerability in terms of her body. She lives with the idea that she is always “at risk.”

### **Relationship of Body to Depression**

Lisa has had episodes of recurring depression. Last year, even in the midst of a depressive episode during which she lost weight because she didn’t eat for several days, she was “happy” about losing the weight. She lost about ten pounds, which made her “slightly happy.” She continues to feel anger towards her mother. She liked the idea that she might be able to “scare” her mother because she was “sickly-looking” and “getting skinny.”

### **Relationship of Body to Age**

**Her concerns and lack of satisfaction with her appearance led her to experiment with coloring her hair. She tried different colors – purple, burgundy, and finally blonde. “I was just frantically searching for some sort of beauty thing.” But at some point, she realized that she was trying to be something she was not. “And then I realized certain people can have blonde hair.” She was “panicking” and covering up and pulling out white and gray hairs. To her, this was a sign that she was getting old. It made her feel unattractive, and that “it’s only going to get worse.” It meant to her that she was running out of time. She hadn’t “captured a man yet,” and now it would only be more difficult. She felt a sense of defeat. “After a certain point you might as well pack it up and forget about it. Go your own way.” Ideally, she wanted to meet someone when she was young so that they could grow old together. Her grandparents were together for sixty-three years, which she thinks is “kind of nice.” Lisa longs for a relationship such as this. “They get to see the young part of you. The kind of skipping rope and then flying kites, and then getting a little older and then settling in. Now it’s like, they’re just going to be presented with old already. God help us all when I’m forty.”**

### SITUATED NARRATIVE #3

Chris

#### Relationship of Body to Peers

For Chris the question of how she experienced the bodily changes of adolescence and its subsequent influence upon her as an adult conjured up several “vivid memories or defining moments.” Her first memory is of lying on the beach with a friend of hers when they were both around ten or eleven years old. Her friend asked her if she had “hair down there.” She “totally remembers that moment.” She remembers everything, that it was a nice day. At the time, it seemed a significant event to her. “It just seemed to be important.” She experienced a sense of anxiety as she compared her own lack of development with that of her friend, that it “kind of struck me with a little bit of fear because I knew that I didn’t.” She felt a sense of embarrassment that her lack of progress in this area would be found out. “It was almost afraid of being found out that I wasn’t maybe where I should be at.”

Her friend pulled down her bathing suit and proudly showed her “one black hair” on an “otherwise hairless crotch.” Chris remembers that she “didn’t want to go there,” that she would have liked to avoid this situation by changing the subject, but she was “frozen.” She felt determined not to reveal her own lack of pubic hair. She thought “I’m still not showing you mine,” because there was “nothing to show.”

When her friend said, “Let me see yours,” her feelings of anxiety continued. The sense of connection she had always felt with her friend disappeared. “I think it hit me...maybe we’re not as connected as I thought.” She feels that the presence of “one sprout of hair” did ultimately seem to change the “nature” of their friendship. It changed it in the sense that her friend was becoming “different” from her and that she seemed to take pride in this. It created a distance between them that she had not felt before. She felt that her friend was now on a different level, one in which she was “ready to experiment” with boys, which the participant was not. This event was of significance in their friendship in that she feels that things were never the same between them. Chris believes there was “an innocence lost” in their friendship. Outwardly, things seemed to change at that point as well. They no longer seemed to “hang out” in the way that they always had, and their parents no longer did things together in the way that they had. These changes seemed to “coincide” with their discussion on the beach.

It also seemed to initiate a kind of role reversal between them. Before, Chris had been the leader in their friendship and her friend more of a follower. Now her “sprout gave her courage and a new-found strength.” Up until that point she was more the decision-maker in their relationship. She would be the one to say “let’s go to the store...let’s color in books...” Now her friend was focusing much more on boys and on her looks and hair. She was impressed with her friend’s skill with a curling iron, which was also something she lacked. In an effort to try and emulate her friend she would get up every morning and use the curling iron. This was something that she really wasn’t even interested in doing. It worried her that she didn’t have an interest in it, and she thought that maybe she should.

Chris felt somewhat confused about it. Her and her friend started going their separate ways.

Their conversation on the beach seemed to become somewhat of a turning point for them. During their childhood, Chris had been more the leader, and now as they got older and more interested in boys, she often deferred to her friend's ideas about things. They both now seemed to view her friend as the more "mature" one, even though they both now had "a healthy patch of triangle between our thighs." Since they lived in different towns she would see her friend every summer and about three or four times a year. When they were adolescents, her friend did appear more mature to her. She didn't "act silly," her hair was always perfect, and she always had a tan. At the time she equated these things with maturity. As time went on she lost touch with her friend. Their parents are still friends, but the last time she saw her was many years ago when she was about twenty-three. Her friend had gotten married at a "really young age," right out of college, because that was "the thing to do." She hasn't had kids and never "got like a real career or anything." Chris now sees her friend in a very different light. "To me, actually, she's a loser!" They have taken different paths in life, and now when she looks back on it, she sees her friend as being "a whole lot more superficial." She was always up on the latest styles and "everything that I just wasn't." Seeing her friend as an adult gave her a much different perspective on her, but back when they were lying on the beach, it seemed that they were "much more separate."

### **Relationship of Body to Specific Parts of Body**

Chris wanted so much for that separateness to vanish, that as she was lying there, she remembers "willing a pubic hair to grow." She asked God to "let it happen." She felt not only separate from her friend, but she worried that this could also be the case with others. It made her feel like she was "different." She felt a sense of connection to her friend in the sense that they were both female and would one day be women. But "how and when that happened," appeared to be, at least superficially, different. She knew intellectually that they would both one day be women, but she wasn't thinking about the journey. She wanted them to be on equal ground right now, at that moment on the beach.

### **Relationship of Body to Timing of Adolescent Bodily Changes**

Chris didn't want to "commit" to answer to her friend's question until she knew where her friend stood on this issue. She wanted to be at whatever point her friend was and if her friend had said, " 'No, I don't have anything,' then I would have said, 'Oh yeah, me neither'." But she wanted to "play it safe," she wanted to be in the same place as her friend because she felt that whatever that was, was probably "right." However, she admitted to her friend that she didn't have any hair yet, but that she could "feel it coming." She felt this to be true because although she could not literally feel it coming she "had read all the books" and knew that it would be coming. Chris recognized "on one level" that "hair in your crotch area is totally superficial, but, yet, it seemed so important at the time."

She could sense what she felt to be her friend's disappointment in her lack of progress in this area. She felt her friend was so much more mature than she was. She wore her hair

like Farrah Fawcett because that was the style back then. Her friend introduced her to the world of boys and got them a Playgirl magazine. Chris looked up to her friend and just thought, "I'm not in her league." She felt the existence of one strand of hair separated them "by a thousand years." In that moment she felt that now her friend had that knowledge too, and it made it even worse. It added to her discomfort, knowing that her friend knew that she was not as "mature" as she was.

### **Relationship of Body to Family**

Her discovery about her friend's "maturity" led her to wonder about other things in the world. She remembers lying in bed that night wondering "what else wasn't as it seemed." She wondered about her relationships with other people and things not being as they seemed. She fell asleep that night listening to her parents and grandfather out in the living room talking and laughing with the TV going. She was aware that she wasn't an adult and allowed to be up watching TV with them but rather having to be there in bed.

### **Relationship of Body to Mother**

Another significant moment which influenced how she experienced her body came when she was eighteen and was visiting home one weekend from college. She came into the kitchen wearing a pair of jeans that tied around her waist and buttoned at the ankle. She had taken up the habit of wearing scarves around her neck Chris was excited for her mother to see her "new look." She felt attractive that day as she entered the kitchen. She was used to dressing this way at school and she felt "really good." Now coming home after living away, she felt more like her mother's equal, like she was no longer her mother's child. She felt like an adult woman coming home to visit. And then her mother commented that she looked "hippy." It had the same impact on her, although for different reasons, as when her friend asked her if she had any hair. She just "froze."

"You shouldn't wear scarves around your neck like that. It makes you look hippy." Chris experienced a sense of disbelief that her mother would say this to her. She could not believe that her mother was saying this to her. She felt different emotions at the same time. She was "somewhat appalled" at her mother's behavior, and also took it "more personally." She thought, "I can't believe she's doing this," but felt anxious thinking, "Oh my God, you know, maybe she's right." Her mother's comment was powerful enough that it had the effect of transforming her perception of herself. She had perceived herself as a "healthy, attractive young woman." Now she felt like she was walking around with hips that "were hitting walls or something." She couldn't believe her mother was "cutting her down like that." She felt "horrible" but did not want to let her mother know this and acted as if her words did not bother her. She felt ashamed and began to doubt and question her own views of herself. To herself, she had thought that she really looked okay. But she respected her mother's beliefs about other people and thought that she always seemed to be "right on" about other people. So now she was saying something about her and she worried that her mother was right.

Chris felt like she just wanted to run and escape this situation and her mother's scrutiny, but she walked casually to the bathroom mirror to "inspect" herself. She didn't want her mother to know how her words had affected her, or that they had any power

over her. Standing at the mirror she began looking at herself “critically,” which was a change for her. She was looking for “flaws.” She was looking at herself through her mother’s eyes, instead of her own. In her own eyes, everything had been fine. By the time she walked out of the bathroom she felt like she had gained about one hundred pounds. Although she had felt so confident and attractive when she first walked into the kitchen, she now felt unsure of herself and filled with indecision. She put the scarf on, then off, then on.

Her mother’s comment would have a far-reaching effect upon her for years to come. In the present the participant still loves scarves and still has them around. She likes to reflect on their colorfulness and beauty. She remembers all of the scarves she once had. She loved them and ended up putting them away. She used them to put in baskets, but she “let that part of myself go.” The scarves had been much more than fashion for her, they had been “an identity.” Back then, “it was cool.” She wore the scarves with “long, funky earrings.” She loved how it looked and felt, but if they were going to make her look fat she definitely thought she shouldn’t wear them. So, for a period of time, she didn’t. “I just totally put them away.” It has only been recently that she has started wearing them again. She recently acquired a new scarf, a present from a co-worker who just returned from Pakistan and gave her a beautiful scarf. She finds humor in the fact that her mother recently saw the scarf and commented on its beauty. “She didn’t say anything about hippyness. I don’t know if she’d forgotten that.” Over time the sting of her mother’s comment and its impact on her has lessened. As Chris grew older, she became less concerned with her mother’s opinion about the scarves. She decided to start wearing them despite what her mother thought. But for a period of time, “it really did, it impacted me.” That day in the kitchen, in an effort to demonstrate her independence and show her mother how unaffected she was, “I put the scarf back on, wore it all weekend in front of my mother, but the minute I returned to school, I ditched the scarf and all of my other scarves for that matter.” It was important to her that her mother didn’t think that her comment could affect her behavior. She wanted her to think “I don’t care what you think.” In fact, she was profoundly affected by her mother’s statement. “My mother’s comment had burned into me and affected how I saw myself as a woman.” She feels it had the effect of making her much more critical of herself. She believes now that her mother’s observation about her “hippyness” was not true, but feels that even if it was, “who cares?”

She experienced a sense of isolation. Her mother’s comments had hurt her. She felt a sense of betrayal. “You’re my mother. How could you hurt me like that?” She thought it was “kind of cruel.” She felt the need to protect herself by distancing and not telling her mother how she really felt. It put up a “kind of wall between us.”

In retrospect she gets angry thinking about it. Chris feels angry with herself that she allowed “a senseless comment to impact me as strongly as it did. I got hung up on something so stupid, wasting precious time worrying about how I appeared to others.” Even now as she recalls that day in the kitchen almost twenty years ago, “I’m getting a little pissed.” She feels her body becoming tense as she thinks about it and realizes that she still gets angry about it. But as an adult her perspective on this event has also changed. Although she still feels angry when she thinks about it, she also now sees it as “silly” that she allowed her mother’s statement to “impact” her in the way that it has. She knows her mother made other comments, and even “to this day she might say stuff,” but

it doesn't affect her in the way that it did in the past. As an adult she has developed some insight into her mother's words, and now sees it as more her mother's own "issue."

It wasn't until graduate school and "ten more pounds later," that she "unburied" her scarves and wore them "proudly again around my neck." But even though she was wearing her scarves again, something was different this time, something had been lost, an "innocence." She is unsure exactly how to describe what was lost. But she still is wearing her scarves, and just about every time she puts a scarf on she thinks of "that comment." She feels badly for herself back then, but not for herself in the present. "I almost feel badly for the child that I was when that happened." Sometimes she thinks to herself that her mom doesn't like scarves on her, that they make her look "hippy. And I'm out the door and that's it."

### **Relationship of Body to Weight**

Her mother's words had a much more powerful impact on her sense of self than gaining a little weight did. When she started college she put on about five pounds. She was conscious of the weight gain but didn't think she looked "bad or hippy." It didn't have much of an effect on her.

### **Relationship of Body to Self-Esteem**

Not like her mother saying that she looked hippy, after which she became much more self-conscious. She had thought her jeans tied around the waist were the "coolest things." But now standing in the dinner line at her dorm she remembers wondering if people were noticing her hips. "It became like a burden, to think that people were checking you out." This represented a change for her in that she had never been that self-conscious before. Along with this came a sense of isolation from her mother, her friends, and most strongly from herself. Chris feels that she wasn't being good to herself, that she was focused on "something so stupid." She feels a sense of irritation when she looks back on this. "I wasn't being true to myself..." She was pursuing her goals - learning, going to college, working, going through life. But every once in awhile, those thoughts would "crop up." She would think to herself that she was "hippy" or fat and would critique herself in that way. When she reflects on it now she feels that she was beating herself up, and "it just wasn't good."

### **Relationship of Body to Perceptions of Body**

The change in her perception of herself came immediately. When she first ran to the mirror after hearing her mother call her "hippy," as she gazed at her reflection, "my hips seemed to grow before my eyes." She experienced it as a "transformation, not necessarily in a good way." She felt embarrassed as she wondered how she could have been walking around the campus "looking hippy and fat like this" and not have realized it before now. It made her begin to doubt herself and question her own perceptions. Not only did she question her perceptions about herself, but it left her with a sense of doubt about what else in the world she may have misperceived as much as this.

Her mother's words made her feel "out of touch" with her body. She thought that she had up to that time "a certain awareness" of how she was going through the world. She thought of herself as a "good young woman, confident." She was also conscious of what she understood to be societal expectations that women should be slender. Up until this time she felt that she fulfilled those expectations.

Chris hadn't thought a lot about her body up to that point. "I wasn't truly in touch with my body." She didn't think about it for its own sake, but rather as something she needed to take care of so that she could "live and help other people." She hadn't thought much about how important it was to take care of her body just to be healthy. Her mother's comment represented a shift for her from thinking about her body as "a vehicle to allow me to do, you know, great things in life, and to go places and literally walk around," to thinking about it as more of an object. She experiences this as "pathetic" and feels that she became "almost distanced from my physical self."

### **Relationship of Body to Menstrual Period**

Chris experienced a similar shift in her perceptions when she had her period for the first time. She felt like she was on "a whole new plane." She remembers leaving school that day. She was in the seventh grade and she was wearing a uniform. She was walking by the principal who was telling everybody to have a good day and she thought to herself "Oh my God, I think I'm gonna have my period." Her stomach was really bothering her. She looked at all the other girls in line and they all had their uniforms on and were dressed alike. But she had the sense that she was "different." She got home and went into the bathroom and "sure enough, I had my period. And of course, I started screaming like a maniac." Her brother came to the door and she told him to get their mother. Her mother came in and said, "Oh, my baby's a woman," and she was crying and "she was all happy about it. But I just remember not being happy about it." She had had a sense of anticipation about it before it happened and felt that she couldn't wait for it to happen. She thought it would be "cool," but the minute it happened she didn't think it was cool at all. Rather, all she could think about was that she was bleeding "from my crotch." Chris also felt a loss of control, that she had been "forced out of childhood." She was aware that it was not a decision that she had made to go on to this stage in her life. Her period was here whether she was ready or not.

## SITUATED NARRATIVE #4

Sue

### Relationship of Body to Potential Boyfriends

For Sue, thinking about the ways in which bodily changes affected her during adolescence occurred significantly in the context of her social relationships, particularly with boys. Her height and weight did not fluctuate much during her adolescence and she “did not feel that bad” about her body at that time. However, her feelings about her body were characterized by ambivalence. She was proud that she was considered “to be a fairly good dresser and best dressed” at her school. She recalled that styles were quite different back in the sixties and that due to her religious upbringing her clothes were more traditional. Therefore, she “felt pretty confident” about her body. Conversely, she “felt shy” and the fact that she did not have a steady boyfriend made her feel less comfortable with her body. She “always associated” having a boyfriend with feeling comfortable with her body and she wonders if this is something other people can understand. Her feelings about her body are so connected to the idea of having a boyfriend that she feels that she may have had “a complex about that.”

During adolescence Sue always believed that she would have felt better about her body if she had had a boyfriend and that she was “just very backwards and certainly never had any confidence,” that she “just had a lower self-esteem.” These feelings have continued for her throughout her life, and she also attributes these feelings during adolescence to her mother being overweight and always being on a diet. She was not so consciously aware of how much her mother and her mother’s sisters struggled with their weight at the time, but believes that she was very affected by this.

She did not have “an extreme awareness” of her body during adolescence because of the styles at that time and because she had “nice clothes.” But she feels a lack of clarity about this, and for her, her feelings about her body are strongly connected to her lack of confidence and shyness which are related to not having a steady boyfriend. She reflected that she “keeps going back to that” (i.e. not having a boyfriend). She continued to have “a bad body image” in adulthood because of her lack of successful relationships with men. It is so connected for her that she worries that people will not like her “because of my body.” However, she differentiates between the sexes on this issue, that she is really talking about men here, because “women always find me attractive.” Her experience has been that women compliment her on dressing well and looking nice and that because of this they comment that “they can’t believe I don’t have anybody,” but that only women tell her this, not men.

For Sue, not being involved in a relationship with a man has continued to significantly and negatively affect her own experience of her body during both adolescence and adulthood. On a typical day she starts out optimistically, being on a diet, but feels a sense of frustration and meaninglessness by the end of the day feeling that no one cares what she looks like, “that there is nobody that is even looking at me so why should I care.” She makes “self-statements” that make it difficult for her to continue being hopeful about

meeting someone. Being involved in a relationship with a man is intimately connected to her feelings about herself in that she believes that she would “care about myself more.” Not having a relationship makes her feel more hopeless about this and she wonders if this is a normal way to feel. She imagines that people who are married or that have a significant other would try harder and focus on having a better body. She tries not to think about it very much because she worries that if she did she would be “totally depressed all of the time.” She believes that maybe this is why she doesn’t feel happy most of the time. In her family she was raised to believe that to be married is to be successful in life, and that being divorced made her feel like “a loser” in her family. She realizes that she believes that to be married is to be successful and having a nice body is the way to achieve this. But this belief about herself conflicts with the reality that in the past there have been times when she has felt good about her body and still was not involved in a relationship with a man.

She has a “poor body image” and “sort of a poor self-esteem” when her body is not in shape. She vows to “keep trying” to get into shape so that maybe “it” (meeting a man) will happen. She laughs when she reads the singles ads in the paper because nobody is looking for someone that is “out of shape and overweight.” The guys say things like “petite” or “weight appropriate.” She feels a sense of resignation that “they’re all obsessed with meeting somebody who is thin,” and wonders if this is how her “poor body image” and “poor self-esteem” in relation to her body is reinforced. In spite of the fact that she thinks she shouldn’t read the ads because of this, she reads them “all the time.”

### **Relationship to Peers**

Also figuring prominently in her adolescent experience of her body were her female friends. She recalled that she had seven close friends and that they did everything together. She “had a complex that my nose had a big bump in it,” and her friends supported her through the plastic surgery she had on her nose when she was in high school. They encouraged her to have realistic expectations about the surgery, cautioning her that her life would not necessarily change because she was changing her nose. Although she denied to her friends that she had any such expectations, “probably deep down inside I wished it could get me a boyfriend or something like that.” She considers the surgery to be going to an extreme, which still did not result in her having a steady boyfriend. Her friends were a source of significant psychological support for her in terms of her body. For instance, they would discuss what parts of their bodies they liked and her friends chose her for “having the nicest feet.” She states that she is trying to make the point that her and her friends did not just sit around and think that they looked fat. For her this is related to the time period, the sixties, when “it was just not like it is nowadays.” She observes that girls are obsessed with their bodies now and one can hear even twelve year old girls saying that they are fat. When she thinks back to the time of her own adolescence and reflects on how it was different, she “cannot honestly remember anybody saying that.” As she remembers it, it was not as much of an issue at that time. She recalls that none of her friends had eating disorders and that they were all “pretty healthy.” She further illustrates their lack of concern about their bodies and their weight by recalling that when they spent time together, which they did almost daily, one of their primary activities was eating. She remembers being unconcerned about the effect of food

on her body, noting that she “used to be able to eat four pieces of pizza and drink soda and not gain any weight.”

In contrast to the support she received from her friends in relation to her body, there were boys who teased her about her nose, one of them calling her “broken nose.” Her decision to have surgery on her nose was a consequence of being teased. Being teased really bothered her and the boy who called her “broken nose” “caused” her to have plastic surgery. He also took her to the prom, but he never knew how deeply his taunting affected her.

For Sue, being happy in life is highly correlated to having a “better body.” But she points out that people who have these better bodies have to work at it. She talks about an old friend who keeps her body in shape by working out. She has a husband, lives in a sunny climate, and takes an annual trip to St. Bart’s. She describes “cringing” when she receives her friend’s Christmas card. Even though she isn’t in frequent contact with her friend anymore, noting that they only exchange cards at this point, she is still strongly influenced by her self-comparison to her friend’s life. She relates her friend’s happy, healthy marriage to her being a runner and having a “good body.” She identifies her feelings in relation to her friend as “sort of like a jealousy thing”, that she is not “too proud to admit.” For Sue there is a clear relationship between making the effort to work out everyday and developing a “good body,” and finding someone who would bring her “stability and happiness.” She believes that she could achieve this if she would only stick with it and work at it. Her belief that having all of the good things in life comes with having a “good body” is rooted in the example of people that she knows, such as her friend, rather than movie stars or people in magazines. She is far more significantly influenced by people that she actually knows. She recently attended her high school class reunion and exercised beforehand and “looked good.” But one of her friends who had never married suddenly met a man and when she came to the reunion “she had her man.” Sue wonders why she focuses on things like this so much. She feels that having the body she would like to have is the key to having everything else she wants.

### **Relationship to Physical Activity**

She recalls getting the exercise necessary for having the kind of body that she would like to have as a more effortless process during adolescence because she and her friends walked everywhere. They walked to school and to each other’s houses and she associates this with being older and going through adolescence in an earlier time. Her and her friends were much more active, walking everywhere instead of driving as people do now, and having activities like swimming. However, she feels that she was not good at sports and despite her parents’ efforts to encourage her in gymnastics, she felt she wasn’t coordinated enough and “it just didn’t work out.” In contrast, she points out that her brother stayed with it. She makes a distinction between her ability to maintain an active lifestyle as an adolescent, and feeling that it is difficult for her to have the determination to be that active as an adult. For her, the positive, healthy feelings that came with a more active lifestyle were easier to achieve, in large part, due to her friends back then and living in a time when people were just more active. Now that she’s older exercising is a more solitary activity and she experiences great difficulty following through on her desire to increase her physical activity. She also feels resistant to exercising, at times feeling

that she would rather do almost anything else, and that maybe she is “allergic to it.” She feels she must force herself, and bought a yoga tape and a treadmill. Instead of naturally engaging in physical activity with her friends as a routine part of life, she now lives in a world with “exercise people like Jane Fonda” and has a “big, expensive treadmill.” She recalls that when she was using her treadmill that she really felt “pretty good” and that she felt she was “lifting some of the depression and negativity in my brain.” In light of this she is uncertain why she stopped. Even with encouragement from her mother she finds that she just doesn’t do it. She wonders if she will feel motivated to exercise as a result of participating in this interview. A friend of hers went to a hypnotist but did not achieve long-lasting results. She wishes “something would work” for her, but thinks that she will “just keep trying.”

### **Relationship to Pregnancy**

When she thinks back to her adolescence she remembers it as a stricter time, a more restrictive way of life. In high school skirts needed to touch the floor when kneeling, and there could be no revealing styles. She recalls that things were stricter in all areas of life. When she went to nursing school there were house mothers and they had to sign in and out of the dorms. There were rules about when you could take a shower and this was occurring when she was eighteen years old. She imagines what it would be like for college kids today to deal with those kinds of restrictions.

Her life at that time was more sheltered, not only due to these kinds of rules and restrictions but she went immediately from high school to nursing school and was working in a job by the time she was twenty. She worked for only a short time before becoming pregnant and getting married. She feels that she missed out on having a time in her life when she could be more independent. She imagines that she had less time than most people for more dating experience and meeting people. Instead, she was pregnant at age twenty and gained a lot of weight. She feels lucky and thankful that she had twins, but says that her body “went completely, like at a young age.” She wonders if other people at that age felt the way she did. With the changes in her body brought about by pregnancy came changes in the way she was viewed by others. She was embarrassed by her father-in-law at dinner one night when she asked for seconds and he told her “You’re going to look like your mother in five years.” That memory has stayed with her and she says she will never forget it. She remembers thinking that just because her mother was overweight, “what did that have to do with anything?” Even now she wanted to defend her mother and stated, “My mother is a nice person.” She believes that many people make judgements about people who are overweight, that people associate being overweight with being “a horrible person,” and she feels strongly that “that is certainly not right.”

Her pregnancy was a turning point for her in terms of her body in that it changed it forever. Once she had her children, she never was able to return to her previous weight of one hundred and fifteen pounds, which was her consistent weight during her adolescence. After that she started to gain weight every year and not take it off. This is disturbing to her because “everybody would like to be a size eight or ten.”

Another aspect of her pregnancy that was extremely stressful for her was having to get married. She considers it the hardest thing she ever had to tell her parents. She hadn’t

known her husband that long either and although it was not an ideal situation she decided that she would try and make the best of it. She has always felt badly that she didn't get to have the kind of experience with her pregnancy that would have allowed her and her husband to feel that it was the most wonderful thing that could have happened to them. She felt that she missed out on that.

Before becoming pregnant she could eat whatever she wanted and not gain any weight. She felt good about her body and didn't worry about what she could eat. But after having her children she began to try different diets and went to Weight Watchers. She wishes she could be more interested in and motivated to exercise. She has tried different classes but has never been able to stick with anything.

After her pregnancy she weighed one hundred and twenty-five pounds, which was significant for her, because it was more than she had ever weighed before. After that her pattern became to gain about five pounds each year and not take it off, and at her present age she wishes she could get back to her weight during her younger years. Her desire to weigh less was so strong that a few years ago, she had liposuction done which she considers "extreme." Her son was getting married, and her ex-father-in-law's comment about her looking like her mother was still troubling her. She would see her ex-husband at the wedding, and she knew that his wife was "a little pudgy." She wanted to look better than his current wife and "didn't care what extreme I had to go to". She felt that "it was worth it" because it gave her a feeling of temporary satisfaction. But then she returned to her previous eating habits which she cites again as the reason she doesn't have a significant relationship with someone. She wonders in the context of the interview why she is again "basing everything" on meeting a man. She observes that this appears to be "the theme of my unhappiness here." She thinks of the money she spent on her liposuction before the wedding, which in the absence of consistent exercise, is a temporary solution. She was warned by her doctor that the effects wouldn't last unless she made changes in her diet and exercise habits, but it allowed her to feel good for a year and a half before she "went downhill." She felt happier with her body during this time and was determined not to gain the weight back but eventually "just sludged back into my little ways."

### **Eating Behaviors in Relation to Father**

Her eating habits were influenced by her parents, especially her father. Her mother and aunts were always dieting, but what affected her more were her parents fighting about her mother's weight. Her mother was involved in a weight loss program and lost a lot of weight, but she imagines it must have been difficult for her mother because she had to fix big meals for her father and the rest of the family. Her father believed that food should not be wasted and instilled this in his children. Her father worked in a steel mill and always wanted a big dinner when he came home, so she was used to eating large meals. But they also had healthy eating habits. They had a garden and would eat fresh vegetables from their garden. She was raised to be a "big eater." Both of her parents expected her to eat all of her food, especially her father who considered it sinful to leave food on your plate. When she was younger she and her brother were in the habit of eating late at night while they were doing homework, and she continues this habit to this day. She can be on a diet and eat healthy foods all day but late in the evening if she is feeling

frustrated she will order a pizza or “bad foods and blow it” just out of habit. She continues this eating habit from her youth and eats at night even when she is not hungry. Food is a way of dealing with frustration. When she has a bad day she will do things like stop on the way home from work and get a giant ice cream cone. She does this because she feels that she deserves it and it feels like a reward to her. When she was growing up her father had a rule that they could not have candy or soda in the house. Her and her sister and brother felt like they were missing out because they were not allowed to have candy, soda, and chips like their neighbors.

She recalls that food influenced her childhood, that it must have “meant security to me even back then.” She remembers coming home for lunch one day and her mother making them homemade strawberry shortcake. It was one of her favorite lunches ever and she still remembers sitting at the table eating it. She feels that food meant a lot to her as a kid and when she went away to camp she wrote home to her parents, not about the activities, but about the food at camp.

### **Relationship to Mother**

In contrast to her father’s admonitions and emphasis on healthy eating, her mother weighed over two hundred pounds and would hide sweets while she was supposed to be dieting. This made Sue feel fortunate because she could always eat whatever she wanted to and still stay thin. She thought that she would be always be able to do this. Her sister was also thin and this contributed to her belief that she would always be able to eat without worrying about gaining weight. They would try and encourage their mother when they would find cookies and candy hidden around the house. She doesn’t remember her mother exercising to lose weight but in those days it wasn’t common for people to do that. She believes that her eating and exercise habits were heavily influenced by her parents’ behaviors and beliefs but also has a strong belief that “your family genes” are quite influential as well, narrowing the significance of her own decision-making.

As she gained weight as an adult and found herself wearing size sixteen pants, she reminded herself of her mother wearing bigger sizes and shopping at Lane Bryant. She is currently a size fourteen and remembers that it felt good to wear smaller sizes. She wonders why, since she felt “really good” she doesn’t choose to do something about it and try to get into better shape. She isn’t sure why she felt so much better being a smaller size. Although she doesn’t really understand the reasons for it, she believes her feelings about wanting to be smaller may be related, in part, to “having to deal” with her mother and her mother’s two sisters. She seems to acknowledge a certain anger or resentment towards them, even going so far as to say “I’m not saying that I would want anything to happen to them.” Now at this point in her life, she finds herself in a position of responsibility in relation to them, as more of a caretaker. As an adult she found herself dieting at different times and being more like her mother and her sisters. She identifies with them, “I see myself as them.” Any time she gains weight she thinks of them and she doesn’t want to be like them. It worries her that she may become more like them. In her efforts to lose weight and avoid this fate, she has “a whole cupboard full of weight loss products that she tries but “can’t stick with.” She has been worried “a lot” about the possibility that she will become more like her mother and her aunts.

### **Relationship to Family**

One of her aunts weighed over three hundred pounds and had a lot of medical problems. She also had other relatives that had medical problems such as diabetes due to their weight. She believes this was the eventual cause of their deaths. Although this has created anxiety for her, and she has discussed this with her sister, it has not caused her to alter her behavior, i.e. exercise more. Their health problems have been in the back of her mind and have caused her to think about her own health issues.

She felt embarrassed by her aunt's weight when her aunt was in the hospital and had to be taken down to the basement to be put on a special scale. People made comments about it and she felt that she should have spoken up and defended her aunt but she remained quiet instead. She likes Richard Simmons because he's helped people and is inspirational for those trying to lose weight. Sometimes she will watch his show just to hear him talk. She feels that he understands what many people don't about people who are overweight. She feels badly that a lot of people say nasty things about heavy people. She has sympathy towards people that are overweight and feels that sometimes it is beyond their control. For her someone's weight does not define what kind of person he or she is, and people are not necessarily deserving of the negative comments made about them. She feels guilty that she did not defend her aunt when she was in the hospital. As a result of her family members' problems with weight she feels protective and understanding towards people who are overweight.

### **Competition With Sister**

She remembers during her adolescence doing homework with her brother and eating hamburgers and pizza with her brother before bedtime. She has always been very close to her family and always got along well with her brother. She has fond memories of these times and she continues this behavior today of eating in the evenings. Her relationship with her sister, who was four years older, was more competitive. Her sister was always very popular and had a lot of boyfriends. She felt that she had a "middle child syndrome," believing that her parents favored her sister because she was the oldest, and her brother because he was the only boy and "could do no wrong". She always felt that she was the least liked and even believed for awhile that she was adopted because of her eye color.

During her adolescence she didn't think much about her body in comparison with her sister's because she didn't have to worry about her weight back then. She doesn't recall sitting around and worrying about this because both she and her sister were thin and they shared each other's clothes. Her competitiveness with her sister revolved more around boys. She experienced a sense of inferiority in relation to her sister, believing that boys would like her sister and not her. She didn't have thoughts that her sister was "built better," but that she was friendly and smiled more and that was probably the reason boys liked her sister better. Her sister married a doctor's son and got married right out of nursing school and moved to Chicago. They were not that close after that until her sister moved back to town a few years ago. Now they're close and talk on the phone several times a day, and "do everything together."

During her adolescence and believing that her parents liked her sister more, she recalls that she used to cry a lot and feel sad all the time. She always believed that everything

went right for her sister. Recently she was talking to her sister about how they both need to lose weight, that they have this in common. In the past her sister had what the participant considered a perfect body, but that is not the case today. Her sister has gained weight and of the two of them, she now feels that she looks better than her sister. But she doesn't necessarily trust that it will last. In the past she believed that her sister had a perfect body and also had a better life, but feeling that she currently looks better than her sister has not affected how she feels about her own body. What is significant for her is that she is still by herself, and her feelings about her body are connected to having a relationship with a man, which she believes is an outcome of having a "good body." This is much more significant and meaningful to her than how her body compares to her sister's. Having a relationship is something she longs for, and although she doesn't believe it is right for her to pray for herself, she has asked God to bless her in this way. She believes her dissatisfaction with her body is inextricably intertwined with not having a man in her life. She prays more for other people but has asked God if He could have "somebody pay attention to me." Someone even told her that maybe God "wants you to do without." For her there is a very clear connection between having a body that she is satisfied with and that she believes others find attractive, and being able to have someone who would notice or comment on her body. She feels tremendous pressure from her family to be involved in a relationship. She is about the first person in her family to be divorced and it made her feel "like the worst person on earth." It was very hard for her to deal with that. Her mother has made several comments to her about her not being with someone who will take care of her. She feels her family doesn't understand her feelings because neither her mother or her sister ever worked and doesn't feel they understand her wanting to be more independent and not simply relying on a man to "take care of her."

### **Feelings About Own Body**

The evolution of her body from her teenage years, when she felt content with her body, to her adulthood during which she gained about five pounds about every year meant dissatisfaction with her body, which she feels is preventing her from having a man in her life. This has led her to try many things over the years to get into better shape, but she feels that she lacks the determination to follow through with anything, precisely because she feels there is no one to pay attention to her body, and so it becomes cycle. She feels "lousy" and "horrible" in the wintertime, which makes it even more difficult to feel healthy and good about her body. Her sister even bought her a special lamp to help elevate her mood.

When she thinks back to the liposuction she had before her son's wedding, it was a dramatic experience to go through for the purpose of looking better. It was "horrible" to go through, and much more involved than she thought it would be. But once she got beyond the physical discomfort of the procedure, she had very positive feelings about her body, but doesn't know why she let herself "fall apart again." She is uncertain why she she wasn't more motivated to exercise and watch her weight so that she wouldn't gain it back. However, she is glad she had it done, and if she had the money, would probably do it again. It was her "one splurge" in life. Even as painful as it was "it was worth every minute to get thinner than my ex-husband's wife."

**That was three years ago and she now weighs one hundred and seventy pounds. She wishes she could lose fifteen pounds. She believes she would look and feel much better if she could lose this amount of weight. She believes it would change things for her in that she would look so much better in her clothes, which would motivate her to diet and subsequently feel better about herself. At present she does not “feel good” about herself because of her weight. This has consistently been an issue for her as an adult. She gets up every day feeling optimistic but ends up “being my old complaining and grumpy self.” One thing that is getting to her currently is seeing “these girls who are wearing all of these tops that are showing your stomach and your midriff and you do look at them and you think I wish that could be me.” Her unfavorable comparisons of herself with “these girls” creates a longing to do something about it.”**

## **SITUATED NARRATIVE #5**

### **Kelly**

#### **Relationship of Body to Body Image**

Kelly believes that, in general, adolescence is a “tough time,” and that it is probably the hardest time in a person’s life. Although she herself is twenty-three, she used to work with elderly people and they would talk about and reminisce about the changes one has to go through during adolescence. This included changes in one’s body, as well as making decisions about college, relationships with peers, and dealing with things like divorce, and “all of the things that you have to deal with at once.”

For herself, she experienced stress in relation to her involvement in extracurricular activities. She was “forced to be in the marching band,” which she “absolutely hated.” Kelly found the pressure of balancing various activities as well as classes and a job to be stressful. In addition there was the pressure of “trying to look good and impress everybody.” Although she wasn’t involved in as many extra activities as some of her peers, like most of the other girls her age she was concerned with maintaining good grades, as well as wanting to “look good, working on the hair and everything.” For Kelly, working on her appearance was one of many areas in which she felt pressure to be successful. She became much more aware of this kind of pressure after starting college than she was during her earlier adolescence. She never paid too much attention to the media portraying “all of those skinny girls,” until after high school and then “it seemed like it was everywhere.” It was about this time, when she started college and would “drink a case of beer a night,” which, “all adds up,” that she gained a little weight.

#### **Relationship of Body to Cultural Expectations**

In addition to this time in her life when she was in college and would compare herself to the slender ideal emphasized by the media, she became acutely aware of how she compared with other girls when she was in the eighth grade and “encountered a huge growth spurt” and grew four inches taller. Kelly really didn’t like it at first because she thought the average height of most girls was about 5’4” and she was a little taller and felt “awkward at first.” It was hard finding jeans that would fit that were not “flood pants.” That was “probably the hardest thing.” She wonders about the cause of her growth spurt, whether it was because she did something to cause it, such as, she was drinking a lot of milk like her brother who had moved in at that time, or if it was “just a growth spurt.” At the time she experienced being taller than her peers as “a little awkward,” but now in her early twenties she “really likes being a little bit taller.” It is a different experience for her now because instead of feeling awkward, not only can she reach things, but now it makes her feel good because people tell her than she has “nice legs and long legs.” What was “awkward” in the eighth grade she now characterizes as “great.” Although she felt awkward when she grew four inches taller, most of her friends in junior high and middle school were tall so she was “about average with them,” and there was a positive aspect to it in that she always liked being able to help her friends reach things.

As an adult Kelly experienced concern about her weight when she went on the Pill and gained weight. She was “constantly thinking about losing weight and trying to be skinny.” It was “kind of like an obsessive type thing,” which was “pretty scary” for her. She felt she was able to control it from becoming as serious as anorexia or bulimia, but she would “constantly” and “seriously” feel guilty “even if I would eat a cookie.” Although she never binged or purged and never felt that she would develop a problem as serious as anorexia or bulimia, Kelly was bothered by “the obsessive, compulsive thoughts she had at that time about her weight. She has had friends with eating disorders and one of her cousins is anorexic. She has been supporting her cousin, who has developed serious health problems, by going to appointments with her and trying to encourage her. She understands the seriousness of these disorders and the consequences they can have for one’s health. The experiences of her friends and her cousin have left an impression upon her and given her “an incentive not to be like that.”

Still, she has been concerned about her weight. Kelly feels that she is considered attractive but still “wanted to change my appearance.” For her this means losing weight. Since starting graduate school she has weighed about one hundred and thirty pounds. This is the source of some anxiety for her to the extent that she hasn’t been able to step on a scale for several months. She believes that she has lost a few pounds, but worries that if she gets on the scale it will say something she doesn’t want to see. So the scale stays in the corner and remains dusty. She would like the security of knowing that her “Christmas jeans will fit,” before she learns what her actual weight is.

She characterizes her concern about her weight as “internal,” not affecting her relationships with others but rather influencing how she feels about herself. “Body image is very important to me.” When she feels good about her weight it has the effect of energizing her in such a way that it makes her “more motivated to get things accomplished...more confident and more outgoing.” For Kelly there is a definite correlation between her weight and these feelings of confidence and energy. Her body image has been important to her since college, and was not something that she thought much about in high school or earlier in her life.

Right now she feels “very fat compared to most people.” She has the sense that her perception is “a distortional thing.” She makes unfavorable comparisons between herself and “the beautiful women” she sees on TV, feeling that she is not “up to par” with them. She has insight into the fact that these images do not represent the average woman, and by her own estimates these “really skinny” women probably account for approximately one percent of the population. Although she believes that most of them are “air brushed” and that she knows that “they’re fake,” she finds that “it’s just so hard to get over that though.” Kelly has a sense of confusion about these feelings. In her experience most guys would rather “have a girl that is a little bit overweight than one that is skin and bones.” She recently had a conversation with her friends about this and “they all agreed.” Although she has a recognition that the images of the women that she sees in magazines are based upon unrealistic ideals of the female body, she continues to experience distress as she compares herself to them.

She has a similar reaction when she thinks about how much she weighs. On the one hand, she intellectually observes that “being 5’7” tall and weighing one hundred and thirty pounds is by no means overweight,” however, she “hates to look in the mirror.” When she is in her “skinny stage” she likes the way she looks in her clothes and thinks

she looks nicer. “I just feel a lot better.” Her weight plays such a role in how she feels about herself that when she is at a higher weight, (i.e. one hundred and thirty pounds), “I just feel disgusted.” She feels disgusted that she lets herself “get like that.” She associates being at a higher weight with “being lazy” and with a lack of self-control, “just eating all that junk. I just get disgusted with letting myself do that.”

Kelly feels she has been quite influenced by the media’s emphasis on the female body in advertising. For her it is “everywhere I look.” On television, billboards, and magazines she sees women portrayed whom she knows are too skinny. Even so, she feels jealous of some of them. She wonders what kind of workout schedules they have and what they eat. She imagines that maybe they live on carrot sticks and wonders “how they can do it.” She speculates on the lives of models and recalls television shows that expose managers getting the models addicted to cocaine or diets that involve very little intake of food. She views this as “bad,” but “it just really bugs me.” It bothers her that people will go to these lengths to lose weight. She experiences ambivalence about this though. She wouldn’t want to live the regimented life that she imagines they must live, however they “look so good,” she still feels jealous and wants to “be like that in a way.”

It feels to her that the media is “constantly portraying deathly skinny girls,” that seem to be everywhere she looks. Not only does she see these women in the media, but she sees them walking around the city. Although by her estimate “only one percent of women are actually that skinny, they seem to be everywhere I look.” She compares herself to these women that she encounters and believes that most other girls do the same thing. For her it is “definitely a woman thing.”

### **Comparison of Concerns About Body Image With Boys**

She doesn’t believe that this is an issue for most men. They have the freedom to go off and “eat a whole pizza and drink beer.” Seeing other women on campus, however, does not affect her quite as strongly as the girls she sees in magazines because they’re “real people,” and she knows that they’re not airbrushed. Although she thinks that men do not experience concerns about their bodies in the same way that women do, she believes that eating disorders in men are more prevalent, especially among wrestlers and swimmers. She also has noticed that some men, especially “the sporty types,” like to “show off” their muscles and their bodies.

### **Relationship of Changes in Body to Relationships With Boys**

In contrast, Kelly recalls that during adolescence there was more insecurity among girls about their bodies. She would observe girls in the bathroom staring at themselves in the mirror. She doesn’t have any reason to believe that this was going on in the boy’s bathroom. She never heard anything from the boys she knew regarding any concerns they had about their bodies. But it was different with the girls. They would make comments about boys not liking them because “I look like this, or my hair, my weight, just different things.” However, unlike her peers, she wasn’t that concerned with her own body image until later, in high school. “Body image wasn’t a big thing for me until probably eleventh grade.” What changed for her was that she began noticing that boys were beginning to pay attention to her. She didn’t have that many boyfriends in junior high and high school.

But somewhere around eleventh grade, her sense of herself expanded to include others. She would see boys and their heads would turn and look at her. She found that she liked this feeling. "I'd be like, that is kind of cool."

### **Relationship of Body to Dieting and Weight**

Kelly thinks of herself as having always been somewhat self-conscious and having the sense that people stare at her sometimes. She wonders why she feels this way and characterizes it as "a really weird thing." But "it started to be a good thing." She had gotten a birth control shot and had lost some weight as a result. People commented on her weight loss and "that made me feel really good and that was a good thing." Her self-consciousness had been transformed into a positive feeling about herself when she lost weight and when she began to notice boys looking at her.

Kelly's self-esteem has always been very closely tied to her weight, which fluctuated a lot throughout junior high and high school. The Depo-Provera shot, which caused her to lose weight also did "a lot of terrible things" to her body. It also made her lose some of her hair, gave her abdominal cramps, and made her become very moody. So she switched to birth control pills which caused her to gain about fifteen pounds. Over the last several years her weight has continued to fluctuate. In an effort to maintain control over her weight, she gets up every day at 6:15 AM and walks for forty-five minutes. People tell her that she's "crazy for getting up that early." But she feels that she derives many benefits from getting up to walk everyday, which contribute to her sense of well-being. "It's a nice refreshing way to wake up," it elevates her mood, and allows her to live a healthier lifestyle. In contrast, when she was at her highest weight, one hundred and forty pounds, it had a negative effect upon her self-image. "I just didn't feel very good about myself and my clothes didn't fit." This year at Christmas she got a pair of jeans that were too small, but she's saving them "for an incentive." She is emulating her mother who has had dresses hung up in her closet for awhile as an incentive to lose weight. For Kelly, her weight has determined the quality of her self-image at any given time. When she has weighed more she has just had "a negative view" about herself and does not feel comfortable with herself.

When she was on the Depo-Provera shot and lost about twelve pounds, she felt that she looked a lot better and enjoyed the compliments that she received from her friends and family. When she is at a lower weight her sense of self grows to include the influence of those around her. When she weighs more, she is more focused on her own self and becomes more self-conscious, paying more attention to such things as how her clothes fit. Kelly feels much more confident when she weighs less. The fact that she has chosen to use birth control and the method that she has used, has been quite influential in terms of her body weight and subsequently her self-esteem at any given time. She is envious of a friend of hers who "not even a week after having her kids, had her half-shirt on again." She sees her friend as, unlike herself, "one of those kinds of people that can eat anything." But she also feels some sense of responsibility for gaining weight in the past. When she worked at Burger King she would get free food, and although she would tell herself that she would get only salads, she would also get ranch dressing and french fries on the salad, so that "probably contributed."

A few years ago Kelly made a New Year's resolution to lose weight and lost forty pounds. This was following her freshman year in college when she and a friend "would go out every night and drink and eat a feast until three in the morning and then go right to bed." This pattern, which she now looks back on as "not very healthy," lasted about five months. Having a friend who did this with her made it easier for her to slip into living this way for a period of time. Her friend also gained weight and "we kind of went through it together." She was "definitely" influenced by her friend, drinking and gaining weight with her. It made it "not as bad," that she was not "the only one looking real chunky here."

Her sense of well-being is tied extremely closely to her weight and what she eats. When she first started college she was eating a lot of cookies and similar foods. Currently, she is eating healthier foods such as tuna fish and rice. She likes tofu and she has given up beef. Although she is not a vegetarian, she eats a lot of vegetables and fruit. Her eating habits have influenced her family as well. When she was living at home she was cooking very healthy foods for her and her dad. He lost forty pounds and his cholesterol went down forty points. Kelly feels proud that her father benefited from her eating and cooking habits and she received a lot of recognition for this. People would ask her father how he had made these changes and he would tell them that it was his daughter's cooking. She just got her blood pressure taken and it was "perfect," 120/80. This really makes her "feel good." She "just feels better all around" when she eats healthier foods. It also gives her a sense of feeling in control when she is eating better. When she was participating in "late night drinking binges and midnight munchies" her freshman year in college, it started to affect her grades. But then last year she decided to "take charge" by trying to lose weight.

### **Relationship of Body to Peers**

Kelly says she experiences a considerable amount of pressure as a college student to focus on her appearance. Events such as spring break bring considerable stress for her and her friends. She has chosen not to go to the beach for spring break in an effort to avoid this. She is inundated with TV commercials such as "Girls Gone Wild" with its images of girls in bikinis. She chose an "alternative" to going to the beach and feels a sense of relief over this. Her friends are feeling a sense of urgency about going to the tanning salon and losing weight. Going to the beach means "having to look good in a bathing suit and to be tan." She is bothered by the lack of authenticity surrounding these preparations. She doesn't believe in "fake tanning" and "fake nails." She believes that people should be themselves and "the hell with all that fake stuff."

### **Relationship of Body to Exercise**

One of the ways that she maintains her appearance in a more genuine way is through exercise. She has exercised faithfully for the last three years. There was a period of adjustment when she first started college and she would eat a lot of cookies from the grocery store and got involved in yo-yo dieting, but now she has a pattern of getting up in the mornings and walking for about forty-five minutes a day. Kelly believes that this has not only helped her lose weight, but it elevates her mood and makes her feel better. But it

requires effort and dedication to accomplish this, something that makes her proud. She thinks of it as getting “back to the grindstone” when she gets up on cold, rainy mornings feeling like she doesn’t want to go out. But she feels a sense of duty, that “I have to. So I do; my umbrella and Walkman and all.” Kelly feels a strong sense of commitment to sticking to her early morning exercise program, which includes getting up at 6 AM to play exercise tapes, and then walking for forty-five minutes. As is the case when she eats too many cookies, when she doesn’t exercise she feels guilty. But she is rigorous about her exercise program without being obsessive. She allows herself a couple of days off every week, usually on the weekends, to relax and sleep in, “which everybody needs.”

### **Relationship of Body to Feelings of Guilt**

However, she has felt guiltier in relation to her eating habits. Her guilt over eating even one cookie led her to restrict her food intake to only foods that she considered healthy. This led to a forty pound weight loss which concerned her family and friends. They all thought that she was anorexic. When she looks at pictures of herself from that period she has the feeling that she was probably too thin. No one believed that she didn’t have an eating disorder. She tried to explain to people that she was simply trying to exercise and eat right. Kelly weighed one hundred and ten pounds and she recalls feeling quite frustrated that she had changed her eating habits so dramatically and had lost all of this weight, and that rather than receiving praise for her weight loss, she was accused of being anorexic. She felt that all of her hard work was for nothing, that she didn’t receive the credit from others that she deserved for all of the willpower she demonstrated. Her weight loss required significant discipline and self-denial because “I love junk like potato chips, chocolate, give it all to me.”

But she no longer experiences the guilt that she would have in the past when she ate something as small as a cookie. She attributes this to seeing her cousin dealing with an eating disorder, personal experiences that she has had, and “me being a little bit older and realizing that body image is not everything.”

### **Relationship of Body to Perceptions of Others**

Kelly still experiences frustration in relation to her weight, however, as she has continued to fluctuate over a fifteen pound range. She wishes that she could simply maintain a stable weight, but sometimes she’ll “eat really bad,” and will lose her willpower and “just give in to eating all the junk.” At other times she is “really good” at controlling what she eats. She experiences it as a struggle to try and maintain a stable weight, but more often her weight is more like a “yo-yo.” She doesn’t notice that her relationships with others are affected as her weight goes up and down. She feels that people tend to respond to her in the same ways, but that for her “it’s more an internal thing.” Her weight at any given time is extremely closely tied to her feelings of self-esteem.

### **Relationship of Body to Self-Esteem and Confidence**

“When I’m in my skinny stage, I feel great about myself and tend to flaunt around a bit.”

Currently, she weighs between one hundred and fifteen and one hundred and twenty pounds. Kelly has felt her confidence increase, being at this weight. When she weighs more, she feels more self-conscious and uncomfortable wearing some skirts and “I never really wear half shirts.” She can feel herself walk more confidently when she is in her “skinny stage.” She feels more assertive and “definitely” freer, a state during which she experiences more freedom of movement. She feels that she has never been one to flaunt herself, but when she weighs less she feels freer to wear a little less clothing, just nothing “risque.” When she is at a higher weight she doesn’t “want to flaunt around that’s for sure.” In fact, a difference of fifteen pounds can make her “feel like a beached whale.” She intellectualizes that she knows that this is a distortion that is not true, but that it is “just hard to get over that fact.” She “just does not feel confident” about herself when she is fifteen pounds heavier.

Currently she is exercising more and feels “a lot healthier.” She is anticipating spring break and summer coming, when there will not be layers of clothing to wear. Her feelings about her body are tied virtually exclusively to her weight. She has “minor” concerns about her skin and her teeth, but she thinks little about these. Her weight is much more of an issue for her. When she is in that stage in which she feels like a “beached whale,” she just wants to be in sweatpants, “in nice baggy clothes, and eat.” In contrast to the freedom of movement she experiences when she weighs less, she doesn’t “really feel like doing anything.”

### **Relationship of Body to Potential Pregnancy**

**Kelly feels a sense of connection with other women and believes that it’s “very hard for women these days to feel self-confident about themselves.” She holds the media responsible for this, with its portrayals of women that leave men with unrealistic images of women, prompting them to make unflattering comments to their wives. She thinks about the future, and the prospect of going through pregnancy. In her experience, after having babies, many women are quite self-conscious about their bodies. It is something she thinks about. She is “deathly scared to have kids.” Her fear is partly grounded in her perception of how pregnancy altered her mother’s body. She was at a “decent weight” until she had her and her brothers. “Your body is never the same once you’ve had kids and that just really scares the heck out of me.” As strongly as Kelly feels about this, she doesn’t think she would allow her feelings to influence her decision to have kids. At present, she isn’t sure if wants to have kids, but she doesn’t think her fear would “influence my choices.”**

## SITUATED NARRATIVE #6

### Jill

#### Relationship of Body to Food

For Jill, her experiences in relation to her changing body were closely connected to her mother's influence on her eating habits. She has always believed that the idea of body image is related to food. Her thinking was heavily influenced by her mother, whom she recalls as being "pretty smart" about food, and who did a lot of reading about food. The origins of this connection for this participant actually go back to her mother's early life experiences in that her mother didn't have a lot of stability, was "not taken care of," and didn't have a lot of food growing up. Due to her mother's own difficult upbringing she believes that her mother was "motivated" to teach her own kids about how to eat right and make sure that they had enough food. Her mother was concerned about her and her brothers and sisters eating a healthy diet. "So basically, I ate carrots a lot." Her mother, in an effort to compensate for her own lack of guidance in this area was always watching and "didn't let us have a lot of sugar." She encouraged them to eat fruit and vegetables like most mothers and really seemed to go out of her way to emphasize to them that these foods were available for them to eat. Her mother encouraged them to limit their intake of certain foods and if she became sick her mother would question her as to what she had been eating, drawing connections to her eating habits as the cause. "She would explain to me why, if I was sick, that is why I felt that way." For Jill, this is the source of her concerns about what she eats and the effects it will have on her body. She thinks about "the consequences of eating," how it is good and bad for her.

The influence of her mother's thinking about food and its effects on one's body is so strong that she feels she can never "seem to think about my body image without thinking of food." Of specific concern to her is the possibility of food making her fat. She focuses on "carbs" contributing to weight gain and she especially has concerns about "this thing going on with my stomach and why do I look like this?" She has sought the advice of her mother who counseled her that it is "probably because of carbs." For Jill, her feelings about her body have a lot to do with what she eats. She currently has a roommate who has quite different eating habits than the participant and looks "a lot different in structure." She finds this very interesting. Her roommate used to be overweight but completely changed her eating habits, and now eats all kinds of different things. As a result her body underwent significant changes. She looks at her roommate and thinks about how her change in eating habits changed her physical appearance. In spite of her apparent interest in this issue, she denies that she has been affected by her roommate's changing body. She limits its influence upon her to an intellectual level, saying only that it "contributes to my theory." She looks at her roommate and thinks that maybe if she changed her eating habits in a similar way that she would have the same results. But she quickly minimizes her concern about this because she feels that it represents such a substantial change that she simply doesn't worry about it. "Sometimes I think it's completely off the wall." She rationalizes that she worries about her roommate because she's a vegetarian and she eats a lot of foods that are "different," and she wonders if she

always gets the “nutrients she needs.” She is aware of her mother’s influence on her as she expresses concern about her roommate’s eating habits. She identifies this as “my mom ingraining in me the balance you need.”

An aspect of Jill’s thoughts about the connection between food and one’s body image is her belief that “some people deal best with their emotions through food.” For her, different foods represent comfort. She noticed this especially when she left home and started college. She was eating cafeteria food that was “just the grease that doesn’t make you feel any better.” But when she got to go home for the weekend and eat soup it was comforting to her. She observes that “sometimes people get sad and they eat junk like candy, chocolate, Doritos, and things like that.” There have been times in her life when this has been true for her. She has always loved fried foods, which for her are attached to happy memories of her grandfather taking them out to eat. This was such a treat because they could get fried food, which they ordinarily didn’t get to eat at home. Food as a form of emotional comfort became a big issue for her around the time of seventh grade. She would get off the bus and go to dance class up the street from her mother’s office and before class she would stop at the 7 Eleven and “load up on orange soda, a big bag of these cheddar cheese sour cream chips and this giant tootsie roll.” Since she didn’t get to do this very often she really enjoyed it when she had the chance and “went all out.” The summer before her parents divorced, making trips by herself to the 7 Eleven was one of the first things she did independently. She associates her mother allowing her to go to the store and buy whatever she wanted with the divorce. She believes that her mother, who ordinarily was so conscious about healthy eating, allowed her this freedom “so that I would feel better.” She thinks that it was her “mom’s way” to give her the money and send her to the 7 Eleven. It was something “I went and did all by myself.” It was “independence...a new thing.”

Jill reveled in her new freedom as a twelve year old going to the 7 Eleven with money from her mother. Since she was allowed to buy whatever she wanted, she opted for junk food, “just like any kid with five dollars in their hand.” When she looks back on that time she recalls that she ate a lot of foods with a high carbohydrate, grease, starch, and fat content. When she thinks about her body now, she wonders if some of the decisions she made as a teenager about what to eat have affected the way her body looks today. She observes that “I look back.” She feels that adolescence is the time when your body changes and you can “make certain decisions and that is how its going to come out.” She specifically focuses on her stomach and tries to remember if her stomach “got like this” before the age of twelve when she started “gorging.” She describes her stomach as “this little pouch thing that goes on and it’s round.” She worries that her eating habits at the age of twelve have caused her stomach to look like this. She feels that her “whole stomach thing is again on my campaign of carbs and fat.” She experiences guilt based on the admonitions of her mother who “always said that’s what causes it.” For her, food has definitely played a role. “It’s all a big chain.”

This has been a challenge for Jill because she has always loved foods with a high starch and carbohydrate content. However, she makes efforts to limit her intake of such foods in the present. This makes her feel “a lot better.” Usually, she tries to eat fruit for breakfast and something light for lunch and “whatever” for dinner. This has created problems for her in terms of her goals for eating right because she likes to go out for dinner. Also, for the last two years when she was living in a dorm and had a meal plan,

she was eating burgers and fries. All three meals were filled with “carbs and fat and lots of starch like breadsticks or ice cream.” Now that she lives in an apartment and does her own shopping she feels that “I’ve changed for the better.” Remaining true to her mother’s teachings about food, she buys “more fruit” and overall thinks that she eats better. She feels “really good” on days that she does this.

Doing this makes her feel a little better about her body and a “little less guilty.” However, Jill says that it doesn’t bother her to go to McDonalds or to the pancake house. She doesn’t get “overly guilty” about it, but she just feels better when she eats better. It allows her to go to sleep with a clear conscience if she eats healthier and can say to herself “I did good.”

There has been a shift in her eating habits from when she was twelve to now, as a college student. She ate whatever junk food she could “get my hands on” back then, and didn’t have the sense of guilt that she does now over eating certain foods. She experienced a sense of freedom at that time in her life in relation to her eating habits that she does not enjoy now. “I didn’t realize calories had consequences.” Now she thinks about food in terms of what kinds of consequences it will have for her. If she has a day where she is eating healthy foods, then she feels that she has “done all I can.” Then she can look at her stomach and even if it doesn’t “do what I want it to do,” she can feel okay about it.

She believes that the way that her body has developed has its origins going back as far as her grandmother. Her mother was not fed “properly” by her grandmother, and she reasons that her mother’s body had to program itself to defend against starvation by retaining fat. Jill believes that this is also true for her. She doesn’t remember ever starving, but her parents didn’t buy a lot of junk food. They bought “the basics” and bought what they could. Since she didn’t get to have foods that were “fun,” on the occasions when she did get to have something that she normally didn’t get to eat, “I went overboard on it and I craved it.” She doesn’t remember what her mother fed her when she was very young. She remembers being referred to as a tiny baby but thinks that she was fed “pretty well.” Jill experienced a feeling of deprivation in the sense that she didn’t have junk food while she was growing up.

In the present she thinks of herself as healthy and that she is a “nut” about eating right. She had a discussion with her sister about this. When she first came to school she was amazed to see people eating a burger with french fries and mashed potatoes. Jill and her sister would joke about this because they had been taught so much about healthy eating. She qualifies her belief that she is a “nut” about eating right, but rather she feels “out of whack” if she goes a couple of days without eating meat or fruit. She has the sense that she needs to get “something right - like something is just not right and I want to fix it.” She believes that she is a little “anal retentive about my food concerns.” When she is feeling “out of whack,” she doesn’t feel as energetic and that is important to her because of the schedule she keeps. If she feels that there is something dragging her down or making her feel sluggish she usually thinks it comes from the food she has eaten.

Currently, she eats a lot of fruits and vegetables and, following her mother’s example, doesn’t keep a lot of junk food around. She feels a sense of pride and feels better about her body when she limits junk food. She eats rice cakes and tries to eat “better things.” However, a couple of weeks ago she was “incredibly stressed out,” and went to the store

and bought a lot of junk food. In that instance, her feelings of pride and accomplishment about her eating were completely changed.

### **Relationship of Body to Mother**

Jill's feelings about her diet and its effect on her body have been significantly influenced by her mother. She described her mother as a "borderline anorexic." She thinks it may have had something to do with her brother's premature birth and subsequent death. Her mother shared with her that many years earlier, around the time of the participant's birth, she "had problems with that." This was triggered by the death of one of her friends from bulimia, and her mother encouraged her to go to the funeral. Her mother was very bothered by this event, and it triggered her to share some details about her own struggle, with her daughter. Jill believes that this is probably the reason that she was taught so much about food, because of the "things my mom went through." She believes her mother has thought a lot about her own body image and watching this has really influenced her to "think about it too." She wonders if it has made her "paranoid" about what she eats. She thinks not, just that it has made her much more aware of what she eats. She observes what other people eat and she thinks about the consequences of eating certain foods. "So it has just opened my eyes to a whole perspective to eating food and relating it to body image." She is quick to counter this with assurances that "I go out and eat when I please, and usually within reason eat whatever I want." She asserts that she is not so worried about what she eats that she can't enjoy herself. She believes she is concerned about it as much as she is because of her mother's teaching and influence related to food.

### **Relationship of Body to Cultural Expectations**

Jill feels that her association of her body image with food is typical of the current times, that we live in a culture where "thin is in." She thinks about the fact that she sees it in the media and that all she seems to see on TV are thin people.

### **Relationship of Body to Exercise and Physical Activity**

In addition to the emphasis she places on diet and its relation to her body image, she also thinks exercise plays a role in her experience of her own body. For her it "counteracts" the effects of food and it can substantially change one's body image, "usually for the better." In her view, eating can change it for "the worse," and exercising can change it "for the better." When one does both, a balance can be achieved. Of the two, exercise and diet, she thinks more about exercise in relation to her body. She feels she should be exercising a lot more than she is right now. If she has a couple of days where she isn't eating the way she thinks she should be, she thinks she should be exercising more. In fact, she "always" thinks she should be exercising and is even trying to train for a marathon but hasn't had the time. She expresses similar feelings of guilt in relation to exercise as she did with diet and food. If she isn't eating right and isn't exercising as much as she thinks she should, she feels sick sometimes, like her body is completely "out of whack." When she feels sluggish from too many "carbs," exercise is

“the ultimate thing” that would help get everything back in shape. But sometimes she just has a day where she’s feeling fat or unhealthy. Eating normally and getting enough sleep help her feel healthier.

### **Relationship of Body to Stressful Events**

Jill feels that her experience of her body has also been quite influenced by a number of stressful events beginning at age twelve and continuing through the present. Most of these events are associated with her parents’ divorce. The divorce set in motion a series of events that happened because of the divorce. They had to sell the house that she had grown up in and to which she was quite attached. It felt to her like things “fell apart,” and that it was a huge change. One year she was living in her house with her whole family and the next she was living somewhere completely different. It also meant she was moving from a rural area to a smaller townhouse in a more urban setting. However, she also experienced “a whole new world” opening up with new possibilities. For instance, her mother wanted them to participate in sports like soccer and up to that point her parents had had different opinions on issues like this. Her brother had attention deficit disorder and he had to be in a different school district. These things were stressful for her and she felt the need to escape. So she began dating a guy in high school which she characterizes now as a “strange relationship” and “definitely not a good thing.” He was “kind of a liar,” and there was a lot of tension because of this. She believes that these events were stressful enough to “possibly alter or redirect the hormonal processes involved in adolescent physical changes...” and maybe change her eating habits as well. She learned in her psychology classes that “stress was a chemical thing.” She believes that stress can “affect something in your body to trigger things,” and that her “hormonal processes” were affected to shape her body “the way it is.” She compares her body to what she sees in the media where there are so many people who “are just like sticks.” They are very thin and there is so much attention that is paid to them and she compares her body to them sometimes. She thinks about how short she is and how she’s gained a little weight in different parts of her body over the last year. She’s frustrated that she hasn’t been able to exercise and thinks she could look better if she did. She thinks she looks “okay,” but indicates a certain dissatisfaction with her body, saying that she would like to “change some things and make it better.” She experiences a lack of contentment with her appearance at the current time, which she believes may be a result of stress affecting her hormones during her adolescence. She wonders if she would look “different” if the same life events had not taken place during her adolescence.

### **Relationship of Body to Sisters**

In addition to her concerns about how the past may be affecting her appearance in the present, Jill compares herself unfavorably to her mother and sisters. From her point of view, her mother and sisters share a similar body type with a “more thin frame.” Her mother is not as thin as she used to be and now looks more like Jill. They have discussed this and they think “it has to do with the carbs.” She wonders if she would look more like her sisters if she were more “thin-framed.” It bothers her that she looks “different” and feels that since they are family they should look more alike. Again, she alludes to a sense

of guilt, wondering if it was “something I did.” Physically, she resembles more her father’s side and this creates for her a sense of alienation from her sisters and mother. Her father’s side of the family are “more solid and wall-like.”

She regrets that she didn’t “eat better.” When she thinks back to her early adolescence she thinks that “I ate so bad just to try and deal with everything.” She believes that she ate “really wrong,” but with all of the stressors she was experiencing at that time, mainly related to her parents’ divorce, she still wonders if something may have been “triggered” in her body that would account for her current body weight and physical appearance. She has been concerned enough about this to discuss it with her mother who offered this suggestion. Because she was a small baby and didn’t have “much fat on my body,” her body has basically compensated for that by retaining fat for “the rest of its life.” She doesn’t look like her sisters because “my body made that decision.” She thinks that this may be a possibility, that her mother may be right about this. She feels that at “that time in your life you are very sensitive to all kinds of changes,” and even wonders if something in her mother’s body was “triggered,” which could account for her current body. She presently feels “a little bit fatter than my sisters.” She thinks that the fact that she is not very tall may contribute to her sense of dissatisfaction with her body. She does not consider herself overweight and does not “feel fat, I just don’t feel skinny.” Her concerns about her appearance stem more from the fact that she is “a little bit larger” than her sisters.

Jill’s parents’ divorce when she was twelve continues to be a central event in her life, and the focal point of the stressful events that she believes may have led to changes in her body. At the time she was “pretty stressed out” and “a little frustrated.” Because she was the oldest it became her job “to help out with things.” Although she thinks her mother would never admit to expecting this from her, she feels some regret that, as a result, she stayed in the house a lot and there were things that she didn’t get to do. She is ambivalent about how much it really affected her because she also recalls it as “not too bad.” She continues to believe that the stress could have “triggered some kind of hormonal process,” or that she simply ate more at that time when she was at home because “that’s what there was to do.”

Her parents’ divorce was “the first in a chain of stressful events that would take place through the years.” She felt that she sometimes “dealt with my problems through food.” She feels like she’s gotten a lot of “pleasure out of food,” whether she was going out to dinner with friends or just staying at home. She likes to cook a little, and her mother taught her how to cook, so that when she came home there would be something ready. When she cooked, she would experiment a lot and she would eat a lot because she liked what she made. After the divorce her mother would buy things that she hadn’t been able to buy for them before, due to her dad’s concerns about money. They didn’t go out to eat a lot but when her mother saw that “her kids were sad,” she tried to cheer them up by buying them things. She always liked it when her mother did that. Food was something that brought her pleasure throughout her childhood. For instance, she always liked going to the grocery store when she was younger. She has “gotten a lot of pleasure out of food.”

Right now she feels “confused” when she looks at her mother and sisters. Her mother looks much different than she used to, and after having five children she is no longer “pencil thin.” She has heard that “a girl tends to look like her mother,” and she looks at her mother now and remembers that she used to look a lot different. She feels confused

about whether she's "supposed" to look like her sisters, if that is what is natural for her. She wonders if she has a change in her schedule and she is able to be more active, if she would look more like her sisters. Then she would "know how I'm more naturally supposed to look." She struggles with her own sense of personal responsibility for her body's appearance with what is genetically pre-determined. "I'm confused, I know I have control over what does happen..." She wonders if she's supposed to look different, i.e. more like her sisters. She feels they look more like they're "supposed to," because they live the kind of lives that allow them to be more active, they have had the time to "live like they're supposed to." She attributes the difference between her sisters' appearance and that of herself and her mother to "stress." "I think my mom and I are just stressed out..." She imagines a future when "ideally" she and her mother will not be "stressed out" and "dealing with things," and they will look more like her sisters do now. For her, this will feel like things will be back to "normal," or as they should be.

### **Relationship of Body to Guilt**

Jill now experiences a sense of guilt over her eating behaviors when she was a young adolescent. Because she was spending a lot of time at home with her added responsibilities after the divorce, "I had little more to do than eat." She now thinks she "really overdid it." She attributes this to her mother buying new foods after the divorce. Since this was a new experience for her, she didn't know how long this abundance of food would be available. She never knew the next time that they would get to go out to eat or that she would be able to "be my own boss about what I ate." She "loved it" when she got to eat what she wanted and did not experience guilt about it at that time in her life. It is only now, with her current dissatisfaction with her body and her memories of "gorging" herself, that she wonders how she may have influenced her bodily development. "Anymore I'm just kind of questioning what kind of changes I've influenced. I'm just kind of in that reflective mode..." She thinks she has been "kind of curious" about this because she has been "doing a lot of work with science and so it has kind of changed me."

### **Relationship of Body to Childhood Development**

Not only does Jill worry that her decisions during an increased period of stress in her early adolescence, following her parents' divorce, could have affected her bodily development, she also is concerned that it could have influenced by something totally beyond her control. She worries that her mother possibly being "a borderline anorexic" when she was pregnant with her and not getting enough food destined her to a life of retaining fat. "That maybe it is an issue with nourishment. I was trying to eat off of the food that she put into her body and if I didn't get enough..." She reasons that if her mother didn't "put enough in there for both of us...then maybe I formed differently than I should have." She searches for a scientific explanation that could account for her body turning out differently than her sisters or the way she would like it to be. "I just think it all has to do with very sensitive processes in the developing fetus, and that could have been something that affected it. I'm not really sure how." Jill believes her body "programmed itself as a defense mechanism" against not getting enough food and that

consequently she will retain “whatever fat I do get.” She thinks that her body now may “specialize in retaining fat.” She vacillates between blaming herself for her own choices as a twelve year old, and blaming her mother for her choices during her pregnancy with her.

### **Relationship of Body to Potential Pregnancy**

She thinks about the effects of going through five pregnancies on her mother’s body. Jill has thought about how hard it would be to lose weight after a pregnancy, what an effort it would take. She hopes she would “have time to make that effort...” She believes that if she really wanted to have children she “wouldn’t not do it because of that,” but that right now while she is young, it is something like “old age,” to be afraid of right now.

### **Relationship of Body to Boyfriend**

In contrast to her concerns about her weight, she has always been content with the fact that, like the rest of her family, she is not very tall. When she was in kindergarten they told her that she was “short and little,” which she didn’t mind and thought was “kind of cute.” It was also a positive thing when she was a teenager because “sometimes it was kind of fun because I got some more attention.” This is still true today since her boyfriend is very tall. Her apartment has high ceilings and she makes him change the lightbulbs. It is a source of fun for them as they joke about how many of her it would take stacked up to change a light bulb.

### **Relationship of Body to Weight and Dieting**

Right now she weighs between one hundred and twenty-five and one hundred and thirty-one pounds. She hasn’t gained very much weight in the last two years, which she thinks is “kind of positive.” She was able to stay away from gaining the “freshman fifteen.” However, she is not content with her current weight and thinks that she could “weigh a little less,” and for her “it goes back to being short.” Jill believes she weighs too much for her height and that she would like to “weigh a little less.” She likes saying it this way because it sounds “a little less negative.” She believes she would feel more comfortable weighing about one hundred and fifteen pounds. She imagines that she would “absolutely” feel more content with her body if she were to “drop ten or fifteen pounds.” But for her this feels like an unattainable goal for the time being. “It’s all just a matter of finding the time to do it and I don’t have any right now.”

### **Relationship of Body to Feelings About Specific Parts of Body**

Her sense of dissatisfaction includes frustration with a specific part of her body. “I spend a lot of time thinking about my mid-section.” She doesn’t “think it’s terrible,” just that it’s “round.” “I don’t have any other problems.” But her feelings about it strong. “I hate my stomach.” Jill distances from this, saying “Maybe hate is a strong word.” It “just really gets on my nerves.” She feels frustrated and even characterizes this part of her body as almost having a will of its own. “I can’t just sit down and eat whatever I want to

because it's tempermental." If she were more content with her stomach she would experience more of a sense of freedom to eat what she wanted to eat. She distances again from her frustration and describes it as "not even that annoying," but quickly recalls the sense of limitation she feels with what she eats. "I know I should eat healthy for other reasons but, it's just kind of, I hate that. Maybe that's too strong of a word." She likes to look "nice" in dresses and doesn't like her stomach sticking out. She wants to look nice and her stomach is "one thing" that bothers her.

She places her frustration about the way her stomach looks in perspective as she observes that "I have been struggling with this for the last ten of my twenty years." The magnitude of her feelings about this creates a sense of alienation from those around her. Jill feels that "people from around here look a lot different, and sometimes I don't feel like I fit in." For her, this is "one aspect of it," the other being her comparison of herself to her sisters. She looks at her sisters and how they can look nice in their clothes, and she feels that this can be true of herself as well. Then she can become frustrated when she is trying on clothes and "I see that thing bulge out." She feels a certain weariness that she has been thinking about this for so many years, that it has become a "kind of a struggle. It has been on my mind." In spite of her efforts with dieting and exercise it has remained as it is. She is frustrated now because she doesn't "have time to pay attention to that because I've been pretty busy." She thinks about it even more now that it is time to start wearing summer clothes and "you can't really hide it with sweaters or anything." But rather than hide it, she would like to just be rid of it through personal effort, through exercise. "I'm not interested in trying some kind of medication or...those things they sell on TV that you can wear to make yourself look flatter." Jill wants to approach it authentically. "I want to do it healthy, and I think the only way is to exercise."

She thinks that despite her concerns about "baby fat," she is not concerned about "obesity," that she is "certainly not fat." She thinks about the baby fat that people tend to develop around their midsections and has a sense of resignation that "some people lose it and some people don't." She has "a little bit left," and from what she has heard, "it's hard to get rid of." These are her "main concerns."

## GENERAL NARRATIVE

Female bodily changes during adolescence were characterized by an increased sense of vulnerability in relation to the bodies of the participants that was new and different. Their bodies became a means for them to be judged by others in ways that they had not before experienced, leaving them open to actual and perceived evaluation and attention from others, and in the process, altering their familial and social relationships. Their bodies also now required their attention and care in ways that they had not before, resulting in changes over which they felt they lacked control. This sense of vulnerability was further intensified by their belief that they lacked some essential knowledge regarding the changes that they were experiencing, in some cases profoundly affecting their relationships with others. Feeling that they lacked knowledge regarding what bodily changes they could expect, they developed a perception that they were falling behind in relation to their peers, that they were being left out of some experience that others seemed to be sharing to which they were somehow not privy. Their bodies were something that they had always been able to count on before and the unpredictability that they experienced in relation to their bodies made them question what else in the world was not as it seemed. This created feelings of discomfort, inadequacy, and a feeling that they were less competent than they had previously considered themselves. They wondered what their peers knew that they did not, leaving them with a sense of worry and confusion. They became acutely aware of the differences between themselves and their peers. Moreover, they did not see any way that they could overcome these differences or advantages held by their friends. This led to a sense of resignation. A sense of alienation and loneliness arising out of their awareness of the differences that they perceived between themselves and their peers seemed, in some ways, insurmountable. Now, as adults they experience an increased sense of autonomy in relation to their ability to effect changes to their bodies and appearance.

These alterations in their bodies and consequently their worlds, led to a variety of emotions related to their experiences of their changing bodies, including feelings of depression, anxiety, confusion, shame, anger, envy, guilt, and a sense of loss, in some cases lasting into adulthood. These feelings were often associated with a changing perception or image of their own bodies which became typically more negative during adolescence. This more negative perception was likely to last into adulthood. This negative body image included concerns about specific body parts. These concerns were significantly related to how others, including female friends, boys and men, and family members would view them, and were also strongly related to their self-concepts and sense of self-esteem. For some participants, these concerns about specific physical attributes lasted into adulthood. Overall their body images, self-concepts and sense of self-esteem were highly related during adolescence and, in some cases, this lasted into adulthood. This concept of their bodies and selves was, to a large extent, shaped and affected by the responses of those closest to them.

For some participants this profound union of sense of self and body included the uniquely female experiences of menstruation and pregnancy. Menstruation was typically experienced as a traumatic event, which, like other experiences associated with bodily change during adolescence, was accompanied by a feeling of being uninformed and

therefore not prepared for what was to come. The experience of menstruation and its subsequent effects on their bodies were associated with feeling a lack of control over what was to happen and when it would occur. It was also experienced as an event that, although traumatic, was an occasion for pride for their mothers, thereby contributing to a feeling of disconnectedness between them.

In the context of reflecting upon the ways in which they had been affected by bodily changes during adolescence, some participants described their concerns about the effects of pregnancy upon their bodies. These concerns were typically described as being in the present, concerns which they experienced as adult women, more so than during adolescence. These anxieties related to the effects of pregnancy upon their bodies were present whether they had actually experienced pregnancy or not. Even potential pregnancy was regarded as a concern and created anxiety in relation to its possible effects upon their bodies. Specifically, their anxiety was centered around the consequences of gaining weight, and their expectations that it may have an irreversible effect upon their bodies.

This worry regarding how their bodies would be affected by pregnancy appeared to grow out of an inability experienced by almost all of the participants to achieve cultural expectations associated with the female body, expectations which they experienced as unrealistic. For some, this began during adolescence and lasted into adulthood. For others, it was not something that they recalled occurring during adolescence, but rather something that became more of a concern when they became women. However, for most of them, anxieties about achieving a culturally ideal body were less influential than the perceived expectations of those with whom they shared close relationships such as family members and friends. For some participants, especially the youngest participants, there was significant concern about weight, leading to dieting and exercise behaviors. There was a strong emphasis on controlling weight through diet and exercise, which required time, effort, and energy. This was described most often as being a concern in adulthood more so than during adolescence, although at least two of the participants did experience significant distress about their weight during adolescence. One of the participants, who was older than the others, described the influence of growing up in a particular time period, (the 1960's). Her experience during this time was that, culturally, there was considerably less attention paid to being slender and at that time this did not represent the cultural ideal. Subsequently, this was not something that she and her friends aspired to achieve growing up in that era. However, almost all of the participants recalled experiencing a restricted freedom of movement or a limitation in their sense of possibilities in life during adolescence with the changes in their bodies. This sense of constricted freedom in their lives has continued in some form during adulthood for most of the participants.

Integral to the loss of freedom experienced by most of the participants were changes in the ways that they were perceived by others. Beginning during adolescence, all of the participants experienced alterations in their relationships with others. Some of these experiences continue to affect them in their adult lives. Specifically, most of the participants experienced their mothers as playing a central role in relation to their changing bodies. Due to their feelings of vulnerability in relation to the changes that they were experiencing, they looked to their mothers for guidance, information, and support during this time of change. Most of the participants experienced anger and

disappointment, feeling that their needs in this regard were not being met, and they subsequently blamed their mothers for their resulting sense of confusion and vulnerability. For one participant, this included some feelings of resentment over the influence of her mother on her eating habits and the subsequent effects on her body. Their relationships with boys and subsequently men, were also affected by their experiences of their changing bodies. For most of the participants there was the new experience of their bodies becoming an object of attention by boys, and for some the experience of being teased about their appearance and the changes they were undergoing. The participants described having both success and a lack of success with boys during adolescence, and their experiences in this regard during adolescence strongly influenced their later relationships with men. For all of the participants, adolescent changes brought an awareness of their bodies becoming an increased focus of attention for others, as well as an increased awareness of the perceptions of others regarding their bodies. This was experienced by all of the participants and for some has lasted into adulthood.

There was some variability among the participants in the ways that they experienced the changes in their bodies during adolescence, as well as the ways that they continue to be affected as adult women. Most of the participants experience a greater sense of autonomy and control over their bodies than they recall experiencing during adolescence. Most of the participants experienced a more negative body image during adolescence which has lasted into adulthood, and which for some has included ongoing concerns about specific body parts. There was a strong association between body image and self-concept during adolescence, which has continued into adulthood for most of the participants. There was variation in the extent to which participants recalled experiencing anxiety over cultural expectations during adolescence but virtually all of the participants experienced this as adults. In addition, for most of the participants the perceived opinions of those closest to them were much more significant to them than those of society at large. Almost all of the participants began to experience loss, limitation, and constriction of freedom during adolescence, affecting their ability to move freely in the world and their openness to new experiences. This has continued for most of them as adult women. Common to all of the participants during adolescence were alterations in their relationships with others as a result of bodily changes, and the awareness that their bodies were now objects of increased attention and evaluation by others. Some of the participants articulated that this experience was so profound for them that it affects them still, and that as adult women they continue to be quite aware of their bodies as objects of attention, in some cases striving to meet expectations that they experience as unattainable.

The relationship between body image and self-concept was one of unity for most of the participants and was experienced as negative during adolescence for most of them. This was especially true for those participants who lacked strong social support. Participants who identified that they were part of a supportive peer group, especially a group of female peers, appeared to be less vulnerable to low self-esteem and negative feelings about their bodies or specific parts of their bodies. Supportive female friendships seemed to act as a buffer against experiences that were characterized as unpleasant or negative resulting from interactions with family members or male peers. Participants who recalled having a negative body image and low self-esteem during adolescence in almost all cases indicated that this continued for them as adults.

Participants who experienced discomfort with specific parts of their bodies during adolescence almost all described having similar feelings as adult women, although the particular aspects of their bodies with which they were uncomfortable did not always remain the same. Rather, patterns were sometimes repeated. For instance, one participant who had plastic surgery on her nose as a teenager after being teased by a boy at school, had liposuction during her adulthood prior to having to encounter her ex-husband at their son's wedding.

Some participants described experiencing a sense of vulnerability or fragility that was associated with the changes that they were experiencing in their bodies. This was heightened for participants who felt that they lacked fundamental information about what they could expect as far as changes in their developing bodies, processes such as menstruation, and how to cope with the changes occurring in their bodies. This included things like how to apply makeup and how to be prepared for menstrual periods. Participants who felt the most vulnerable and the least well-informed most often placed the blame for this on their mothers. This sense of vulnerability or fragility in relation to lack of knowledge was another area for which having a female peer group appeared to insulate participants. Participants most often cited their mothers, older sisters, and female friends as potential sources of information regarding adolescent developmental changes. Consequently, participants who lacked these relationships or experienced them as less supportive, were more likely to recall a sense of increasing vulnerability with adolescent bodily changes. These feelings were also likely to persist into adulthood.

Some of the participants focused on menstruation as an experience that was traumatic for them. They were the same participants who had identified a lack of information as a source of anxiety. Feeling uninformed contributed to a sense of loss and of feeling out of control in relation to beginning to menstruate. Most of the participants who experienced menstruation as being most traumatic also described having the most conflicted relationships with their mothers. They felt that their mothers had not prepared them for what was to come, and two of the participants described feeling some anger or resentment towards their mothers. Their mothers were happy and proud on the occasion of their first period but they themselves were not. At the same time, they felt a profound sense of connection to their female ancestors and to women everywhere.

Almost all of the participants spontaneously included their feelings about pregnancy or a potential pregnancy, even though the research question did not deal specifically with this issue. Of the six participants, only two had experienced pregnancy and only one had actually given birth. Even the possibility of pregnancy created anxiety about how it would affect their bodies. Even though the participants differed in their life experiences related to pregnancy or even whether or not they wanted to have children, the participants had similar concerns and worries about how pregnancy would affect their bodies.

Most of the participants were concerned with the cultural expectations placed upon the female body. For most of them these concerns began during adolescence and continued throughout their adulthood. However, one participant who recalled growing up during the 1960's, an era earlier than the others, remembered that there was far less pressure to be thin and that girls were not preoccupied with their bodies in the way that they are now. She and her friends experienced freedom from having to worry about their weight, and were not focused on dieting and exercise. They were just naturally active and in this regard their lives were much more carefree. Although almost all of the other participants

recalled feeling during adolescence that their bodies were in some ways inadequate and did not live up to what they perceived to be the cultural ideal for the female body, only two of the participants recalled being concerned about their weight at that point in their lives. Both of these participants experienced significant pressure and/or criticism from their mothers regarding their weight. However, as adults almost all of the participants described feeling that they could not live up to what was expected of them, including achieving a body weight that would be deemed culturally desirable. Emphasis upon weight appeared to be significantly associated with the present period of time, with both older and younger participants experiencing significant cultural pressure to lose weight and appear as thin as possible. The youngest participants, those in their early twenties, described following restrictive diets and regimented workout schedules to achieve and maintain an ideal weight. These youngest participants were much more likely to follow through on their diet and exercise plans. Participants in their thirties and fifties had similar goals for their bodies, but described much more difficulty following their plans and also had more anger and resentment about having such expectations placed on them.

The younger participants did not seem to have this kind of resentment and did not overtly acknowledge the kind of restrictions having to adhere to their diet and exercise regimens placed on them in terms of their time, energy, and efforts. However, almost all of the participants did provide examples of ways in which their life possibilities or freedoms had been restricted as a result of adolescent bodily changes. Things such as having to give up dance or not being able to wear certain clothes or participate in certain activities were cited by almost all of the participants as beginning in adolescence and continuing into adulthood. This appeared to be an area of common ground for the participants regardless of life context or situation.

The ways in which their bodily changes altered their relationships with those around them were also described by each of the participants. Most of the participants viewed their mothers as playing a significant role in their lives as they were experiencing changes in their bodies. Participants who indicated that their mothers had their own issues with weight and dieting, and even aunts and grandmothers and other female relatives, described being highly influenced by these issues. They were more highly motivated to try and avoid being overweight or didn't want to disappoint their mothers by weighing too much. Those participants who identified being part of a supportive female peer group tended to experience less anxiety related to bodily changes. However, those who did not describe being part of such a group were more likely to report their female peers as being a source of anxiety rather than a comfort. Pressures related to peers involved worries about how they compared with other girls in terms of the timing of the changes they were experiencing, i.e. being on schedule, not being too early or too late. Participants who did not identify having close female friends also worried that their female peers were much better informed than they themselves were and that they were just "luckier" in that they had nicer hair or better skin or just knew how to apply makeup without being taught.

Fathers were seldom mentioned by participants as being significant in their experiences of bodily change. Brothers were only mentioned as significant if they were involved in teasing, which for one participant remains a painful memory for her as an adult. Female relatives were considered by these participants as being far more influential in their lives as they coped with the changes they were experiencing during adolescence. Male peers were mentioned by three of the participants and all described experiences that

were painful to them not only as adolescents but all three were clear that the teasing or indifference that they experienced as adolescent girls had stayed with them and still hurt them as adults. These participants are not currently involved in relationships with men and have experienced difficulty maintaining ongoing relationships with adult men. Of the three participants who did not cite experiences with male peers as significant for them, all are currently involved in relationships with men.

Common to all of the participants was the new experience of their bodies becoming objects of attention in ways that were new and different for them. This experience seemed to transcend situational or contextual aspects of the lives of the participants and appeared to emerge as an ongoing phenomenon during adolescence that continues in their lives as adult women. Articulated by some of the participants in relation to this new experience in life was a sense of loss and longing that there can be no turning back.

### GENERAL NARRATIVE WITH ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES

Findings relevant to this group of participants indicate that relationships with others are highly influential in relation to how adolescent girls experience the changes in their bodies occurring during adolescence. Both female and male relationships were cited as significant, with female relatives and peers being potentially both sources of support and distress. Male relatives were not indicated as significant in this regard by these participants, and male peers were considered to be significant only in terms of distressing and painful experiences. Experiences during adolescence that were traumatic for the participants in terms of how they influenced self-concept, such as teasing by boys or criticism from mothers, continued to be experienced as painful and influencing their lives as women. Participants described being self-conscious about their bodies as adolescents but this did not include being worried about weight during adolescence. This appeared to emerge as much more of a concern for them as adults. Although it was not specifically included in the research question, almost all of these participants independently related their experiences of adolescent bodily changes to their anxieties about how pregnancy had or could affect their bodies. Even the possibility of pregnancy appeared to be experienced by these women as an inescapable and inherent aspect of being a woman.

**Female bodily changes during adolescence were characterized by an increased sense of vulnerability in relation to the body that was new and different. The participant's body became a means for her to be judged by others in ways that she had not before experienced, leaving her open to actual and perceived evaluation and attention from others, therefore altering her familial and social relationships. Her body also now required her attention and care in ways that it had not before, resulting in changes over which she felt she lacked control.**

Chris - I think some of it was, cause her comments hurt me. Well, you're my mother. How could you hurt me like that? To me it was kind of cruel. So I kind of protected myself, obviously now I'm not totally telling her how I feel about things. Or what she said to me, it just, you know, it did put up kind of a wall between us.

Tina - I think that sometimes there is the idea that if I could, I would just use my body as a vehicle to move my brain around and you can't do that because if you neglect what's going on with your body, then the mind can go too...I was kind of happy being a sheltered little girl and just the idea of growing up and am I going to have to go off to college and become an adult. That wasn't anything I was rushing into and then I guess just the idea that the changes that were happening with my body were indications that, yes, I was growing up and I would have to go out and earn a living or go to college or whatever.

Lisa - Because I don't want to use the word vulnerable, but during that time you're messing with something else. It's just one more thing you have to deal with that day. And guys don't have to go through that...In my mind I wouldn't be taken seriously if I was skinny and angry. "Oh, she can't do much damage vs. she might crush me to death"...I felt like I was vulnerable, that you are vulnerable. That being a woman, that you're a target.

**This sense of vulnerability was further intensified by her belief that she lacked some essential knowledge regarding the changes that she was experiencing, in some cases profoundly affecting her relationships with others.**

Chris - Do they love me, you know, just questioning my relationships with people. Are things as they seem?...

Tina - I really had no idea when he asked me that...It made me feel kind of uncomfortable because I didn't know what he was asking me and what it meant...I'm not quite sure if I knew it at the time or if I'm projecting backwards. I'm not really sure. I think I kind of had a notion that it was something that girls did and boys didn't. I think that was about all I knew at that time...I don't know if it was too strong of a word to say that I was frightened or I was scared just because I didn't want to look like I had no idea what he was talking about. I guess it was more that I just wanted him to stop because if he asked me additional questions, I couldn't answer them. I think that's what I remember most.

Lisa - The pain was mostly not knowing what was going to happen, no one really explained anything really. The facts of life, especially female changes, ...how to handle your period at school or what happened if you had an accident...but that in and of itself was very much not knowing. Just going through it and not knowing, and then just being in pain from it...

**Feeling that she lacked knowledge regarding what bodily changes she could expect, she developed a perception that she was falling behind in relation to her peers, that she was being left out of some experience that they seemed to be sharing to which she was somehow not privy. Her body was something that she had always been able to count on before and the unpredictability that she experienced in**

**relation to her body made her question what else in the world was not as it seemed. This created feelings of discomfort, inadequacy, and a feeling that she was less competent than she had previously considered herself. She wondered what her peers knew that she did not, leaving her with a sense of worry and confusion. She became acutely aware of the differences between herself and her peers. Moreover, she did not see any way that she could overcome these differences or advantages held by her friends. This led to a sense of resignation. A sense of alienation and loneliness arising out of her awareness of the differences she perceived between herself and her peers seemed to her, in some ways, insurmountable. Now, as an adult, she experiences an increased sense of autonomy in relation to her ability to effect changes in her body and appearance.**

Chris – I was almost afraid of being found out that I wasn't maybe where I should be at... Yeah, that's what I felt. Just that she was always much more mature than I was. You know, she wore her hair like a Farrah Fawcett style, cause that was in back then. And she introduced me to the world of boys in terms of, like she got us a Playgirl magazine. It was kind of like, she just seemed so ahead...It just made me feel like I was different...Cause I thought, maybe we're not as connected as I thought...But she was becoming different than me and she took kind of a sense of pride in that...It was just-like after that we never-I think there was an innocence lost in our friendship...

Tina - ...it seemed like the popular girls, and I wasn't part of the popular crowd, I was part of the band crowd. We were the smart kids, and then there were the popular kids, and it always seemed to me that they were naturally born with the ability to look good and that was something that the rest of us just had not inherited or whatever, and I was upset about that. I guess because I wanted to be smart and look good...it was kind of a puzzle that I wanted to figure out, how do they do that, how do they get their hair to do that, how do they get that look, the makeup or whatever, what do they do to do that and I don't know? I still don't know...is it something they're born with and it just happens... I still believe there's something, there's still the idea that I'm never going to be...one of those people who just naturally seems to accessorize themselves well or whatever...but I think I'm at a point where I'm not really sure I want to, and that it's really a high priority for me.

Lisa - ...just seeing the other teenagers in the lunch room...you knew that they have more information than you. Or they're more experienced at something than you were. And that was even more painful...definitely a gap, and then there was really no way to remedy it cause I didn't really run with that kind of crowd. The friends I had, we really didn't discuss much of it either...my one friend, the one that blossomed early, she always had makeup on. Her hair was always nice. Some of the other girls, their hair was always nice. Some of them would get up early to do it. I never did. It was like, well, did anybody ever show me how to put on makeup? No...that's what I always wanted to-that picture that's what I wanted. I want to wake up in the morning looking like that, okay? But I can't be bothered trying to do that day after day after day. Because I know it's not going to turn out perfectly like that everyday. So I don't even bother.

**These alterations in her body and consequently her world, led to a variety of emotions related to her experience of her changing body, including feelings of depression, anxiety, confusion, shame, anger, envy, guilt, and a sense of loss, in some cases lasting into adulthood.**

**(Depression)**

Tina – My everyday life during adolescence was not a happy experience... It was my junior year that I first became aware that I was unhappy and should do something about it. Looking back, I think I was depressed for a long time...The idea that I really didn't like the way I looked. I started doing some things about it, wearing makeup and that kind of thing.

Lisa – Yes, I had a lot of adolescent pain, crying a lot...I don't know if that was the time when I started my overeating. It was probably after I started the eighth grade, right in there. Obviously, I was crying out for something, someone's attention or something. I don't know why. I just know I was in pain...emotional pain, not physical pain. I think it was a matter of not knowing things, not knowing what's going on, what's going to happen, and I guess hormones, whatever hormones do, and then everything kind of being swept under the rug, or not even being forthcoming.

**(Anxiety)**

Chris – I just totally remember that moment...it just seemed to be important. I kind of struck me with a little bit of fear...it was almost afraid of being found out that I wasn't maybe where I should be at.

Kelly – Adolescence is a tough time for teenagers. It's probably the hardest time in your life...all the things that you have to go through and the changes in your body...all the things you have to deal with all at once and all of the stress...

Tina – I don't know if it was too strong of a word to say that I was frightened or I was scared just because I didn't want to look like I had no idea what he was talking about. I guess it was more that I wanted him to stop because if he asked me additional questions, I couldn't answer them. I think that's what I remember most.

**(Confusion)**

Chris – I don't know what kind of thinking that was, It was like "Please God, let it happen..."...And it was related to my parents, you know, questioning. Do they love me, you know, just questioning my relationships with people. Are things as they seem?

Tina – I guess there was just more confusion and not quite knowing what I was supposed to do and what I was supposed to think.

**(Shame)**

Chris - I felt ashamed. You know, how could I have thought that I looked okay.

Tina – I just kind of felt embarrassed about having the hair and not being able to shave...Somewhere I learned to be ashamed of myself and my body. Whether it happened all at once or gradually, I don't know. It happened without my noticing. I'm not even sure I have the right words to describe what I know.

Lisa – Beneath the shame and disgust I feel towards my body, I secretly feel proud and safe within it.

**(Anger)**

Chris – I get angry thinking about it...just going through it right now, I'm getting a little pissed...I can feel my body being tense thinking about it. I do get angry about it. Yeah. It made me angry with myself because it was a senseless comment and it impacted me very strongly. I got hung up on something so stupid, and I get very angry thinking about the time I spend worrying about it.

Kelly – It was very frustrating...it's very hard to have the willpower, especially because I love junk like potato chips, chocolate...but I gave up everything and I worked really hard and no one believed me. I was just really mad and frustrated...

Tina – Yes, I didn't like it obviously that they were giggling at me, and then I guess I would say that I was angry at them, but I didn't really get the idea that they shouldn't be giggling if that makes any sense whatsoever...I expected them to do that and I was angry that they did, but I didn't really expect that I would be able to make them stop or anything like that unless I shaved.

Lisa – And because of my body I didn't try out for cheerleading. I would have been really good because I can still do a split...But in my mind, I was too fat for that. I could have expressed my anger and my energy. But I hid in the band. There was a whole uniform. Real asexual...Anger, lashing out, if something was going on, if I was feeling hurt. I think that's what's underneath anger once you get through all the layers. And I just wanted to get through it, whatever it was...I have anger issues...Since I was not allowed to get angry, literally as a child, a pre-teen, as a teen, and even into my twenties. Even normal anger. No one ever taught me that...Anger for me is power. I'm a powerful woman when I'm angry. And to me, I'm even more powerful with this size – and angry. In my mind I wouldn't be taken seriously if I was skinny and angry.

**(Envy)**

Chris - ...one day we're both gonna be there...but that didn't seem to matter as I wanted it to be now...I just wanted it to be now...I don't think it was just that she had more hair. I don't think it was as simple as that. But she was becoming different than me and she

took kind of a sense of pride in that...But she ended up, I totally lost touch...So the last time I saw her I was probably twenty-three or something, around there. It was after college and she had gotten married because that was the thing to do, at a really young age. She hasn't had kids, and she never really got like a real career or anything like that. To me, she's actually a loser!...we just took different tracks. She was so- now that I look at it, I can see, she was a whole lot more superficial.

Kelly – Definitely jealousy, but I know I wouldn't want to be like that, but still then, they look so good, but then I can only imagine what they have to go through. Even though I know that I just still can't help to feeling that it's like I want to be like that in a way.

Lisa – I was always jealous of the girls that looked good and still carry that with me today...Because guess what? They got the guys' attention. Or they seemed very animated, or very popular. And I didn't like that...I think it's envy because you want to be in their place. I wasn't one of those girls.

### **(Guilt)**

Jill - Looking back on it, I think in that time I ate whatever I wanted, I had to have junk food, just like any other kid with five dollars in their hand. Looking back on it, I think in that time I ate a lot of that kind of stuff like high carbohydrate, grease, starch, fat content things. I try to think about my body now and I wonder if some of the decisions I made affected how it is, so I look back...Yes, like in adolescence. I was thinking that since that is the time when your body changes, you can make certain decisions and that is how it is going to come out. So maybe that is one of the decisions I made and that's why...I think that contributes to the feeling guilty about that because I think I really overdid it.

Kelly - ...but I would constantly, even if I would eat a cookie, I would seriously feel guilty, and to let something get to that point, is really scary...I wonder if it's going to make me gain weight...and when I think about that now, I think, "How trivial, it's just a cookie"... me being a little bit older and realizing that body image isn't everything. I was just experiencing things like that.

Tina – For the longest time I couldn't understand why I was so convinced that body hair was morally wrong.

Lisa – I would use food to soothe myself. I still do it to this day...And feeling full, having something to hold onto. I'm the bulimic without the purging...I wouldn't care how many calories, even to this day...cause I cannot stop once I start. So, I'll deal with the guilt.

### **(Loss)**

Jill - I used to have dance class on Wednesdays and my mom worked up the street and there was the dance center and 7 Eleven right across from it... So, I used to walk from my mom's office up the road and I would get off the bus there after school. I would go to 7 Eleven and load up on orange soda, a big bag of these cheddar sour cream chips and

this giant tootsie roll. I would spend all this money on junk before dance class. I didn't get to do that very often, so I really enjoyed it when I did and I went all out. The summer before, my parents decided to divorce and that was one of the first things I did independently...I associate it more with my parents' divorce because I think my mom kind of did that so I would feel better.

Chris – I think there was an innocence lost in our friendship...but I let that part of myself go...I just totally put them away. And actually, it's only been more recently that I started wearing them again...just like, I had been forced out of childhood or something. Like it wasn't my decision to go on to this next stage, you know. It was like I was forced out. I had no control over it.

Tina – I've heard people say that girls lose themselves somewhere in adolescence. While I hate to think that that's what happened to me, I don't know what else to call it. It's just something that I've heard. I haven't done a lot of reading. It's just the idea that girls kind of lose their self-confidence.

Lisa – I enjoyed dancing...and I was the biggest, or the widest out of the group I was in during that routine. And when I saw that video, I was appalled that that was me. Cause I loved dancing. I still do. I still love dancing. And that stopped. I don't know how I stopped dancing. I don't know what happened. I don't remember the day it ended or saying goodbye to anybody, nothing like that.

**These feelings were often associated with a changing perception or image of her own body which became typically more negative during adolescence. This more negative perception was likely to last into adulthood.**

Sue – During adolescence I was 5 feet 6 inches and always weighed one hundred and fifteen pounds...I probably did not feel that bad because I was always considered to be a fairly good dresser...I'm not saying you have to have a boyfriend to have a good body image or something, but I guess I felt shy and our family was pretty religious so we wore clothes that were more traditional. I think for some reason I just did not feel real comfortable with my body...I think I just realize that I have a poor body image and sort of a poor self-esteem when my body is not in shape...So I will have to keep trying.

Chris – It's not like I could literally feel it coming, but you know, it's got to be happening soon, you know. I had read the books and stuff. So, you know, on one level I knew it was all like a superficial thing. Hair in your crotch is totally superficial. But, yet, it seemed so important at the time... I felt the existence of one strand of hair separated us by a thousand years.

Tina – I was also being judged on how I looked, on whether I used makeup or had developed a nice figure – instead of how well I did in school or whatever...And this makes me feel poorly about myself. It's one of those things that you kind of get the idea

that “Oh, if I just looked good or looked like people look on TV or whatever, that your life would be better.”

Lisa – Adolescence and bodily changes brings only pain to mind... Well, what’s starting to grow? You know, why be ashamed of it... I still have it to this day of being in a dressing room. I didn’t have a waist... and my mother just hissed at me... and I wasn’t even fat. And that has still stuck with me. That’s still in my brain... I’ll never forget that moment. Cause I did not understand what was wrong. I’m trying on clothes. What’s the problem? And then it’s my body, I’m growing. Why even make a comment. Instead of just being proud. So I just didn’t understand what her problem was. So it didn’t make me feel good that day. And I hate clothes shopping to this day, too.

**This negative body image included concerns about specific body parts. These concerns were significantly related to how others, including female friends, boys and men, and family members would view her, and were also strongly related to her self-concept and sense of self-esteem. For some participants, these concerns about specific physical attributes lasted into adulthood.**

Sue - ...I had a nose job when I was in high school because I had a complex that my nose had a big bump on it and my parents let me have plastic surgery, and my friends, I could remember that we had a session before I went in for the surgery because they told me, “If you think your life is going to change because you get a different nose, it is not going to change.” And I said, “I’m not going to get it done for that reason.” Probably deep down inside I wished it would get me a boyfriend or something like that. I even went to that extreme and I still certainly did not get a steady boyfriend or anything.

Jill – I spend a lot of time thinking about my mid-section. I think it would be nice if I could stretch that way a little bit, just to balance everything out, just to even things. Most of it is just my stomach... I hate my stomach. Maybe hate is a strong word. It just really gets on my nerves... I can’t just sit down and eat whatever I want to because it’s tempermental... I like to look nice in dresses. I don’t like it sticking out. I want to look nice and that’s just one thing that bothers me. I have been struggling with this for the last ten of my twenty years. Sometimes I get frustrated like if I’m trying on clothes and I see that thing bulge out... I think since I’ve been thinking about it so many years, it’s kind of a struggle. It has been on my mind.

Chris – I lay there willing a pubic hair to grow, hoping I would have something before the day was out. Well, it didn’t really work I don’t think! (laughter) I don’t know what kind of thinking that was. It was kind of like magical thinking. It was like, “Please God, let it happen.”... It just made me feel like I was different.

Tina – It was something that I wasn’t particularly happy about (during adolescence) and that I wished would change. I have been unfortunate enough to inherit more than my fair share of body hair. It’s not socially desirable is one word for it. You know, shaving the legs, and I have a lot of hair on my arms, and I started bleaching it and that kind of

thing...I just started recently...he was looking at my arms and touching the hair like he can't believe that a woman would have hair like that. And he mentioned that he didn't know any other adult women that had hair like this. It made me feel really bad just because it's considered terribly unattractive and it makes me feel very self-conscious.

Lisa – I still have it to this day of being in a dressing room. I didn't have a waist. I was just kind of like, whatever, I didn't have that Victorian corset kind of, and my mother just hissed at me...like you don't have any waist. And I wasn't even fat. And that has stuck with me. That's still in my brain-with belts. I hate wearing belts. And when I do, I feel weird. I don't feel feminine...I'll never forget that moment.

**Overall, her body image and her self-concept and sense of self-esteem were highly congruent during adolescence and, in some cases, this lasted into adulthood. This concept of her body and self was, to a large extent, shaped and affected by the responses of those closest to her.**

Sue – I was just very backwards and certainly never had any confidence. I would say that I just had a lower self-esteem for some reason...but I guess I felt shy and our family was pretty religious so we wore clothes that were more traditional. I think for some reason I just did not feel real comfortable with my body...

Chris – I became much more self-conscious for a period of time...Cause I even remember, those jeans tied around the waist, they were the coolest things I thought. And I remember standing in line at the dorm getting dinner or whatever, and I remember wondering, my gosh, I wonder if people are noticing my hips. You, know, and it was like a burden, to think that people were checking me out. And I really wasn't like that before. I wasn't that self-conscious...every once in awhile, those thoughts might crop up. Like, I'm not, I'm hippy or I'm fat. And it's like-critiquing myself in that way, was beating myself up, and it just wasn't good.

Tina – And this makes me feel poorly about myself...It's just one of those things that you kind of get the idea that, "Oh, if I just looked good or looked like people look on TV or whatever, that your life would be better. Does it make me a bad person that I prefer to do this other thing than paying more attention to the way I look. I guess it's the question of, "Are my priorities in the right place?" I've been on the road of discovery to a more self-accepting me for about three years. It hasn't been easy, but I believe I'm making progress...I'm getting there. There are moments, like I'm packing up right now to go for spring break. I'm going to visit my parents in California and I haven't worn my swimsuit for ages and ages. And I put it on and I looked at myself in the mirror and I thought, "That's not awful, that's not bad." And I don't think I would have done that before. I like myself when I wear makeup now. So, I'm making progress, I think.

Lisa– I wanted to be a high maintenance female, but I subconsciously know I will never be that way...In my mind there's no way. There's no way. What do you do on that day if you can't keep that up? What do you do if you don't have those ten perfect nails?..You're

ugly, you're not together. Something's not right. It's safer to stay on the basic maintenance level than to try to maintain that high maintenance level. Because when you fall off that high maintenance plateau, there's a change. And to me that would affect my little self-esteem or worth or whatever...I suppose with high self-esteem, I wouldn't be doing the treading every night, or checking the mirror all the time, looking at every little blemish. But I lost all that weight and I have nothing to show for it. I'm right back where I started, and I'm angry about that.

**For some participants this profound unity of sense of self and body included the uniquely female experiences of menstruation and pregnancy. Menstruation was typically experienced as a traumatic event, which, like other experiences associated with bodily change during adolescence, was accompanied by a feeling of being uninformed and therefore not prepared for what was to come. The experience of menstruation and its subsequent effects on her body were associated with feeling a lack of control over what was to happen and when it would occur. It was also experienced as an event that, although traumatic for her, was an occasion for pride for her mother, thereby contributing to a feeling of disconnectedness between them.**

Chris – And I'm like, "Oh my God, I think I'm gonna have my period." It was just my stomach was really bothering me. And I looked at all the girls in line and we all had on our uniforms and everybody was dressed the same, you know. But it's like, "Oh, I'm different." And I got home, and I went to the bathroom and sure enough, I had my period. And, of course, I started screaming like a maniac. And my brother came to the bathroom door and I said, "Get mom." And he got her and she came in and she's like, "Oh, my baby's a woman", and she's crying, she's all happy about it. But I just remember just not being happy about it...Up until that point, I kind of couldn't wait for it to happen, you know. Oh, this will be cool, and the minute it happened, it was like, "Oh, this is not cool at all, you know, I'm bleeding from my crotch." Just like, I had been forced out of childhood or something. Like it wasn't my decision to go on to this next stage, you know? I had no control over it. I mean what if I wanted another week of this, to not have my period. But no, it came.

Lisa – I was about thirteen years old when I got my first period... I didn't like it. It wasn't really explained a lot. I wish everything had been a little more open...It was just awful, and I did have a couple of accidents. It was just very humiliating for me...I just knew it was normal to have it...I just knew it was something that was going to come and this is it, and now you're going to have to deal with this. It wasn't very positive for me to be proud of. So I didn't think it was the greatest thing in the world to be happening, bottom line. The perfunctory phone call to one of my mother's friends was made. She was so proud and that was that...that will go on over the ages. A mother was always proud when that happened to her daughter and to tell a friend. For some reason, that was all the women that stand on your shoulders and you're standing on their shoulders from ages past. I don't know if it's mythical, but it's just something that happens, that the motherly, earthly, matriarchical kind of thing going on – I mean, she was happy but I

wasn't...I still hate this monthly thing...It's God's curse on women. That's what I would say.

**In the context of reflecting upon the ways in which they had been affected by bodily changes during adolescence, some participants described their concerns about the effects of pregnancy upon their bodies. These concerns were typically described as being in the present, concerns which they experienced as adult women, more so than during adolescence. These anxieties related to the effects of pregnancy upon their bodies were present whether they had actually experienced pregnancy or not. Even potential pregnancy was regarded as a concern and created anxiety in relation to its possible effects upon their bodies. Specifically, their anxiety was centered around the consequences of gaining weight, and their expectations that it may have an irreversible effect upon their bodies.**

Sue – Maybe because I got pregnant at such a young age, too...I'm thinking here I am at the age of twenty, pregnant, and gaining all that weight. I happened to be lucky and thankful to have twins and then my body went completely, like at a young age. Then it seemed like that is when I started to gain weight every year and then you do not take it off. Everybody would like to be a size eight or ten...Until I had my children, I could eat anything and everything and not gain weight. I didn't worry about it, but then after I had my children is when it just seemed like I tried different diets and I have gone to Weight Watchers...After my pregnancy I probably weighed one hundred and twenty-five pounds. It was more than I had ever weighed before I ever got pregnant. But then each year it seems like you gain five pounds back on, and with my age you wish that you could get back.

Jill – But she didn't look like this at my age after she gave birth to me and my brother born prematurely deceased...I just kind of pointed that out, as maybe that's another reason why my mom doesn't look exactly like she did. She had five kids. Sometimes it's just basically hard to lose weight. You have to make an effort to lose weight after having a pregnancy sometimes. At least that's what I've heard and I'm thinking, I hope I have time to make that effort because you hear a lot about it. If I really wanted to have kids, I wouldn't not do it because of that. Yes, it is something to kind of be – again, I'm young. Old age is something to be afraid of right now...

Kelly – It's very hard for women these days to feel self-confident about themselves...After having babies and things like that, a lot of women are very self-conscious of their bodies...Oh my gosh, yes. I'm deathly scared to have kids. It's not the whole fact – my mom was a decent weight until after she had my two brothers and me. I think it was her eating habits, too. Your body is never the same once you've had kids, and that just really scares the heck out of me.

Lisa – ... I'm not planning on having kids, I don't want kids, I mean the whole physical thing. And I want this monthly stuff to stop...For me, it would mean I'm safe. I'm free of monthly costs, monthly pain...I'm free of ever getting knocked up...The rest of women

would probably say it makes you less of a woman. I'm the one who says it wouldn't matter to me one bit. I'm still me... But to me, it means a man can't ever hurt me anymore, or entrapment by pregnancy kind of thing. That would be all taken care of... I had a miscarriage. Technically, since this is anonymous, it was an abortion. I'm not proud of it. It's something that affects me to this day...Body-wise it was kind of like, my body let me down. It turned on me. I got knocked up. I was careless. It's a vulnerability I'm talking about...

**This worry regarding how their bodies would be affected by pregnancy appeared to grow out of an inability experienced by almost all of the participants to achieve cultural expectations associated with the female body, expectations which they experienced as unrealistic. For some, this began during adolescence and lasted into adulthood. For others, it was not something that they recalled during adolescence, but rather something that became more of a concern when they became women. However, for most of them, anxieties about achieving a culturally ideal body were less influential than the perceived expectations of those with whom they shared close relationships such as family members and friends.**

Sue – I probably did not feel that bad because I always was considered to be a fairly good dresser and best dressed at our school. So, like I said, back then I would have to say, in the sixties, it was different because the styles certainly were not like they are now, and so I felt pretty confident with my body...I did not have an extreme awareness of my body due to the styles back then...The point that I was trying to make was that none of us ever sat around and thought we looked fat or anything. I think that back in the sixties it just was not like it is nowadays. Girls are so obsessed with their bodies or you hear little girls that are twelve years old saying that they are fat. I cannot honestly remember anybody saying that...None of my friends had eating disorders or anything like that. We were all pretty healthy... I'm not relating to any movie stars or reading any magazines or anything like that. Just to people that I know is how I would be thinking.

Jill – Isn't that typical of the times? It just seems like we are still in a culture where thin is in more. I see it in the media a lot. I think about that and I think that is all you seem to see on TV is thin people and it is just in our media so much that people associate people with being fat. That is kind of why I thought it was typical.

Chris – I guess because, you know, I thought I had a certain awareness of how I was going through the world, and you know, I felt that I was a good young woman, confident. But I also, I guess on a certain level, thought, cause I know society thinks, "Oh, you should be a certain way to be a woman, and you should be somewhat slender or whatever. And I felt that I was, you know?...how pathetic, it became more of an object.

Kelly – The media places more of an emphasis on the female body in advertising though. Everywhere I look, TV, billboards, magazines, it's everywhere, absolutely everywhere. In a way, it's like, I know they're too skinny, but in a way, I'm jealous, not of some of the ones that are really, really skinny, but the healthier skinny... Definitely, jealousy, but

I know I would not want to be like that, but still then, they look so good, but then I can only imagine what they would have to go through. Even though I know that I just still cannot help to feel that. It's like I want to be like that in a way. And the media is constantly portraying deathly skinny girls...everywhere you look...it's definitely a woman thing. Most guys could care less.

Tina – Ever since then, it has remained in my mind that I should wear a perfect size six too, even though I would probably need to take drastic measures to do so...I think I kind of read these books and I got the idea that when I become a junior in high school, this is what I am going to be. I'm going to be tall and blonde and wear a size six. Just the idea that I've been out of high school for awhile and that hasn't happened. I guess it's just the idea in the back of my mind that that's what should have happened...I finally realized I had expected to be like Barbie: perfectly hairless in every way. These beliefs that somehow my body has matured incorrectly have made me very shy about myself...My life since then has been a process of trying to co-exist happily with my body. To tell myself what I see in the movies or whatever isn't the average person, and that is not going to happen.

Lisa – I did that one time. I got gussied up and went to the mall. Great service, every store I went into. Oh, I never wanted to be the societal norm. But then I tried to prove how society treats people. By how they look and how they dress. Maybe it was because I looked confident. I was feeling good about myself because I got gussied up. Is it that one causes the other? But you are judged. But there would be no way I would draw attention to myself...I was a real person, someone of worth. I was out in society, playing the little societal rules, the little games, whatever we have set up on this planet. And according to society, I was someone of worth, because obviously, I deserved it...It's kind of like fooling society. I was fooling people by my appearance.

**For some participants, especially the youngest participants, there was significant concern about weight, leading to dieting and exercise behaviors. There was a strong emphasis on controlling weight through diet and exercise, which required time, effort, and energy. This was described most often as being a concern in adulthood more so than during adolescence, although at least two of the participants did experience significant distress about their weight during adolescence. One of the participants, who was older than the others, described the experience of growing up in a particular time period, (the 1960's). Her experience during this time was that culturally, there was considerably less attention paid to being slender, and at that time it did not represent the cultural ideal. Subsequently, it was not something that she and her friends aspired to achieve growing up in that era.**

Sue – And we all walked to each other's houses. That was good exercise...we just used to walk everywhere. Nobody drove anywhere. It was just so different with me being older...We walked to school and that was good exercise everyday, plus we swam in the summer...I know it is because I do not exercise...I really do need to exercise and get out and do something. But I just can't force myself to do it. I...do it a couple of times and I

don't stay with it. I bought a yoga tape...then I bought a big, expensive treadmill...and when I was doing that I really felt pretty good. I really did feel like maybe it was lifting some of the depression and negativity in my brain. But then, I just for some reason, quit doing it.

Sue - My mother is one of five girls-all who I remember were dieting my whole life...my father always told the story of when he was little, if they dropped a piece of bread on the floor, they had to pick it up and kiss it because it was a blessing...so we were all very good eaters...I can remember eating really big meals...when I'm having a bad day...I'll get a big, giant ice cream cone. I'll be driving past the mall and I'll think, I deserve this because it's my reward, and then I feel a little bit better...Nobody back then was exercising to lose weight because none of that came out...So as an adult, I found myself dieting at different times and being more like my mom and her sisters...I have a whole cupboard of all those things that are on TV or in the magazines or in the drugstores that are going to help you lose weight...It got to the point that my son was getting married. I had liposuction (quick remedy) and weighed one hundred and fifty-five pounds afterwards...it's horrible to go through... It was my one splurge in life is how I would look at it. Yes, it was worth every minute to get thinner than my ex-husband's wife. Isn't that terrible? But seriously, it was worth it...it seems at present I don't feel good about my body and I can't seem to motivate myself to care.

Jill - ...I can never seem to think about my body image without thinking of food...I think your body image can have a lot to do with what you eat...some people deal best with their emotions through food...Maybe I feel a little less guilty because I feel better when I haven't eaten a whole bunch of things. It doesn't bother me to go to McDonalds. Just this morning I went to the pancake house and I don't get overly guilty about it, but I just think it makes me feel better to eat better. I go to sleep with a clear conscience of, okay, I ate healthy today. I did good...I ate whatever junk food I could get my hands on then...Back then, I didn't realize calories had consequences, so it was fine.

Kelly - I gained all the weight back plus more. This is when the problem started. Constantly thinking about losing weight and trying to be skinny, and thinking about it all the time, kind of like an obsessive type thing. Yes, that's pretty scary...I never went to any extent of anorexia or bulimia, thank God. I was able to control that, but I would constantly, even if I would eat a cookie. I would seriously feel guilty and to let something like that get to that point, it is really scary...I feel fat compared to many people...Being 5'7" tall and weighing one hundred and thirty pounds is by no means overweight - but I hate to look in the mirror...I just feel disgusted, I just feel disgusted with how I let myself go like that...with me being lazy and not getting out there and walking and just eating all that junk. I get disgusted with letting myself do that.

Kelly - I have exercised faithfully for the past three years...it's not only for the weight loss, but it elevates my mood and it makes me feel better...Now that the holidays are over, it's back to the grindstone...waking up very early in the morning and walking in the rain and the snow. I'm out there. So, I guess you can call me a hardcore

walker...Sometimes...when I wake up and it's raining, then I really don't want to go out, but I have to. So, I do, my umbrella and walkman and all.

Lisa – I have never been this heavy. It's awful, awful. I started putting on weight because I was eating junk food and it was just slowly creeping up. I don't remember numbers. I just remember having to change jeans. That was the trigger for me...ideally I would fit into nice, petite clothes...They have beautiful clothes. I don't fit in them...But I cannot get any bigger. I cannot get any bigger. I just can't. This is ridiculous...I don't like it.

Lisa - In eighth grade I started my overeating behavior...I remember this very clearly. I would come home, make myself- mostly it was like those macaroni and cheese boxes, make myself an entire box of that, eat all of that while sitting in front of the TV, and then when mom came home, which was like five or six o'clock, have dinner...That was the end of my dancing days...I'll never forget that moment either...I don't want anyone taking away my ability to soothe myself through food...I have no physical affection. So that takes the place of it, and that always took the place of it. To me, food equals love kind of thing, and I take it to the extreme. Because it's an energy source for your body. It's not psychological love or whatever.

**However, almost all of the participants recalled experiencing a restricted freedom of movement or a limitation in their sense of possibilities in life during adolescence with the changes in their bodies. This sense of constricted freedom in their lives has continued in some form during adulthood for most of the participants.**

Chris – I took the scarf off, then on, then off...I remember all my scarves I had, I just love them. I ended up putting them away...I let that part of myself go...it had been an identity. It was cool, you know. I wore these scarves and these long, funky earrings...I loved it, you know. But, oh my God, if they make me look fat – so I shouldn't wear them...I just totally put them away. And actually it's only been more recently that I started wearing them again...Sometimes I'll go one step further and think, "Oh, yeah, my mom doesn't like scarves on me. They make me look hippy." And I'm out the door and that's it.

Kelly – When I'm in my skinny stage, I feel great about myself and tend to flaunt around a bit...I feel more assertive and everything. At this certain stage, I feel like a beached whale...at that stage I just feel like being in sweatpants, kind of like I am now. I feel better now. I don't really feel like doing anything. I just want to stay in nice, baggy clothes and eat.

Tina – I don't remember worrying about my body when I was little. I ran around and used my body however I wanted...I guess just the idea that I could climb on a jungle gym or run around on the beach or whatever...I don't like pidgeon-holing myself, but I don't have the courage to change. I guess I used the term "pidgeon-holing" because to me that does kind of indicate something that is kind of cramped or whatever...Somehow I'm not

doing everything that I could and maybe there are things out there, yoga or whatever, that I would enjoy, but it's my own hang-ups and my own preconceived notions about myself that aren't allowing me to do these things...I probably would enjoy some of these other things...but just the idea that I've spent so much time building myself up as the academic person and the reading person, that it's a little too far out of my comfort zone. At this particular point in my life, the risks outweigh the possible gains that I might get.

Lisa – I enjoyed dancing...I was only in eighth grade, but...compared to them, and then being in spandex, which was like a tight-fitting whatever. And I just saw all, just blob. And I was the biggest, or the widest out of the group I was in during that routine. And when I saw that video, I was appalled that that was me. Cause I loved dancing. I still do. I still love dancing, and that stopped. I don't know how I stopped dancing. I don't know what happened. I don't remember the day it ended or saying goodbye to anybody, nothing like that. But I could have been great...but then, obviously I was getting the feedback, I am way too fat to hold myself on these things. I have excellent balance and I'm always on my toes, but to be on the ballerina toe – that's a point – you work up to that. I was shot down and the rest of my friends got to go on for that...I remember being in the studio, the dance studio...and somehow it was explained to me, as nicely as they could...but that crushed me...because then, obviously that meant I was a cow, I was a hippo...I couldn't be on, I couldn't even try it. I wasn't even given a chance...I can balance really well. I could have been great on a balance beam...They would perform a ballet routine. It would include some pirouettes. But I didn't. I didn't get that chance.

**Integral to the loss of freedom experienced by most of the participants were changes in the ways that they were perceived by others. Beginning during adolescence all of the participants experienced alterations in their relationships with others. Some of these experiences continue to affect them in their adult lives. Specifically, most of the participants experienced their mothers as playing a central role in relation to their changing bodies. Due to their feelings of vulnerability in relation to the changes they were experiencing, they looked to their mothers for guidance, information, and support during this time of change. Most of the participants experienced anger and disappointment, feeling that their needs in this regard were not being met, and they subsequently blamed their mothers for their resulting sense of confusion and vulnerability. For one participant, this included some feelings of resentment over the influence of her mother on her eating habits and the subsequent effects on her body.**

Jill – I think she has thought a lot about body image, too...watching her think about her body has really influenced that... It has caused me to think about it too...I don't know if it's made me, I don't want to use the word "paranoid," but I think it has really made me aware...it's just raised a huge awareness as to, I look at what I eat and I look at what other people eat and I think food has consequences. So, it has just opened my eyes to a whole perspective to eating food and relating it to body image...I go out and eat when I please and usually within reason, eat whatever I want, but I'm not so worried about it that I don't have fun. It's concerning.

Chris – The other moment that sticks out in my mind is when I was eighteen years old and visiting home one weekend from college. I entered the kitchen wearing a pair of jeans that tied around my waist and buttoned at the ankle. I had taken up the habit of wearing scarves around my neck. I was excited for my mother to see my “new look” and I remember feeling attractive that day as I entered the kitchen...And she commented that I looked hippy...I just froze...But I’m like, “Oh my God, you know, maybe she’s right.”...I couldn’t believe she was cutting me down like that. I felt horrible, but I acted as if her words didn’t bother me...I felt ashamed. You know, how could I have thought that I looked okay? Because my mother – to me I really did. I respected my mother’s beliefs of other people. She always seems to be right on about other people. So here she is saying something about me. So, maybe she’s right...I guess I didn’t want her to think her words had power over me. And they did. I guess I was looking at myself, obviously critically, you know...I was looking for the flaws. Looking at myself through my mother’s eyes. Because in mine they had been fine...My mother’s comment had burned into me and affected how I saw myself as a woman...cause her comments hurt me. Well, you’re my mother. How could you hurt me like that? To me it was kind of cruel...it did put up kind of a wall between us.

Tina – I also remember the giggle of middle school school boys when I began to grow dark hair on my legs, but my mother thought me still too young to shave...I was very upset with my mother...I was very self-conscious because there were other girls who were starting to shave. Perhaps if I had a big sister or a mother who was fashion-conscious I would have learned these things. I did not, however, and my adolescence was an adventure in learning what I most needed to know, and pretending everything else didn’t matter...

Lisa – It was like, “Well, did anybody ever show me how to put on makeup? No. “Did you watch your mother?” Yes. I didn’t really like what she had to go through...To her the subtext was, it was a chore...What I got from my mother was that it was a chore for her to be a woman. To get dressed, to get whatever, it was a chore...It was painful. It was uncomfortable to be dressed up, it was terrible to be in high heels. Your feet hurt...All I got – I’m standing there in the doorway, watching, with big eyes. That’s what I picked up...And of course my mother wouldn’t go for that. She would say you’re just fine the way you are. You know, not necessarily in a nice, positive way.

**Their relationships with boys, and subsequently men, were also affected by their experiences of their changing bodies. For most of the participants there was the new experience of their bodies becoming an object of attention by boys and for some the experience of being teased about their appearance and the changes they were undergoing. The participants described having both success and a lack of success with boys during adolescence, and their experiences in this regard during adolescence strongly influenced their later relationships with men.**

Sue – I felt pretty confident with my body, but it just seemed that I did not have a steady boyfriend or anything like that...I still never really ever had a steady boyfriend that I

think would make you feel more comfortable and think that you looked good. I always associated having a boyfriend with feeling comfortable with your body and I don't know if that makes sense to people. I think I had a complex about that or something...maybe that's why I continued to have a bad body image because I never had successful relationships...I also feel that maybe people who are married or have a significant other would try harder to have a better body...I'm always thinking, well, you're never going to meet anybody and that is why I should eat a hot fudge sundae...Every once in awhile, the one interesting thing that I do want to mention is, I always crack up because nobody is looking for anybody that is out of shape and overweight. When you do read those, its like the guys say "petite" or "weight appropriate," or how do they word that somehow. Even them, they're all obsessed with meeting somebody who is thin. Maybe that's where I get that. That is a reinforcer for me when I read that, and I shouldn't read them, but I read them all the time.

Kelly – Just little things like, he isn't going to like me because I look like this, or my hair, my weight, just different things...Body image wasn't a big thing for me until probably eleventh grade. It was just the thing of noticing the guys, and I never really had too many boyfriends, especially not in junior high and not even really throughout high school actually. Sometimes, you know, just their heads would turn and notice me and I'd be like, that is kind of cool.

Tina – At the same time, I remember a few years later, the first time I became aware that a man was checking out my legs. I didn't know if I liked it...I don't remember how old I was, maybe fifteen...It was a combination of of like, "Oh, that's kind of nice that he would look at me, and also kind of embarrassed because I didn't know what to do. I didn't really have any guy experience... I really had no idea...I've never been in a serious relationship and often times I wonder if my body is capable of turning a guy's head...I guess it's the idea of – do I have a figure that guys will find attractive, and I said that I'm not a snappy dresser. Should I wear different things just because I think that guys will find it more attractive? Or should I go with what I feel more comfortable with? I guess those are the main questions.

Lisa –...I am currently using my heaviness to keep men away. I see it as a ninety percent societal, face value, guys will just move on. I'm not in heels, I'm not very tall or svelte, or whenever they do that scan, and of course, they always stop for blondes. Immediately, they always stop for blondes...I never felt attractive in high school. It wasn't fun. I remember having a couple of crushes, crushes on boys but never having that returned. Just kind of sitting on the sidelines. Just observing...just being left out. When you pair up, or the dating, or the whatever. I was just an observer...I did not date in high school, not even a kiss from a boy. That's a shame. I think you should get to do something in high school. To me, it just kept me naïve. I didn't prepare me for the real world...You've got to get it together when you're an adult. And yet I'm still at this kind of baby step kind of stuff. So, it still affects my relationships to this day.

**For all of the participants, adolescent changes brought an awareness of their bodies becoming an increased focus of attention for others, as well as an increased awareness of the perceptions of others regarding their bodies. This was experienced by all of the participants and for some has lasted into adulthood.**

Sue – ...I had a nose job when I was in high school because I had a complex that my nose had a big bump on it and my parents let me have plastic surgery... This one kid called me “broken nose” and that bothered me, and he did end up taking me to the prom, and after he caused me that plastic surgery... I was just really determined with my son getting married and after my ex-husband’s father making the comment that I was going to look like my mother, and I knew that his wife was a little pudgy, and I thought that I was going to look better than her and I didn’t care what extreme I had to go to. It was worth it.

Jill – I don’t know if it’s made me, I don’t want to use the word paranoid, but I think it has really made me aware of, it’s just raised a huge awareness as to, I look at what I eat and I look at what other people eat and I think food has consequences. So, it has just opened my eyes to a whole perspective to eating food and relating it to body image.

Chris – In retrospect, I get angry thinking about it. Angry with myself that I allowed a senseless comment to impact me as strongly as it did. I got hung up on something so stupid, wasting precious time worrying about how I appeared to others... Now I see that as silly. And I’m the one who allowed that comment to impact me... even to this day she might say stuff, but it doesn’t impact like it did back then.

Kelly – It is probably the hardest time in your life... all the things that you have to go through and the changes in your body... The body image, too, plays into that. You’re trying to look good and impress everybody.

Tina – The one vivid thing that I remember... was I was standing in my middle school lunch line, and I could feel it when I was wearing it, and I was so sure that everybody else could tell that somehow yesterday I showed up at school and I was not wearing a bra, and today I was. I don’t know why I got that sense because I’m sure that nobody was paying attention to me... I rarely wear shorts or sleeveless shirts or outfits that expose my stomach. I don’t play sports and I don’t like speaking in front of others, so I’ve taken to other means for recognition... Red, to me was, you wanted to be noticed if you wore red. I thought, “Well, I don’t really want people to notice me and I’m not going to wear red. I don’t wear a lot of red.

Lisa – It’s safer to stay on the basic maintenance level than to try to maintain that high maintenance level. Because when you fall off that high maintenance plateau, there’s a change. And to me, that would affect my little self-esteem or worth or whatever. In high school... you have anxiety, anxiety of what to wear, what was I going to wear to look presentable... And now I’m realizing it’s okay to have anxiety about that. It’s okay to have anxiety about you’re going to be wearing make-up and stuff, and you’re going to look good. And people are going to look at you, and it’s okay. I wanted to be a high maintenance female, but I subconsciously know I will never be that way. Hair done,

make-up done. Very nice. Hair's always nice. Nails, and then, always a flashy something. That's high maintenance...That's what I always wanted...I want to wake up in the morning and look like that...But I can't be bothered trying to do that day after day after day after day. Because I know it's not going to turn out perfectly like that everyday. So I don't even bother...What if I looked good yesterday, but now, having a bad hair day or whatever. The people in your workplace, they would notice, they would notice a difference. And that would bring attention to you.

**The relationship between body image and self-concept was strongly unified for most of the participants and was experienced as negative during adolescence for most of them. This was especially true for those participants who lacked strong social support. Participants who identified that they were part of a supportive peer group, especially a group of female peers, appeared to be less vulnerable to low self-esteem and negative feelings about their bodies or specific parts of their bodies. Supportive female friendships seemed to act as a buffer against experiences that were characterized as unpleasant or negative resulting from interactions with family members or male peers. Participants who recalled having a negative body image and low self-esteem during adolescence in almost all cases indicated that this continued for them as adults.**

Sue – I had seven close friends. My friends and I hung out and we all did everything together...I had a nose job when I was in high school because I had a complex that my nose had a big bump in it and my parents let me have plastic surgery, and my friends, I could remember that we had a session before I went in for surgery because they told me, “if you think your life is going to change because you get a different nose, it is not going to change”...Then we had a big discussion about what parts of our bodies that we liked. And the thing that I was picked for was having the nicest feet. The point that I was trying to make was that none of us ever sat around and thought we looked fat or anything...In fact, what we did when we got together was eat.

**Participants who experienced discomfort with specific parts of their bodies during adolescence almost all described having similar feelings as adult women, although the particular aspects of their bodies with which they were uncomfortable did not always remain the same. Rather, patterns were sometimes repeated. For instance, one participant who had plastic surgery on her nose as a teenager after being teased by a boy at school, had liposuction during her adulthood prior to having to encounter her ex-husband at their son's wedding.**

Sue – This one kid called me “broken nose” and that bothered me, and he did end up taking me to the prom after he caused me that plastic surgery. He never knew that, but he was one of the guys who called me “broken nose” and then I did end up going to the prom with him...I went into that extreme thing like getting liposuction done. When I think of all the money that I spent to have that done...I was just really determined that

with my son getting married...and I thought that I was going to look better than her and I didn't care what extreme I had to go to.

Jill – I spend a lot of time thinking about my mid-section...I hate my stomach...I don't like it sticking out. I want to look nice and that's just one thing that bothers me. I have been struggling with this for the last ten of my twenty years.

Tina – I have been unfortunate enough to inherit more than my fair share of body hair. It's not socially desirable is one word for it...I started bleaching it and that kind of thing...I remember that he came over and he was looking at my arms and touching the hair like he can't believe that a woman would have hair like this. It made me feel really bad just because it's considered terribly unattractive and it makes me feel very self-conscious.

**Some participants described experiencing a sense of vulnerability or fragility that was associated with the changes that they were experiencing in their bodies. This was heightened for participants who felt that they lacked fundamental information about what they could expect as far as changes in their developing bodies, processes such as menstruation, and how to apply makeup and how to be prepared for menstrual periods.**

Chris – As we continued to lie on the beach, I felt the existence of one strand of hair separated us by a thousand years...Because I felt that she was more mature and stuff. And at that moment it was like, "Oh no". Now she knows it too. So that made it even worse...I remember lying in bed that night, wondering what else wasn't as it seemed.

Tina – I remember a desperate desire in middle school to physically be like the "popular kids"...it was a kind of a puzzle that I wanted to figure out. How do they do that? How do they get their hair to do that? How do they get that look? The makeup or whatever. What do they do to do that and I didn't know. I still don't know. They were developing nice figures, but more importantly, that they had clear skin...I remember thinking that these girls must have inherited a natural knowledge of how to properly apply lipstick or achieve perfectly tanned legs.

Lisa – Because my one friend, the one that blossomed early, she always had makeup on. Her hair was always nice. Some of the other girls, their hair was always nice. Some of them would get up early to do it. I never did. It was like, well, did anybody ever show me how to put on makeup? No...It wasn't really explained a lot. I wish, I wish everything had been a little more open. Again, when I mentioned how to cope in school, for the longest time I really didn't know what a tampon was and why are they used. It was just awful, and I did have a couple of accidents. It was just very humiliating for me...there was that feeling of uncertainty and the sense that other people were better informed than you...I don't want to use the word vulnerable, but during that time you're messing with something else. It's just one more thing you have to deal with for that day.

**Participants who felt the most vulnerable and the least well-informed most often placed the blame for this on their mothers. This sense of vulnerability or fragility in relation to lack of knowledge was another area for which having a female peer group seemed to insulate participants. Participants most often cited their mothers, older sisters, and female friends as potential sources of information regarding adolescent developmental changes. Consequently, participants who lacked these relationships or experienced them as less supportive, were more likely to recall a sense of increasing vulnerability with adolescent bodily changes. These feelings were also likely to persist into adulthood.**

Chris – “No”, I told her. “I don’t have any hair yet but I can feel it coming. It’s not like I could literally feel it coming, but, you know, its got to be happening soon you know. I had read all the books and stuff. So, you know, on one level I knew it was all like a superficial thing. Hair in your crotch area is totally superficial. But, yet, it seemed so important at the time...I could sense her disappointment. Yeah, that’s just what I felt. Just that she was always much more mature than I was...I just looked up to her. So, I just kind of like, I’m not in her league.

Tina – My everyday life during adolescence was not a happy experience. I just remember being really, really self-conscious and unsure of myself. I’m not sure I want to describe it. I’m not really quite sure. I just remember wishing that things were different. I guess one thing was, I wasn’t interested in what a lot of my friends and my peers were interested in...Even now as I write, I’m aware of a subtle reluctance even to think back to middle school...I was very upset with my mother...Perhaps if I had a big sister or a mother who was fashion-conscious I would have learned these things.

Lisa – Adolescence and bodily changes brings only pain to my mind. The pain was mostly not knowing what was going to happen, no one really explained anything really. The facts of life, especially female changes, not being ashamed of the enlargement of your breasts, or how to handle your period at school, or what happened if you have an accident. Just going through it, and not knowing, and then just being in pain from it, just finding out or just seeing the other teenagers in the lunchroom or whatever, you knew that they have more information than you. Or they’re more experienced at something than you were. And that was even more painful...I just knew it was normal to have it. My one girlfriend had it earlier because she had developed. Because then we had “the talk” in school, she recognized the diagram. She knew what it was, and I’m thinking “Why don’t I know”? She had four older sisters. So I didn’t say it was abnormal for my body to have that. I just knew it was something that was gonna come...and now you’re gonna have to deal with this...I didn’t have any sisters and I didn’t have a mother that was open about it.

**Some of the participants focused on menstruation as an experience that was traumatic for them. They were the same participants who had identified a lack of**

**information as a source of anxiety. Feeling uniformed contributed to a sense of loss and of feeling out of control in relation to beginning to menstruate.**

Chris – Up until that point, I kind of couldn't wait for it to happen, you know. Oh, this will be cool, and the minute it happened, it was like, oh this is not cool at all. You know, I'm bleeding from my crotch...I had been forced out of childhood or something. Like, it wasn't my decision to go on to this next stage you know? I had no control over it. Yeah, I mean what if I wanted another week of this, to not have my period? But no, it came.

**Most of the participants who experienced menstruation as being the most traumatic also described having the most conflicted relationships with their mothers. They felt that their mothers had not prepared them for what was to come, and two of the participants described feeling some anger or resentment towards their mothers. Their mothers were happy and proud on the occasion of their first period, but they themselves were not. At the same time, they felt a profound sense of connection to their female ancestors and to women everywhere.**

Chris – And my brother came to the bathroom door and I said, "Get mom". And he got her and she came in and she's like "Oh, my baby's a woman," and she's crying, she's all happy about it. But I just remember just not being happy about it.

Lisa – The perfunctory phone call to one of my mother's friends was made. She was so proud and that was that...that will go on over the ages. A mother was always proud when that happened to her daughter and to tell a friend. For some reason, that was all the women that stand on your shoulders and you're standing on their shoulders from ages past. I don't know if it's mythical, but it's just something that happens, that the motherly, earthly, matriarchical kind of thing going on – I mean she was happy but I wasn't.

**Almost all of the participants spontaneously included their feelings about pregnancy or a potential pregnancy, even though the research question did not deal specifically with this issue. Of the six participants, only two had experienced pregnancy and only one had actually given birth. Even the possibility of pregnancy created anxiety about how it would affect their bodies. Even though the participants differed in their life experiences related to pregnancy or even whether or not they wanted to have children, the participants had similar concerns and worries about how pregnancy would affect their bodies.**

Sue – I'm thinking here I am at the age of twenty, pregnant, and gaining all that weight.

Jill – But she didn't look like this at my age after she gave birth to me and my brother...that's another reason why my mom doesn't look exactly like she did. She had five kids.

Kelly – I’m deathly scared to have kids... Your body is never the same once you’ve had kids and that just really scares the heck out of me.

Lisa – I’m not planning on having kids, I don’t want kids, I mean the whole physical thing...it was an abortion. I’m not proud of it. It’s something that affects me to this day. Body-wise it was kind of like, my body let me down. It turned on me. I got knocked up. I was careless. It’s a vulnerability I’m talking about.

**Most of the participants were concerned with the cultural expectations placed upon the female body. For most of them, these concerns began during adolescence and continued throughout their adulthood. However, one participant who recalled growing up during the 1960’s, an era earlier than the others, remembered that there was far less pressure to be thin and that girls were not preoccupied with their bodies in the way that they are now. She and her friends experienced freedom from having to worry about their weight, and were not focused on dieting and exercise. They were just naturally active, and in this regard their lives were much more carefree.**

Sue – My friends and I hung out and we all did everything together. Honestly, practically everyday in the summer we would get together and just hang out or go swimming or anything like that...The point I was trying to make was that none of us ever sat around and thought we looked fat or anything. I think that back in the sixties it just was not like it is nowadays.

**Almost all of the other participants recalled feeling during adolescence that their bodies were in some ways inadequate and did not live up to what they perceived to be the cultural ideal for the female body, only two of the participants recalled being concerned about their weight at that point in their lives. Both of these participants experienced significant pressure and/or criticism from their mothers regarding their weight.**

Jill – Well, my mom kind of got this started...she did a lot of reading about food...she was always trying to get us to eat right...so I think that is her motive to teach us what to eat...So basically, I ate carrots a lot. She was always trying to watch and she didn’t let us have a lot of sugar. She would try to get us to eat fruits and stuff...She wanted us to limit content of certain foods...If I was sick one time, she said, “Have you been eating a lot of starch”...She would explain to me why, if I was sick, that is why I felt that way...and I just always think about what I am eating and the consequences of eating, how it is good for me, how it is bad for me, and everything about it...Food makes you fat? I believe it. I can never seem to think about my body image without thinking of food. My whole thing...is that carbs contribute to fat...and I’m wondering why do I look like this. She said its probably because of carbs...

Lisa – ...you must be ill-my mother would say that to me when I would get in shape. “You look sick”. She would never, never be very proud or whatever...I got negative feedback.

**However, as adults almost all of the participants described feeling that they could not live up to what was expected of them, including achieving a body weight that would be deemed culturally acceptable. Emphasis upon weight appeared to be significantly associated with the present period of time, with both older and younger participants experiencing significant cultural pressure to lose weight and appear as thin as possible.**

Sue – If I could weigh about one hundred and fifty-five pounds, I know I would feel much better and look better...once in awhile I do read in the paper those singles things. And I always crack up because nobody is looking for anybody that is out of shape and overweight...they’re all obsessed with meeting somebody who is thin.

Kelly – When I was at the most, one hundred and forty pounds, I just didn’t feel very good about myself and my clothes didn’t fit...I know it’s a distortional thing. But the whole thing like the magazines...and watching the TV and seeing the beautiful women and just compared to them I just don’t feel up to par with them.

Lisa – I started putting on weight because I was eating junk food and it was just slowly creeping up. I don’t remember numbers. I just remember having to change jeans. That was the trigger for me...But I cannot get any bigger. I cannot get any bigger. I just can’t...I see it as ninety percent societal, face value, guys will just move on...

**The youngest participants, those in their early twenties, described following restrictive diets and regimented workout schedules to achieve and maintain an ideal weight. These youngest participants were much more likely to follow through on their diet and exercise plans. Participants in their thirties and fifties had similar goals for their bodies, but described much more difficulty following their plans and also had more anger and resentment about having such expectations placed on them. The younger participants did not seem to have this kind of resentment and did not overtly acknowledge the kind of restrictions having to adhere to their diet and exercise regimens placed on them in terms of their time, energy, and efforts.**

Sue – I probably do think that way because I could start the day out so good, being on a diet, but then, when I get frustrated by the end of the day I say, “Who cares what I look like anyway,” and there is nobody that is even looking at me so why should I care...I tried different things to get into shape and it just wasn’t going to work. So I don’t know, but I just don’t stick with things and I don’t know why, but I guess it’s just not having the determination to do it.

Jill – I think about exercise a little more than food. Usually if I go out to eat a lot, I think I should exercise a lot more than I am right now because I try to eat right...If I have a couple of days when I'm not eating healthy, like what I consider healthy, I think I should be exercising more. I always think I should be exercising and I'm trying to train for a marathon...

Kelly – I have fluctuated between fifteen to thirty pounds and I am losing a little bit now because I am getting up at 6:15 every morning and walking for forty-five minutes. I get up early...Now that the holidays are over, it's back to the grindstone...waking up every morning and walking in the rain and the snow. I'm out there. So I guess you could call me a hardcore walker...you get a little wet and dirty sometimes but I get the job done...when I wake up and it's raining then I really don't want to go out, but I have to. So, I do; my umbrella and Walkman and all.

Lisa – Same with the weight thing. Let's say for the sake of numbers, 150. I was doing fine. I was doing great, and because of my work schedule, fell off the wagon. Here I am now, over two hundred pounds. What was all that for? Why should I bother again to go back? I'm angry about that. So why bother? I worked very hard.

**However, almost all of the participants did provide examples of ways in which their life possibilities or freedoms had been restricted as a result of adolescent bodily changes. Things such as having to give up dance or not being able to wear certain clothes or participate in certain activities were cited by almost all of the participants as beginning in adolescence and continuing into adulthood. This appeared to be an area of common ground for the participants regardless of life context or situation.**

Chris – I let that part of myself go...it had been an identity...I wore these scarves and these long, funky earrings...I loved it, you know. But, oh my God, if they make me look fat – so I shouldn't wear them...I just totally put them away.

Kelly – When I'm in my skinny stage, I feel great about myself and tend to flaunt around a bit...I feel more assertive and everything. At this certain stage, I feel like a beached whale...

Tina – I don't remember worrying about my body when I was little. I ran around and used my body however I wanted...Somehow I'm not doing everything that I could and maybe there are things out there, yoga or whatever, that I would enjoy, but it's my own hang-ups and my own preconceived notions about myself that aren't allowing me to do these things.

**The ways in which their bodily changes altered their relationships with those around them were also described by each of the participants. Most of the participants viewed their mothers as playing a significant role in their lives as they were experiencing changes in their bodies. Participants who indicated that their**

**mothers had their own issues with weight and dieting, and even aunts and grandmothers and other female relatives, described being highly influenced by these issues. They were more highly motivated to try and avoid being overweight or didn't want to disappoint their mothers by weighing too much.**

Sue – I think what might have affected us at adolescence is that my mom's whole family was always overweight and I always remember my mother being on a diet and my mom and dad having words about my mother being heavy...She had four sisters and they all struggled with weight...so maybe we were just more aware of that because other people in our family were struggling...

Jill – Well, my mom kind of got this started. She was pretty smart about food because she had four babies and she wanted to feed them right so she did a lot of reading about food things. She was always trying to get us to eat right. I mean, when she was younger, she didn't have the stability. Her mom was actually in college and she was not taken care of, and she talks a lot about that she didn't have a lot of food growing up. So I think that is her motive to teach us what to eat...Her mom didn't feed her properly, so that's probably why her body has programmed itself to defend against starvation by retaining whatever fat it does get. I think the same is true of me.

**Those participants who identified being part of a supportive female peer group tended to experience less anxiety related to bodily changes. However, those who did not describe being part of such a group were more likely to report their female peers as being a source of anxiety rather than a comfort. Pressure related to peers involved worries about how they compared with other girls in terms of the timing of the changes they were experiencing, i.e. being on schedule, not being too early or too late. Participants who did not identify having close friends also worried that their female peers were much better informed than they themselves were and that they were just "luckier" in that they had nicer hair or better skin or just knew how to apply makeup without being taught.**

Chris - ...I was lying on the beach with a friend..."Do you have hair down there"? she asked me...It kind of struck me with a little bit of fear because I knew I didn't. It was almost afraid of being found out that I wasn't maybe where I should be at.

Tina – I remember standing in the middle school lunch line the first time I wore a bra. The subtle pressure of the straps and hooks, now so familiar, was brand new... I was so sure that everybody else could tell that somehow yesterday I showed up at school and I was not wearing a bra, and today I was...I remember a desperate desire in middle school to physically be like the "popular kids"...it was kind of like a puzzle that I wanted to figure out. How do they do that?...is it something that they're born with and it just happens...Do they use a magical product that they haven't told the rest of us about, and why is it that they get the clear skin and I don't?

Lisa - ...just being in pain from it, just finding out or just seeing the other teenagers in the lunchroom or whatever, you knew that they have more information than you. Or they're more experienced at something than you were. And that was even more painful.

**Fathers were seldom mentioned by participants as being significant in their experiences of bodily change. Brothers were, for the most part, only mentioned as significant if they were involved in teasing, which for one participant remains a painful memory for her as an adult.**

Lisa – My one brother always teased me. Even though there really wasn't anything wrong with me. But just name-calling and the neighborhood kids would sometimes call me names. It was all very weird. And I couldn't really fight back...That's enough to grow inner hatred. I still kind of have that a little bit towards him even though we're all older. "Why did you do this to me"?...I still don't like him for that. Even if he says he's sorry and I didn't know any better. Save it.

**Female relatives were considered by these participants as being far more influential in their lives as they coped with the changes they were experiencing during adolescence.**

Chris – My mother's comment had burned into me and affected how I saw myself as a woman...cause her comments hurt me. "Well, you're my mother. How could you hurt me like that"? To me it was kind of cruel. So I kind of protected myself...

Lisa – You know, why be ashamed of it. I remember saying that to my mother one time. But it wasn't explained or it wasn't a proud moment to come out and go shopping to look for some items and then my mother got on my case. I still have it to this day of being in a dressing room. I didn't have a waist. I was just kind of like, whatever. I didn't have that Victorian corset kind of, and my mother just hissed at me, like with the clothes and the jeans or something, like you don't have any waist. And I wasn't even fat. And that has still stuck with me.

**Male peers were mentioned by three of the participants and all described experiences that were painful to them not only as adolescents, but all three were clear that the teasing or indifference that they experienced as adolescent girls had stayed with them and still hurt them as adults. These participants are not currently involved in relationships with men and have experienced difficulty maintaining ongoing relationships with adult men. Of the three participants who did not cite experiences with male peers as significant for them, all are currently involved in relationships with men.**

Sue - ...when you get teased, something bothers you. This one kid called me "broken nose" and that bothered me...I took it more seriously.

Tina – A boy beside me suddenly asked me if I was “blossoming.” I had only a vague notion of what he meant-and I’m sure his understanding was no greater than my own. I shut him down with a sharp “No!” I don’t know if it’s too strong of a word to say that I was frightened or I was scared just because I didn’t want to look like I had no idea what he was talking about...I was just aware that there were these girls that seemed to be more with it and more put together...and my classmates would talk about them or look at them...and that was not happening so much for me...Thinking about how adolescence changed my perception of myself is a lot easier than thinking of how it altered relationships with others...I don’t know if it’s a matter of remembering that one moment when the guys laughed at me...

Lisa – I never felt attractive in high school. It wasn’t fun. I remember having a couple of crushes, crushes on boys, but never having that returned. Just kind of sitting on the sidelines. Just observing...a couple of guys hanging around your locker, nothing like that ever happened...just being left out...I was just an observer. I did not date in high school, not even a kiss from a boy...It just kept me naïve. It didn’t prepare me for the real world...Where else are you gonna learn how to connect with the other sex? How to kiss, or have fights, or how to have a relationship. I didn’t have any of that...How am I going to learn to get along in the world...So, it still affects my relationships today.

**Common to all of the participants was the new experience of their bodies becoming objects of attention in ways that were new and different for them. This experience seemed to transcend situational or contextual aspects of the lives of the participants, and appeared to emerge as an ongoing phenomenon during adolescence that continues in their lives as adult women. Articulated by some of the participants in relation to this new experience in life was a sense of loss and longing that there can be no turning back.**

Chris - ...I let that part of myself go, I just totally put them away...I had been forced out of childhood...Like it wasn’t my decision to go on to this next stage, you know. It was like I was forced out. I had no control over it.

Tina – I’ve heard people say that girls lose themselves somewhere in adolescence. While I hate to think that’s what happened to me, I don’t know what else to call it.

Lisa – Cause I loved dancing. I still do. I still love dancing. And that stopped. I don’t know how I stopped dancing. I don’t know what happened. I don’t remember the day it ended or saying goodbye to anybody, nothing like that.

## DISCUSSION

### Dialogue with the Literature

The results of the investigation into the transformative experience of adolescent female embodiment for women will be discussed in terms of the themes explicated through the analysis of data. The major themes will be expanded upon and discussed in relation to the review of the literature, with the goal of making explicit their meaning and significance for existential psychology.

This study sought to contribute to an understanding of the ways in which bodily changes occurring during adolescence are experienced by girls in relation to the Self, the World and Others. Adult women were chosen to participate in the study in order to also understand something about how, or if, these changes continue to affect their lives as adult women.

The original questions creating the foundation for the study were guided by the thinking of Pipher and Boss. Pipher asserts that not only is adolescence a period characterized by loss, alienation, and inauthenticity for girls, but that these losses have the potential for long-term consequences in the lives of women as well. Pipher's analysis, along with Boss' existential theory of what it means to be human and his understanding that openness and freedom equate to health, provide the theoretical background for this study.

The findings of the study have been organized around the identification of themes based upon the participants' responses, and these themes will serve as the organizing framework for the discussion of the study's findings.

Examining the major themes in terms of the Self, World, and Others will provide for

a logical organization for the discussion and dialogue with the literature. These three major themes will be bolded in the body of the discussion, while aspects of the themes related to Self, World, and Others, will be underlined.

Beginning with participant responses that emerged in relation to the Self, findings included a clear unity in relation to body image and self-concept, a more negative image of the body during adolescence and subsequently during adulthood, specific concerns about particular parts of the body beginning in adolescence and lasting into adulthood, a lack of knowledge about what would happen to the body contributing to feelings of inadequacy, lack of competence, loss of control, a sense of unpredictability, and feelings of vulnerability and fragility. Responses related to the Self also included the participants' experiences of menstruation and pregnancy, and finally, the participants' responses indicated that they experienced a variety of emotions as their bodies changed during adolescence, and that these emotional responses continued for most of them as adult women, including feelings of depression, anxiety, confusion, shame, anger, envy, guilt, and, most significantly, feelings of loss.

Based upon these emerging themes it is possible to consider their meanings psychologically and, in particular, what they may tell us about the participants from an existential psychological point of view. Drawn from the above themes, several major psychological themes may be delineated which can illuminate the psychological meanings of the participants' responses. In terms of the Self, they include the following.

## **SELF**

### **The Unity of the Body/Self**

The results of this study point to the profound unity of the body and the self.

Throughout the psychological literature relating to the human body, and specifically that which is relevant to the adolescent female body, there is much evidence to suggest that one's body image is strongly unified with one's self-concept. This was also the case in the present study and this finding is very much in line with those reported previously in the literature related to adolescent body image and self-concept (Lerner and Karabenick, 1974, Kavrell and Jarcho, 1980, Padin, Lerner, and Spiro, 1981, Tobin-Richards, Boxer, and Peterson, 1983, and Rosenbaum, 1993). Most of the participants in this study described ways in which their self-esteem was related to the image that they had of their bodies. Sue described her feelings of "low self-esteem" and not feeling "real comfortable" with her body. Chris talked of "critiquing" herself and "beating" herself up as she began to have concerns about how she was appearing to others. Tina recalled "feeling poorly" about herself, thinking "Oh, if I just looked good...". The present study lends support, as previously indicated in the literature, not only to the idea that self-concept and body image are profoundly unified, but provides examples, based upon the lived world of the participants, that Merleau-Ponty's understanding of human beings as "embodied-beings-in-the-world" (1962), and the unity of the self, the body, and the world appears grounded very much in fact.

While the present study very much highlights the indivisibility of the body/self, it also provides a descriptive view into the nature of this relationship as it specifically relates to the life of the adolescent girl. In particular, it makes clear a common ground between that which is related to the realms of Self and Other. There is an interconnectedness between these two spheres of existence as they relate to the body, and this connectedness is manifested in the following way. What becomes evident

when the body/self-image is examined, is that it always, for these participants, is experienced within the context of their relatedness to significant others. What determines what constitutes the body/self-image for these participants was always described in terms of their own perceptions of how they were being viewed by others. This will be discussed more fully when the results are presented in terms of the Other, but if there is a context for the development of self-concept for the adolescent girl as it relates to her body, which occurs in the absence of her own concerns about how she is appearing to those around her, these participants did not describe it.

This body/self connection was also described by these participants as one that evolved into distressful or negative experiences of the body and self during adolescence.

Any positive or satisfying experiences they may have which may have contributed to the development of a more positive self-concept either did not occur, or they did not recall such experiences in relation to the development of their bodies. As it relates to the qualitative nature of the self-concept as it is experienced by adolescent girls, the present study furthers understanding of this also by providing a longitudinal window into what happens as girls grow into adulthood and become women. What becomes of their experience and concept of the body/self? It seems that there is overwhelming evidence, based upon these participants' descriptions, to support Pipher's thesis that the experiences of girls during adolescence can continue to alter and affect their lives as women, that women may suffer for years, the consequences of their adolescent experiences. In terms of the self-concept and how it may evolve over the years from adolescence to adulthood, these participants described continuing feelings of decreased self-esteem but that this appears to occur in the context of an ongoing struggle, a struggle for what may be seen as

a recovery of the self. The present study illuminates this struggle based upon the participants' descriptions of their present experience of the self. They provided examples which indicate that they are engaged in an ongoing project during which they attempt to resurrect or rebuild the self-image. The participants described their lack of self-esteem but provided evidence that there is potential for a struggle to regain the self, a process for these participants which met with varying degrees of success. Tina questioned, "Are my priorities in the right place? I've been on the road of discovery to a more self-accepting me for about three years. It hasn't been easy, but I believe I'm making progress...I'm getting there...I like myself when I wear makeup now. So, I'm making progress, I think". Alternatively, Lisa indicated that she is still struggling with her sense of self as it relates to her body image. "I wanted to be a high maintenance female, but I subconsciously know I will never be that way...In my mind there's no way. What do you do on that day if you can't keep that up? ...You're ugly, you're not together. Something's not right. It's safer to stay on the basic maintenance level than to try to maintain that high maintenance level. Because when you fall off that high maintenance plateau, there's a change. And to me that would affect my little self-esteem or worth or whatever...I suppose with high self-esteem, I wouldn't be doing the treading every night, or checking the mirror all the time, looking at every little blemish. But I lost all that weight and I have nothing to show for it. I'm right back where I started and I'm angry about that". The present study then, corroborates the profound and far-reaching effects of the changing body on the self-concept, but also yields descriptive information regarding the participants' experiences as women, as they attempt to re-constitute their sense of self as adults.

This engagement with the past lends empirical support to Guignon's (1993) discussion

of temporality and the narrative quality of the human life. The idea that there is a temporal unfolding of a life is demonstrated through the participants' stated experiences of attempting to achieve a kind of re-integration of the self as adult women. This process seems to involve taking the adolescent sense of self and attempting to further or broaden one's possibilities for existence, i.e. experimenting with a new look or a new behavior. For example, Tina talked about being daring enough to now "wear red". This temporal unfolding as seen through a process of re-integration of the self, may be further understood as an example of Boss's Daseinanalytic understanding of human existence. To review Boss's conceptualization of existence once more, human beings are understood to be motivated towards certain conduct in ways based upon past biographical events. This must not be conceptualized in any way as a causation of future behavior but instead provides motivation which encourages "a person to restrict, or partially blind her to the abundance of her inborn possibilities of relating so that she fulfills only a few neurotic modes of relation to her world...It is in the form of motivations that the past addresses the present" (p.192-93). According to Boss, then, existence in the present, always involves a process of being engaged in coming to terms with one's past. In this case, the adult woman is involved in a process of attempting to reconstitute or reintegrate herself in the years following adolescence, a process during which she is, as Boss points out, fundamentally directed towards the approaching future, and in order to accomplish this, she must be open to the future and its possibilities. As stated previously, this openness allows for "the inherent unfolding of inherent potentialities into existential freedom" (p.199). The participants in the present study described ways in which they had experienced constrictions during adolescence of

their possibilities in life, and as women, they provided examples of their struggles during adulthood to reclaim some of their possibilities for relatedness. This will be described more fully in relation to those themes relevant to the participants and their World.

### **The Struggle For Authenticity**

Increasingly during adolescence, the sense of identity of the participants revolved more and more around their concerns about how they were being perceived by those around them. Again, there is the intertwining of the Self and Others, as the perception of others enters as a significant dimension of the self. Their bodies became more of a focus, not only for others, but consequently for themselves as well. This involved, for almost all of the participants, an increased attention and focus away from other matters, and a reorganization of their thinking and prioritizing of their concerns towards themselves, including their own bodies. For almost all of the participants, this resulted in new anxieties and dissatisfaction with their bodies, including specific concerns about particular aspects of their own bodies. They were no longer free to the extent that they had been, to pursue other experiences in life. They now felt required to pay attention to their bodies in ways that had not concerned them in the past. This gave rise to a new level of self-examination and evaluation of themselves. Sue described how she “had a nose job when I was in high school because I had a complex that my nose had a big bump on it...Probably deep down inside I wished it would get me a boyfriend...” Jill elaborated upon her dissatisfaction with her stomach. “I spend a lot of time thinking about my mid-section...I hate my stomach...I don’t like it sticking out. I want to look nice...I have been struggling with this for the last ten of my twenty years”.

Chris recalled that “I had read all the books and stuff...on one level I knew it was all like a superficial thing. Hair in your crotch is totally superficial. But, yet, it seemed so important at the time...” Tina remembered that she “was also being judged on how I looked, on whether I used makeup or had developed a nice figure – instead of how well I did in school or whatever...and this makes me feel poorly about myself”. She went on to describe her particular concerns about body hair. “It was something that I wasn’t particularly happy about (during adolescence) and that I wished would change. I had been unfortunate enough to inherit more than my fair share of body hair. It’s not socially desirable is one word for it”. Lisa stated that “Adolescence and bodily changes brings only pain to mind...well, what’s starting to grow? You know, why be ashamed of it...I still have it to this day of being in a dressing room. I didn’t have a waist...and my mother just hissed at me...”

The responses of these participants provide support for the discussions of the experience of the adolescent female set forth by Basow and Rubin (1999), Streigel-Moore and Cachelin (1999), and the comprehensive analysis of Pipher (1994).

Basow and Rubin describe adolescence as a time when girls are engaged in a process of attempting to stay in touch with their own thoughts and feelings, but at the same time, conform to the female role expectations imposed upon them by others. This process of conformity involves a shifting to being concerned with being attractive and meeting the needs of others. They may become vulnerable to, among other things, dissatisfaction with their own bodies. This dissatisfaction or negative image of one’s body occurs in the context of normal female adolescent developmental changes such as menstruation, the appearance of secondary sex characteristics, increased storing of fat by the body and

characteristics such as widening hips. Streigel-Moore and Cachelin (1999) point out that these naturally occurring physical changes, indeed biologically determined developmental changes, are at odds with what is considered culturally desirable for the female body, thereby creating a tension for which the adolescent girl must come to some kind of resolution. The participants in the present study described the kind of “normal discontent” (p.101) with their bodies postulated by Streigel-Moore and Cachelin. Pipher describes how the adolescent girl’s dissatisfaction with her body can lead to the development of a “false body” (p.57). That is, she allows the culture to determine who she will be. What, then, are the consequences for the adolescent girl as she sublimates or lets go of her own body/self concept and replaces it with the body/self which she comes to understand is acceptable to the Other? This renouncing of normative biological change associated with female development has implications for, as Pipher has already established, maintaining authenticity of the adolescent girl’s self. This denial of the self, and its subsequent inauthentic existence, gives rise to difficulties with the self’s identity in terms of qualities such as autonomy and competence of the self. The present study lends further evidence and provides clarification into the kinds of experiences that are significant for adolescent girls as they succumb to this journey towards an inauthentic self and existence. As is evidenced by the above examples, there is much dissatisfaction with their bodies, inclusive of various aspects and parts of their bodies, and much concern regarding how they are appearing to others. However, one surprising finding of the current study is that although all of the participants had quite significant concerns regarding their appearance and certain parts of their bodies, in general, they did not identify weight as a specific concern during adolescence. The exception to this were two

participants who both identified issues related to their mothers. Jill reported feeling significant pressure to eat a healthy diet by her mother whom she described as having some of her own issues with food and weight. And Chris, who described an experience of being criticized by her mother for dressing a certain way which left her feeling “hippy and “fat”. Possible reasons for the lack of mention of concerns regarding weight during adolescence could be that this simply was not a concern for them and this finding does not support the widely held assumptions reported elsewhere in the literature. It is also possible that any concerns that the participants had about their weight at that time in their lives were overshadowed by their multiple other concerns about their bodies and appearances and they do not recall it as being a concern. It is likely, however, based on the descriptions given by these six participants, that the importance of weight appears to be very much culturally-driven. That is, almost all of the participants described being worried about their weight as adults. This cultural obsession with weight appears to very much be tied to the present period of time, and it is likely that studies done which examine this issue in girls who are experiencing adolescence in the present, will find that it is very much an issue during adolescence. The present study indicates that weight is very much a concern in the present era by adult women, and it may be possible to conclude that this is more a function of our particular historical period of time, rather than being driven by a particular developmental period or age of the research participants.

All of this vulnerability in adolescent girls to ride out the cultural pressures they experience in terms of their bodies, may be understood from a Heideggerian perspective. Adolescents in general, and adolescent females in particular, may be at a point in the human life cycle where they are at greater risk or at a point of increased vulnerability, for

living in the 'they'. They are increasingly sensitive to others' opinions regarding their bodies, and in their own thinking about their embodiment are much more greatly influenced by how they perceive others as seeing their bodies. At no other time in the human life, at least from a developmental perspective, is there greater pressure to conform to one's peers and to cultural fads. This will be discussed in more detail in terms of the Other and the World.

### **The Struggle For Autonomy and Competence**

One of the primary themes emerging in relation to the Self of the adolescent girl, consists of issues surrounding the development of an autonomous, whole, competent self. Experiences involving unpredictability and loss of control, including those related to lack of knowledge and information, led in many cases to feelings of inadequacy, vulnerability, fragility, and loss of self-direction. These feelings arose primarily in relation to profound experiences involving significant others, such as their mothers and female peers. Some of the participants questioned why they lacked fundamental knowledge about what to expect, and this led them to question the very nature of their relationships, especially with their mothers. These participants experienced questions in their ability to trust, and an either implicit or explicit sense of betrayal. They were left wondering why they had not been more fully prepared for what was to come.

The sources for the participants' increased awareness of lack of predictability and sense of control primarily revolved around normative developmental changes for which they felt unprepared, and lack of information and knowledge about such changes. Where they had once felt confident and in control of things in general, they now reported feeling quite uncertain about what was to come, and quite unsure of themselves. The terrain of

their lives had shifted, there was a fundamental altering of things that was occurring, and they were not in control of it. Their ability to act upon the world was diminished. This gave rise to a loss of autonomy and self-direction. This phenomenon is alluded to, in general, by Boss, whose idea is that persons “restrict” themselves to “only a few neurotic modes of relation” (p.192-193) to the world, and more specifically by Pipher who points to the problem of “loss of wholeness, self-confidence, and self-direction” (p.25) during adolescence. She identifies changes such as girls becoming more “deferential”, and points out that adolescent girls “lose their resiliency and optimism, and become less curious and inclined to take risks” (p.19).

The participants in this study described experiences occurring during adolescence, that were profoundly painful for them at the time. The origin of most of their experiences related to a loss of autonomy, wholeness and competence, were primarily related to their perception that 1) they lacked knowledge about the bodily changes that they were experiencing and that their peers were better informed and more knowledgeable than they were, and 2) that they lacked control over what was happening to their bodies. The realization that some unalterable, biologically pre-determined process was occurring was quite upsetting for some of the participants, creating a deep sense of loss and longing for what had been. The sense that the participants had that they lacked knowledge over what was occurring with their bodies was tied to an even greater sense that their relationships with others had changed in some unexpected way. They no longer felt that they could count on their friends or their mothers in the same ways that they always had. The world had been altered and they were no longer so sure of their place in it.

Lisa recalled that “The pain was mostly not knowing what was going to happen, no

one really explained anything really. The facts of life, especially female changes...Just going through it and knowing, and then just being in pain from it... Tina remembered that ...it seemed like the popular girls, and I wasn't part of the popular crowd...it always seemed to me that they were naturally born with the ability to look good and that was something that the rest of us just had not inherited or whatever, and I was upset about that...it was kind of a puzzle that I wanted to figure out... This participant also recalled her social discomfort over her lack of knowledge regarding what was occurring with her own body. "I don't know if it was too strong of a word to say that I was frightened or I was scared just because I didn't want to look like I had no idea what he was talking about." Chris described her sense of loss as she experienced the normal adolescent developmental event of having her first menstrual period. "Just like, I had been forced out of childhood or something. Like it wasn't my decision to go onto this next stage, you know? I had no control over it. I mean, what if I wanted to have another week of this, to not have my period? But no, it came."

The present study supports Pipher's contention that adolescent girls will have experiences that will diminish their sense of autonomy, wholeness, and competence. It adds to the current literature in this area by providing descriptive data as to the context for these types of changes in the self. For these participants, this was clearly manifested as a lack of knowledge and loss of control over one's own body. This also lends further weight to the strength of the body/self connection.

The loss of autonomy and self-direction experienced by some of these participants also resonates with the thinking of some contemporary feminist thinkers such as Miller (1983) and Gilligan (1993), who criticized Freud for the narrowness of his understanding

of what is occurring in the lives of girls and what is involved in the maturation of the self. Freud correctly identified that for girls, the period of adolescence is marked by a shift from activity to passivity, but for Freud, this process is limited to their sexual impulses. Freud believed that it was necessary for girls to shift their libidinal impulses from active (clitoral) to passive (vaginal). Miller points out that, for Freud, in order for the female to successfully negotiate this passage to womanhood she must submit the forces of the derivatives of her own sexual drive to the service of others, i.e. to men and to child-bearing. Gilligan, likewise, viewed it as problematic that Freud set the stage for many developmental theorists, who attempted to understand and fit women into a developmental model that viewed men as normative and women as deviating from the norm. The present study lends support to the idea that indeed, as Freud and many others have theorized, adolescent girls seem to experience a kind of shift from a more active to a more passive kind of existence, but that the nature of this shift is far more comprehensive and encompassing than simply a shifting of libidinal impulses from one region of the body to another, and that to suggest that there is merely one means of resolving this developmental dilemma is to deny that the adolescent girl exists as part of an interpersonal world with a range of human potentialities as possibilities for relating to her World. These participants pointed out that their “shift to passivity” most often had to do with feelings of inadequacy and self-consciousness within the context of their interpersonal relationships, thereby contributing to and lending support to more contemporary critiques of Freudian female developmental theory. Existential psychology, with its recognition of and emphasis upon the interrelatedness of the Self and Others, can provide a framework for understanding the vital role of the adolescent girl’s

interpersonal relationships in the development of an autonomous self.

The participants of the present study very clearly identified that they were trying to figure out what was going on with their own bodies and that they became engaged in a struggle that involved trying to figure out how to gain the approval of those around them. The source of their feelings of inferiority and subsequent loss of autonomy and wholeness arose in the context of this struggle.

### **Factual Aspects of the Adolescent Female Self**

The losses of self-confidence and self-direction occurring for the participants of this study, took place against the backdrop of multiple, ongoing; and for these participants, sometimes unexpected and confusing changes in their bodies to which they did not feel ready or able to respond. These factual changes were the ground against which they described experiences of uncertainty, vulnerability, self-consciousness, and loss. One of the most profound changes in their bodies was menarche. This was raised by some of the participants as an event that they recalled as being traumatic in nature, as well as becoming a source for increased uncertainty and anxiety over what to expect. It also created anxiety for them related to how they would appear to their peers. Lisa recalled “I was about thirteen years old when I got my first period. I didn’t like it. It wasn’t really explained a lot. I wish everything had been a little more open...It was just awful, and I did have a couple of accidents. It was just very humiliating for me...So I didn’t think it was the greatest thing in the world to be happening, bottom line.” Once again, as described by this participant, there is a feeling that those around her are not acting in ways that would allow her needs to be more fully met. There is a lack of openness

surrounding the development of her first period. There is inherently a sense of disappointment over the fact that neither her mother, her school, or her peers had acted to help her feel adequately prepared for what was to come.

The results of this study do not support the findings of Rierdan and Koff (1980) who, based upon their results, concluded that the onset of menstruation acted as primarily an integrative event for the self and helped the adolescent girl begin to develop a sense of herself as maturing, thereby contributing to the development of a broader psychosexual identity. For the participants who mentioned menarche as being significant for them, it was not described primarily as a positive, integrative kind of experience. Rather, it was considered by these participants as a source of discomfort and anxiety, and one which created much concern for them in terms of how they would be perceived by their peers. This was not in the sense of whether or not they had begun menstruating, but rather in terms of their overall knowledge regarding what to do when they had their periods so as not to become the object of humiliation at school. There was one positive aspect of beginning to menstruate that was mentioned by one of the participants. Lisa described feeling a powerful connection to other women on that day, one that she described as possibly “mythical”, but that she was still not happy about beginning her period, and to this day “I still hate this monthly thing...It’s God’s curse on women”. Two of the participants described a sense of disconnectedness with their mothers on the occasion of their first periods and this will be discussed more fully in terms of the Other. From an existential psychology perspective, the factual realities for the adolescent girl are that she will encounter a dramatically new experience (menarche) for which she will have no choice but to adjust and adapt to in some way. Her situatedness, as far as her familial and

peer relationships, are highly significant in terms of how traumatic this event is for her. The role of facticity in the life of the adolescent girl will be described further in relation to the Other.

The research question posed to the participants in this study led to a surprising finding in that five of the six participants spontaneously introduced some of their concerns about what pregnancy already had or could do to their bodies. This was an intriguing inclusion for these participants to make in that there was nothing inherently included in the research question itself that directly or indirectly asked about pregnancy. The participants seemed to make a spontaneous leap to the present and revealed their current worries and concerns as adults about pregnancy. Again, the research question asked them to reflect upon their adolescent experiences and how these were affecting them as adults. Reflecting on adolescent bodily changes gave rise, in this instance, to a quite adult concern, suggesting a unity or connectedness between the phenomenon of pregnancy and the very origins of their ability to give birth, which occurred during adolescence. This highlights the unity of the narrative quality of their lives, as constructed by the participants. During adolescence the girl's body is preparing for the first time, for the possibility of pregnancy. Adolescent physical development related to the existential possibility of pregnancy, and actual pregnancy occurring later in life, are not separate, discrete events, but instead are part of a continuous unfolding of the same phenomenon. These participants demonstrated the existence of such a continuous unfolding through their unexpected responses related to pregnancy. They appeared to be making explicit, that for them, the process of reflecting upon the first, initial, factual changes that would later allow them to actually give birth or even allow for the possibility of pregnancy, were

all part of the same phenomenon. One of the goals of the present study was to understand what the adolescent girl's experiences might mean in the context of her life. The responses of the participants in relation to pregnancy are a demonstration that their adolescent experiences indeed do not occur in isolation, but exist within lives that have a continuous unity. Again, this resonates with Guignon's (1993) elaboration of Heidegger's temporal ground for human existence. The course of events in a human life cannot be understood in isolation, but must always be viewed within the context of a life. Accordingly, for these participants, the meaning of the changes that they experienced within their bodies during adolescence, were intimately and meaningfully connected for them to the existential possibility of pregnancy later in life.

### **Emotional Aspects of the Body/Self**

The multitude of changes in the body of the adolescent girl gave rise to a range of emotional responses in connection with these changes, both during adolescence and later during adulthood. Pipher's hypothesis that women can continue to be very much affected by their adolescent experiences was strongly supported in this study in terms of the emotional or affective responses of the participants related to their experiences of bodily change. The participants described experiencing a variety of emotions both during their adolescent years as well as in their present lives. To review, these responses included feelings of depression, anxiety, confusion, shame, anger, envy, guilt, and feelings of loss. These emotional responses once again seem to indicate the unitary nature of the body/self. Tina spoke of her feelings of depression in relation to her appearance. "Looking back, I think I was depressed for a long time...The idea that I really didn't like the way I looked." Chris alluded to feelings of anxiety in relation

to her worries over her physical development in comparison to one of her peers. “I just totally remember that moment...it just seemed to be important. It kind of struck me with a little bit of fear...it was almost afraid of being found out that I wasn’t maybe where I should be at.” Her worries led her to experience confusion, not only regarding her bodily development but over other aspects of her existence. “I don’t know what kind of thinking that was, it was like “Please God, let it happen”...And it was related to my parents, you know, questioning, “Do they love me, you know?” Just questioning my relationships with people. Are things as they seem?”

Some of the participants described feelings of shame and embarrassment in connection with their changing bodies. Lisa shared that she continues to experience such feelings. “Beneath the shame and disgust I feel towards my body, I secretly feel proud and safe within it.” Tina revealed that “somewhere I learned to be ashamed of myself and my body. Whether it happened all at once or gradually, I don’t know.” For these participants emotions such as feeling ashamed or embarrassed were described as being intimately linked to their sense of self and body image. The participants’ emotional responses also included feelings of anger, both during adolescence, as well as continuing feelings of anger as adults. Chris described lingering feelings of anger over a comment her mother made regarding the way she was dressed. “I do get angry about it. Yeah, it made me angry with myself because it was a senseless comment and it impacted me very strongly. I got hung up on something so stupid, and I get very angry thinking about the time I spend worrying about it.” This long-lasting emotional response, beginning in adolescence and continuing into adulthood was experienced by Lisa in relation to the feelings of envy she experienced towards some of her female peers. “I was

always jealous of the girls that looked good and still carry that with me today...Because guess what? They got the guys' attention. Or they seemed very animated, or very popular. And I didn't like that...I think it's envy because you want to be in their place. I wasn't one of those girls."

Also included in the emotional responses of the participants were experiences of guilt. For the participants of the present study, feelings of guilt seemed to occur primarily in relation to food and its effects on their bodies. Jill described current feelings of guilt that she has over her eating habits as a teenager. She worries that this affects the way her body appears today. "Looking back on it, I think in that time I ate a lot of that kind of stuff like high carbohydrate, grease, starch, fat content things. I try to think about my body now, and I wonder if some of the decisions I made affected how it is, so I look back... Kelly described similar feelings, but it appears that she has been able to develop a sense of perspective about some of her earlier concerns. "...even if I would eat a cookie, I would feel seriously guilty, and to let something get to that point is really scary...I wonder if it's going to make me gain weight...and when I think about that now, I think, "How trivial, it's just a cookie"...me being a little bit older and realizing that image isn't everything." Just as with the process of reintegration of self described earlier, for the participants of this study, there appears to be the potential for a similar reevaluation of past emotions that the participants engage in and work out on their own. This reassessment, as identified by the participants, seems to occur to varying degrees and is highly individualized among the participants. Finally, for most of the participants of this study, there were experiences of loss that occurred in relation to their changing bodies. Chris talked about there being "...an innocence lost in our friendship but I let that part of

myself go...” Tina recalled that she has “heard people say that girls lose themselves somewhere in adolescence. While I hate to think that’s what happened to me, I don’t know what else to call it.” There were many aspects of the participants’ responses that were characterized by loss of some kind. This was a dominant theme of the participant responses in general, and will be discussed in more detail in terms of the participant responses related to the body and World.

The current study supports Basow and Rubin (1999), Streigel-Moore and Cachelin (1999), and Pipher (1994) who all identified some of the emotional conflicts that adolescent girls may experience in relation to their changing bodies, as well as Pipher’s understanding that adult women may continue to experience emotions related to this process as adults. It does not support Fischer’s research (1986) which concluded that there was simply not enough consistent evidence to support the idea that there is significant psychological distress related to one’s changing body during adolescence. Not only does the present study not support Fischer’s contention, it provides examples of the kinds of emotional turmoil experienced by adolescent girls as they negotiate this period of dramatic change in their bodies. The myriad of emotions described by these participants can contribute to an increasing understanding of the dimensions of this experience during the adolescent period of development. Further, these descriptive responses provide possible examples of the type of “neurotic modes” (1994) to which Boss referred, which may encourage one to “restrict, or partially blind her to the abundance of her inborn possibilities for relating... (p.192). These emotional responses may act in ways to narrow or restrict possibilities for relatedness in that they focus the participant’s attention on herself and her own

body thereby minimizing her awareness of others and the inherent possibilities surrounding her, as well as a narrowing of possibilities related to an increasing sense of anxiety and diminishing self-confidence.

In spite of the many examples the participants provided of the ways in which their Selves were constricted and/or repressed in relation to their experiences of their changing bodies, some of the participants also shared instances in which it appeared that they were also able to resist or rise above these forces. Lisa talked about how she has now reached a point in her life where she has begun to “move towards an acceptance” of her appearance, that she has now begun to give herself some “leeway” from having to “rise to the level of perfection all of the time.” She feels that she has a more “realistic” image of herself and that she sees herself as “fitting in with the rest of society.” This has only come after many, many years of self-criticism in relation to her body and her appearance.

In addition to those themes related to The Self, several themes arose which may be examined in light of their relevance to the sphere of existence related to The Other.

## **OTHERS**

Several themes emerged in relation to the participants’ relationships with others. They described significant changes in many of their relationships, and these seemed primarily centered around their relationships with their mothers and their peers. Four of the six participants described feelings of anger and/or resentment towards their mothers. These feelings appeared to include holding their mothers accountable for not adequately preparing them for adolescence. The two other groups cited most often by the

participants, with whom they experienced changes in their relationships, were female and male peers. It appeared that these groups were connected for these participants, i.e. mothers and female and male peers, in that the participants felt unprepared for the bodily changes that they were experiencing, and the relationships which the participants identified as being most profoundly affected by this lack of preparedness were their peer relationships. This was where they described feeling it most acutely.

Female peers appeared to wield significant power in that they could be the source for both deep feelings of inferiority, as well as the inspiration for feelings of self-acceptance. Male peers seemed to have a strong influence upon the participants' experience in that several of the participants shared stories that involved some sense of being rejected by their male peers, either through direct statements that were made to them by boys, or simply being ignored by their male peers and describing how painful this was to them. In other words, feeling unprepared for the bodily changes that they were experiencing, for which they appeared to hold their mothers primarily responsible, led to alterations in their relationships with their peers. In the case of female peers, being unable to anticipate or understand some of the changes led to experiences of feeling inferior to other girls. These experiences ranged from such issues as not knowing how to apply makeup, to what to do about unwanted body hair, to being savvy about fashion, and to understanding menstruation. These were examples cited by the participants as areas within which they felt inadequate or inferior. In terms of male peers, they described feeling uncertain how to respond to attention or questions from boys about the changes they were experiencing. Again, they described feelings of inadequacy in situations involving their male peers, which for these participants appeared to mean not being adequately informed or prepared

by their mothers.

In contrast to the participants' descriptions of significant experiences with their peers, both male and female, they had less to say about changes in their relationships with family members (excepting their mothers.) This included sisters, brothers, and most strikingly, fathers. None of the participants had anything to say regarding how their experiences of their changing bodies affected their relationships with their fathers. The reasons for this are not immediately clear, however, this may be best understood from within a developmental context. Adolescence in general is characterized by a broadening and a shifting of one's most significant relationships to include peers taking on a much more prominent role importance. However, it is still surprising that fathers were not described as playing any sort of significant role in the participants' experiences of adolescent female embodiment.

The most overwhelming change for these participants in terms of their relationships with others was the new realization that their bodies were now objects of attention by others and under scrutiny in ways that they had not experienced before. There was the sense that others' perceptions of them had changed and that this awareness of being an object of attention was something that is a part of their lives as women as well.

Understanding these themes psychologically allows for the following meanings to emerge. Issues associated with temporality, "dysappearance," alienation, and fidelity characterized the participants' relatedness to others.

### **Temporality**

The participants' sense of lived time played a significant role in their experiences of adolescent bodily development. There is support in the literature for the idea that one's

perception of development in relation to one's peers can have significant effects on self-concept and self-esteem. Tobin-Richards, Boxer, and Peterson (1983) elaborated on their findings related to timing of pubertal changes. "A sense of being early, late, or on time in physical development, relative to same sex peers may strongly influence perceptions of the self and feelings of adequacy and normality..." (p.132).

The participants of the present study experienced distress over their perceptions that they had somehow fallen behind their peers. Chris described feeling that "I was almost afraid of being found out that I wasn't maybe where I should be at... Yeah, that's what I felt. Just that she was always much more mature than I was... It was kind of like, she just seemed so ahead. It made me feel like I was different". For this participant, this led to questioning of her friendship. "Cause I thought, maybe we're not as connected as I thought... I think there was an innocence lost in our friendship". Lisa recalled her friend who "blossomed early" always having makeup on and her hair "always nice." In terms of the timing of changes and how they are experienced by adolescent girls, previous literature indicates that girls do not appear to benefit in the same way that boys do with early maturation. These participants did describe strong feelings of envy towards female peers whom they perceived as maturing earlier than they themselves did. But, the key for these participants appears to be their perception of where they stand in relation to their peers, of keeping up with them, not simply being the first to mature. As Tobin-Richards (1983) pointed out, it is the sense of being "on time" in relation to one's peers that has such significant ramifications for the self-esteem of adolescent girls.

The participants of the current study had little to say regarding the specific timing or chronology of developmental and bodily changes. As phenomenologists have stressed,

it was their lived experience of the timing, i.e. where they stood in their development in comparison with their peers. Some of them described how desperately they wanted to be at the same point as their peers, both in terms of physical development, such as developing pubic hair, and learned behaviors such as how to apply makeup. Their experiences of developing later or the perception that they were behind, affected them profoundly. It was the source of significant distress for several of the participants, and their distress always took place within the context of their relatedness to others. These participants indicated that their perceptions about the timing of changes, which dramatically influenced their self-esteem, always took place in relation to Others.

### **Dysappearance**

One of the strongest findings of the present study involves the awareness by all of the participants of their bodies becoming an increased focus of attention by others and of the participants becoming increasingly aware of the perceptions of others of their bodies. This experience has lasted into adulthood for most of them. Leder (1990) described the phenomenon of “dysappearance” wherein the body is subjected to the intentions of the Other. The body is directly thematized, and adolescent girls are especially vulnerable to this phenomenon. The participants of this study overwhelmingly described experiencing this process. Sue described being influenced by those around her to the extent that she had corrective surgery on her nose in high school in response to teasing, and later had liposuction as an adult before being reunited with her ex-husband at her son’s wedding. Chris talked of being “...angry with myself that I allowed a senseless comment to impact me as strongly as it did. I got hung up on something so stupid,

wasting precious time worrying about how I appeared to others...” Kelly described “trying to look good and impress everybody.” Tina discussed her feeling of being self-conscious the first time she wore a bra. “...I was so sure that everybody else could tell that somehow yesterday I showed up at school and I was not wearing a bra, and today I was.” She further described her feelings about being noticed by others. “Red to me was, you wanted to be noticed if you wore red. I thought, “Well, I don’t really want people to notice me and I’m not going to wear red. I don’t wear a lot of red.” These descriptions by the participants provide examples of Foucault’s understanding of the body as being “directly involved in a political field: power relations have an immediate hold upon it: they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs.” (p.98). This increased awareness by the participants of their bodies now being experienced as objects under the scrutiny of others was the only experience endorsed by every one of the participants, lending strong support for the universality of this experience.

### **Alienation**

Closely aligned with this phenomenon of disappearance is the experience of alienation from oneself. This experience of the Self is intertwined with others to the extent that it occurs primarily in the context of the Other. Bartky (2000) described the process of fragmentation of the person and its subsequent constriction of human potential as it relates to female embodiment. Women in Western societies are subjected to cultural images of the female body that they cannot possibly live up to, thereby leaving them with the idea that their bodies are deficient. “Women in western societies live out an estrangement from the body...” (p.324).

This alienation from the body/self again occurs within the context of others. It is the perceived disapproval of others that constitutes this alienation or estrangement from the body/self. Sue described her belief that “If I could just weigh about one hundred and fifty-five pounds, I know I would feel much better and look better...once in awhile I do read in the paper those singles things. And I always crack up because nobody is looking for anybody that is out of shape and overweight...they’re all obsessed with meeting somebody who is thin.” Kelly described feeling that “When I was at the most, one hundred and forty pounds, I just didn’t feel very good about myself and my clothes didn’t fit...I know it’s a distortional thing. But the whole thing like the magazines...and watching the TV and seeing the beautiful women and just compared to them I just don’t feel up to par with them.” And Lisa recalled that “I started putting on weight because I was eating junk food and it was just slowly creeping up. I don’t remember numbers. I just remember having to change jeans. That was the trigger for me. But I cannot get any bigger. I cannot get any bigger. I just can’t... I see it as ninety percent societal, face value, guys will just move on...”

The present study provides examples of participants who must contend with societal expectations regarding their appearance. Their perceptions regarding how others are viewing them directly influences their self-image and supports Pipher’s (1993) concept of alienation which involves a disowning of the self and an acceptance of society’s right to define them on the basis of their physical appearance.

This concern over appearance and how others are perceiving their appearance leads to a preoccupation with both the body and appearance, and viewed from within Boss’s existential framework, has a limiting effect upon human potential and possibilities

for relatedness. These participants provided examples of allowing society and others, the right to define them. The participants felt pressure to conform to specific societal requirements regarding their appearance, an experience that continues for them as women. Their preoccupation with achieving cultural norms has the effect of lowering their self-esteem, restricting their openness to new possibilities for relatedness. In this way, the development of the body/self concept cannot be separated from the context of the Others.

### **Trust/Fidelity**

One of the most profound effects of the adolescent developmental changes experienced by the participants of this study were the ways in which their relationships with others were altered. Especially significant were the changes to their closest relationships, i.e. mothers, and peers. Their ability to trust their own bodies, as well as those around them was severely challenged during the period that their bodies began undergoing the physical changes associated with adolescent female development. The effects of these changes in their most important relationships continues for most of the participants in their present lives.

Erikson's epigenetic theory of development identifies a crisis that must be negotiated during each stage of development. During adolescence the problem to be resolved is that of forging an identity, and successful resolution allows for the development of the ego quality fidelity. Miles (1986) pointed out that fidelity becomes an especially important issue for girls in that "the psychological implications of the existence of the maturing 'inner space' provides the ground for a particular sense of urgency for intimacy with

others” (p.13). In other words, the young girl begins to include others in her life in such a way as to psychologically fill this inner space through the intimacy found in interpersonal relationships. But these relationships were drastically altered for the participants of this study. The ability to trust the predictability of the relationships that they had been able to count on, were, in some cases, shattered for these participants. Of all of the changes experienced by the participants of the study, among the most painful and distressing were the changes they experienced in their interpersonal relationships. Fundamentally, what was described by the participants, was a sense of betrayal or inability to trust that which had been consistent. They were no longer able to trust that their expectations of those around them would be fulfilled. They were now met with uncertainty and unexpected responses with which they were unfamiliar. More than anything else described by these participants, this inability to trust or command the loyalty of those with whom they had once felt secure, created in many cases a sense of anxiety, loss, sadness, and confusion.

As described previously, one of the most vital and meaningful relationships for these participants appeared to be with their mothers. The participants of this study frequently identified situations involving their mothers as being highly significant for them in terms of their attempts to adjust to the changes that they were experiencing. In particular, they seemed to hold their mothers most accountable for the uncertainty and lack of knowledge that they experienced in relation to the changes they were undergoing. Some of the participants described a real sense of betrayal towards their mothers for feeling that they had not adequately prepared them for what was to come. Chris recalled that “My mother’s comment had burned into me and affected how I saw myself as a woman...

cause her comments hurt me. “Well, you’re my mother. How could you hurt me like that? To me it was kind of cruel. So I kind of protected myself.” Tina stated that “I was very upset with my mother...Perhaps if I had a big sister or a mother who was fashion-conscious I would have learned these things.” Lisa described her frustration over not being better informed. “Why don’t I know?... I didn’t have any sisters and I didn’t have a mother that was open about it.”

The present study contributes to a greater understanding of the ways in which adolescent girls experience their bodily changes in that it illuminates and describes the profound relationship between their development and their interpersonal relationships. The other relationships appearing to be the most significantly affected were with peers. In the case of female peers, relationships with this group underwent significant changes for the participants of this study and in many cases made a transition from being a source of security and certainty to that of increased anxiety and distress. Chris described the changes in her relationship with one of her best friends. “...I don’t have any hair yet but I can feel it coming...I could sense her disappointment...I just looked up to her. So, I just kind of like, I’m not in her league.” Tina recalled that “My everyday life during adolescence was not a happy experience. I just remember being really, really self-conscious and unsure of myself...I guess one thing was, I wasn’t interested in what a lot of my friends and my peers were interested in... Lisa stated that “Adolescence and bodily changes brings only pain to mind...Just going through it and not knowing, and then just being in pain from it, just finding out or seeing the other teenagers in the lunchroom or whatever, you knew that they have more information than you. Or they’re just more experienced at something than you were. And that was even

more painful.”

However, those participants who described being part of a supportive female peer appeared to be somewhat insulated from such anxieties and found their female friends to be more of a source of comfort and support. Sue described the support she derived from her female friends. “My friends and I hung out and we all did everything together. Honestly, practically everyday in the summer we would get together and just hang out or go swimming or anything like that. The point I was trying to make was that none of us ever sat around and thought we looked fat or anything.”

Similarly, Tina talked about how some of her views about herself and her own body were transformed during her undergraduate years at an all-girl Ivy League college. She found tremendous support in her peer group at college, which included much more progressive thinking about women and the female body than she was used to. Consequently, she was motivated to make some changes in her life, to become more active and venture out into areas that she had avoided previously. She began doing yoga and wearing make up. She began wearing “red,” which she wasn’t even sure that she “deserved” before that time.

The other significant change occurring for most of the participants was in their relationships with male peers. They described a variety of experiences with male peers in relation to their changing bodies and the participants who reported negative or distressing experiences with boys described ongoing concerns as women over how their bodies were being perceived by men. For the participants of this study there appeared to be an association between having these types of interpersonal experiences with males during adolescence and having ongoing concerns about how they were being perceived

by males as women.

The participants of the present study described a range of experiences and responses to changes in the nature of their relationships with males. Kelly described having boys notice her as a positive experience. “It was just the thing of noticing the guys, and I never really had too many boyfriends, especially not in junior high and not even really throughout high school actually. Sometimes, you know, just their heads would turn and notice me and I’d be like, that is kind of cool.” Tina was more uncertain about how she felt about this new experience of being noticed by males. “...the first time I became aware that a man was checking out my legs. I didn’t know if I liked it...that’s kind of nice that he would look at me, and also kind of embarrassed because I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t really have any guy experience...I really had no idea.” Tina also went on to describe her present uncertainties related to how men will respond to her body. “I’ve never been in a serious relationship and often times I wonder if my body is capable of turning a guy’s head...do I have a figure that guys will find attractive...I’m not a snappy dresser...Should I wear different things just because I think that guys will find it more attractive? Or should I go with what I feel more comfortable with?” For her, the uncertainty that she was feeling as an adolescent has continued as an adult, leaving her with questions about how best to approach the possibility of a relationship with a man, as well as whether to make compromises in her presentation of self, in order to achieve this. Lisa drew a direct connection between her experiences or lack of positive experiences with male peers during adolescence and a continuing lack of confidence that she feels in terms of her relationships with men. She remembered that she “never felt attractive in high school. It wasn’t fun. I remember having a couple of crushes, crushes on boys but

never having that returned. Just kind of sitting on the sidelines. Just observing...just being left out. I did not date in high school, not even a kiss from a boy...It didn't prepare me for the real world...So it affects my relationships to this day.”

Similar to the changes in their relationships with female peers, which for these participants appeared to be based upon a perceived sense of being uninformed, there were new and unexpected experiences in terms of how their male peers would relate to them. These were both positive and negative in terms of their influence upon self-concept and above all, created a deep sense of uncertainty. In the face of such uncertainty, and because of the interconnectedness of the self-concept and one's relatedness to others, this new uncertainty had a significant and profound influence on the participants' sense of identity. Based upon their descriptions of their interactions with those such as their mothers and their male peers, it became quite difficult for these participants to be able to have a sense of trust that their interactions would unfold with any sort of certainty, and thereby leave them with any sense of security in terms of what to expect from these relationships.

As Merleau-Ponty (1962) pointed out, one can never encounter one's own body in the world. Therefore, we can only imagine the way that others perceive it. The adolescent girl has come to expect certain responses and reactions from others in relation to her body. When these begin to change, her concept of her body/self also begins to change, and depending upon her experiences, as some of the participants of the current study have described, she may become vulnerable to a sense of uncertainty, doubt, and lack of confidence. She is no longer sure of herself or those around her. Her identity is altered and, as these participants have described, this may have lasting

implications for her interpersonal relationships for years to come. Specifically, these participants have identified such relational changes in their relationships with boys and subsequently men.

Just as with those aspects of the participants' experiences that relate to self, there was also evidence of the participants experiencing a sense of liberation in terms of their relationships with others. Sue talked about her female friends being a source of support in relation to how she felt about her body. She described having a group of friends who "did everything together." They provided each other support in relation to their bodies, and also seemed to insulate each other in the sense that they "did not just sit around and think that they looked fat." Tina also described how important her female peers were in helping her to progressively move towards greater acceptance of her body. This is interesting to note in that it was also her female peers with whom she felt a sense of being inferior in terms of her appearance. She identified that as she found a peer group in high school with whom she felt comfortable, she also felt more comfortable with the changes in her body. This continued when she went on to an all-female Ivy League college, and was exposed to a whole new level of acceptance of the female body. She described being surrounded by women who were not "slaves to fashion," and who believed very strongly in being themselves. This proved to be an extremely positive experience for her. Chris also described a process of developing new perspectives as she grew into adulthood, that allowed her to broaden her thinking and her possibilities. Her friend, who during their adolescence, had created so much anxiety for her regarding the timing of her bodily changes, was now viewed quite differently by Chris. Where once she had seen her friend as more advanced both in terms of her development, as well as in her knowledge of

things like fashion, she came to see her as “a loser” as they got older. She was also able to recover from the powerful interaction with her mother regarding her habit of wearing scarves around her waist, which her mother was critical of at the time. Chris was later able to “proudly wear” her scarves again after many years.

These are some of the experiences that the participants described, in which they seemed to be able to experience a sense of liberation rather than limitation in their experiences of embodiment.

## WORLD

Finally, were themes that emerged in relation to the World of the participant. In terms of the present study, an important and extremely relevant aspect of the World of the participants, is the culture into which they were born. This aspect of the World is one that is emphasized in the previous literature on female embodiment, and was also a main focus of attention for the participants of this study. Similarly, one of the major themes discussed in the literature relevant to this study involved the ways in which a woman’s freedom to move through the World encounters interference or is restricted. The same was true for the participants of this study, and again, there is an interconnectedness between the World of the participant and her experience of Others in that relevant themes included the participants’ beliefs and anxieties related to the cultural expectations placed upon them and consequently the negative evaluations of their bodies that they perceived those around them to be making, in particular in relation to their weight. For the participants of this study, this consciousness of cultural and societal pressure is very much a part of their lives as women as it was during adolescence. An exception to this was that during adolescence most of the participants did not recall being unduly

concerned about their weight, as they are as adults. However, as adolescents they experienced much anxiety regarding other aspects of their appearances. Most of the participants described in detail how their attempts to achieve and maintain a culturally acceptable weight as adults affects their lives on a daily basis. Finally, almost all of the participants described ways in which their lives had been constricted, or limitations of some kind had been placed upon them. The examples they provided involved losses of freedom of movement in the world or constrictions of their possibilities in life. If these themes are viewed psychologically, the following meanings emerge. The significance of the expectations of the culture into which they were born were described by the participants of the study.

Adolescent Female Development in a Cultural Context:  
The Embodied-Being-In-The-World

Beginning in adolescence, the participants of the present study experienced a profound awareness of their bodies being viewed now as objects in the world. As described by these participants this experience was unsettling to them, and because of the indivisible nature of the body/self, the implications for the developing adolescent female self were significant.

Viewed from within a developmental context, what is happening cognitively for adolescents also gives rise to the kind of self-consciousness and heightened cultural awareness that the participants experienced. Elkind (1974) describes the effects of the development of formal operational thought upon the developing adolescent. The advent of formal operations allows for the adolescent to not only conceptualize her own thought, but it also gives her the capacity to conceptualize the thoughts of others. But, at

this physiological stage of development, she is unable to distinguish between what others are thinking about and what she is preoccupied with herself. Therefore, she imagines that others are as concerned with her behavior and appearance as she is. “This belief that others are preoccupied with (her) appearance and behavior constitutes the egocentrism of the adolescent”(p.91).

The outcome of such adolescent egocentrism is that the adolescent is always imagining that others are “as admiring or as critical” (p.91) as she is of herself. In this way, she is always “constructing, or reacting to, an imaginary audience” (p.91). The imaginary audience contributes to the kind of self-consciousness that is so typical of adolescence. When the young adolescent is feeling negative or critical of herself, she imagines that her audience will be critical as well.

Following the acquisition of formal operations, there is no new mental development and what is achieved during adolescence is utilized over the course of a lifetime. As the stage of formal operations becomes established, the egocentrism of early adolescence begins to subside. The “imaginary audience” is gradually altered and becomes more similar to that of a real audience. This occurs as a result of the adolescent testing reality and gradually being able to tell the difference between his own thinking and that of others.

The experiences of the participants in this study, that include both an increased awareness of self and culture can, in part, be understood within the context of this cognitive developmental process.

Bartky (2000) describes the aftermath for women, of being presented steadily with media images of perfect female bodies. In the light of such unattainable bodily

images, females are vulnerable to an experience of alienation from their bodies, and therefore, the self. Bartky points out that “Women in Western societies live out an estrangement from the body” and “must exist perpetually at a distance from our physical selves, fixed in a permanent posture of disapproval.” (p.324). Females thus have the experience of thinking about and viewing their own bodies as objects. As Bartky points out, a distance develops between the normally unitary body/self. This is a new experience for the adolescent girl, who up until this time has had little awareness or experience with her body being viewed as an object and therefore had no reasons to view it this way herself.

The participants of the current study described their experiences of being alienated from their own bodies in the following ways. Chris remembered that “...I had a certain awareness of how I was going through the world, and you know, I felt that I was a good young woman, confident. But I also, I guess, on a certain level, thought, cause I know how society thinks, “Oh, you should be a certain way to be a woman, and you should be somewhat slender or whatever. And I felt that I was, you know?...how pathetic, it became more of an object.” Tina described feeling that, if she could, “...I would just use my body as a vehicle to move my brain around...I was kind of happy being a sheltered little girl...” She went on to say that “...this makes me feel poorly about myself...you kind of get the idea that, ‘Oh, if I just looked good or looked like people look on TV or whatever, that your life would be better.”

The participants’ descriptions of their increased awareness of their bodies can be understood from Leder’s (1990) perspective on unthematized existence. Leder points out that “the surface body tends to disappear from thematic awareness precisely because

it is that from which I exist in the world” (p.53). Because one’s attention is focused outwardly in the direction of the world, the bodily apparatus associated with perception and movement become invisible in the moment. “The intentional arc has a telos that carries attention outward, away from its bodily points of origin” (p.53). In contrast to this unthematized living of the body, a “heightened body awareness” (p.90) may be understood within the context of dys-appearance, that is, when one’s bodily experience becomes thematized, such as at a time of “rapid change” (p.90) during adolescence. In this case “the assumption of a novel body renders problematic what was previously tacit” (p.90). This was certainly the experience of the participants of the present study as they became aware of their bodies in new and profoundly different ways.

In terms of existential phenomenological psychology, this alienation or distancing of the self from the body that occurred for the participants as they became more aware of the ways that others were perceiving their bodies, supports Merleau-Ponty’s position that our bodies are open to cultural inscription, that they are part of a field of significance. Our knowledge of our bodies is pre-reflective, that is, our bodies are so familiar to us that we move through the world without even having to think about our bodies. As the adolescent girl is surrounded by images of what she is supposed to look like, she is at the same time, immersed in her own interpersonal world, within which she is subject to the perceived approval or disapproval of others. It becomes increasingly difficult then, for her to maintain such a pre-reflective knowledge of her own body. As Merleau-Ponty pointed out

...the image in the mirror prepares me for another still more serious alienation, which will be the alienation by others. For others have only an exterior image of me, which is analogous to the one seen in the mirror. Consequently, others will tear me away from my immediate inwardness much more surely than will the mirror (p.136).

What is significant for the adolescent girl in terms of Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the embodied-being-in the world, is that in light of the fact that one's body is always engaged in movement that is directed towards a world, the participants described how their worlds had changed. They were now living in worlds that included cultural expectations of how their bodies were supposed to look and interpersonal messages from those around them regarding how well they were achieving this.

The participants of the study provided examples of themselves previous to adolescence, when they were free to move throughout the world without considering or thinking explicitly about their bodies. Now they had to be much more aware of their bodies, and as their awareness increased that their bodies were being viewed by others as objects, they became much more self-conscious and acutely aware of their own bodies as things or objects-in-the-world. Based upon her lived experience, then, of her own body-in-the-world, the participants of the present study have pointed out that they were quite influenced by the cultural and interpersonal messages that they were receiving about their own bodies, requiring them to re-evaluate what had been so familiar. According to the participants of this study, it was no longer possible to live "pre-reflectively". It was necessary for them to thematize what had been "lived." Their selves were now obligated to think about their bodies, and this occurred in a cultural and interpersonal world that objectified their bodies, creating a separateness between the body and self, in that the self was now observing the body from within the context of the cultural and social world of which it was a part. What then does this mean for the adolescent girl as she moves through the world towards which her body is always directed? The ways in which her body is free to move are subsequently affected as well.

### Freedom and Human Potential Lost

While Merleau-Ponty's conceptualization of the embodied-being-in-the-world provides access into the adolescent girl's experience of her body, Boss' Heideggerian understanding of human freedom is especially relevant for the development of a descriptive view into the ways in which her experience is altered by bodily change.

For Boss, (1994) it is one's openness to her inherent possibilities that is the essence of what it means to be human. Boss understands such openness as a primordial characteristic of being human. It is this openness which allows for the "...unfolding of inherent potentialities into existential freedom" (p.199). But based upon her experience, one may be motivated to restrict her possibilities for relatedness to her world. Pipher (1994) outlined examples of such restrictedness of human potentialities in the lives of adolescent girls, including a loss of wholeness and self-direction.

Feminist writers such as Bordo (1993), Bartky (2000), and Young (1990) articulated the ways in which cultural forces limit or constrict the potentials of adolescent girls and women. Bordo pointed out that thinness is equated with self-control for women, thus they must restrict and control their desires in order to conform to cultural ideals of femininity and achieve a culturally desirable body. The present study demonstrated that because this constriction of hunger and other desires unfold in the context of one's world, its consequences are always directed towards a world, giving rise to a constricted existence as well. The participants of the study shared many of their experiences that were characterized by loss and limitation.

Bartky views the cultural expectation of an ideal embodied femininity, i.e. an

infantilized body that takes up as little space in the world as possible, as a “set-up” for most women. Young visualized the space around women’s bodies as a type of enclosure resulting in a sense of confinement, inhibiting their ability to reach, stretch, and throw. Almost all of the participants in the current study provided examples of ways that their possibilities in life or their freedoms had been restricted in relation to their changing bodies. Chris recalled that “I let that part of myself go...it had been an identity...I wore those scarves and these long, funky earrings. I loved it...but, oh my God, if they make me look fat-so I shouldn’t wear them...I just totally put them away.” Kelly talked about the ways her weight affected how free she felt to move through the world. “When I’m in my skinny stage, I feel great about myself and tend to flaunt around a bit...I feel more assertive and everything. At this certain stage, I feel like a beached whale...” But she also described a feeling of resistance and anger to what she experienced as the oppressive influence of the media, and its unrealistic portrayals of women. Tina described how her sense of freedom of movement in relation to her body had been altered as she left childhood. “I don’t remember worrying about my body when I was little. I ran around and used my body however I wanted...Somehow I’m not doing everything that I could and maybe there are things out there, yoga or whatever, that I would enjoy, but it’s my own hang-ups and my own pre-conceived notions about myself that aren’t allowing me to do these things.” Lisa recalled a painful loss that occurred for her resulting from her concerns over her appearance. “I enjoyed dancing...and I was the biggest, or the widest out of the group I was in during that routine. And when I saw that video, I was appalled that that was me. Cause I loved dancing. I still do. I still love dancing. And that stopped. I don’t know how I stopped dancing. I don’t know what

happened. I don't remember the day it ended or saying goodbye to anybody, nothing like that."

### Possibilities For Reconstituting and Reclaiming the Self

While most of the participants shared stories of their existential possibilities having been limited or constricted in some way due to their awareness of their changing bodies, some of the participants also went on to describe ways in which they had been able, as adults, to subsequently expand their existential potentials and possibilities for relatedness. Chris described how she had once loved scarves and how her mother's criticism of her wearing scarves around her waist with her jeans profoundly affected her. "My mother's comment had burned into me and affected how I saw myself as a woman cause her comments hurt me. Well, you're my mother. How could you hurt me like that? To me it was kind of cruel. So I kind of protected myself." She went on to say that she put the scarves away, that she "let that part of myself go..." However, this participant also described having been able to reintegrate this aspect of herself later on as an adult. She recounted that for a very long time she didn't wear scarves but that she still found them beautiful. Then, a friend of hers gave her a new scarf upon returning from a trip. She began occasionally incorporating them into her wardrobe, and finds humor in the fact that her mother saw the scarf while visiting her and commented on how beautiful it was. She now thinks sometimes as she is getting ready to leave the house about the scarf around her neck and how her mother once criticized her, "and I'm out the door and that's it."

Her mother's comment was quite powerful and would have a far-reaching effect upon her for years to come. Previously, she had perceived herself as "attractive," and now she

felt “ashamed.” However, over time the sting of her mother’s comment lessened and she became less concerned about her mother’s opinion of the scarves and how she looked in them. She decided to start wearing them in spite of her mother’s opinion. Although she still can get angry thinking about it, as an adult her perspective on this event has changed. She now sees it as “silly” that she allowed her mother’s statement to affect her in the way that it did, and views it as her mother’s “issue.”

Tina recalled that she was very self-conscious about the changes in her body when she was in middle school. As she moved into high school she found a peer group that she felt comfortable with, and found that she also began to feel more comfortable with the changes in her body. But it was during her undergraduate years at Vassar that she was really able to develop a whole new level of acceptance towards her body. “I can credit my undergraduate experience at Vassar with helping me a lot. Here was a group of brainy, beautiful women who are not ashamed of their bodies. I saw women who did not wear bras or shave. I heard women speak unabashedly of menstruation and sex.” This experience led her to do a great amount of “thinking,” which she credits with giving her the idea that “I’m better than I think I am.” She began doing things like wearing make up and doing yoga. She describes herself as being on a “road of discovery to a more self-accepting me...” It was during college that some of her beliefs about herself were altered and it was during this time that she began to wear brighter colors. She started to think that she might “deserve brighter colors.” She never saw herself as the type of person who could wear red.” Her comfort level with being “noticed” has increased, and although she doesn’t wear a lot of red, “Sometimes I do.”

These participants described a process of rediscovering what they had known

previously about themselves and re-opened areas of their lives that had been closed off from them. From Boss' existential perspective, they had narrowed their range of possibilities in the world by being less open to that which they were encountering. According to Boss, they were motivated to conduct themselves in a certain way in the world based on past biographical events. Chris a single comment made by her mother was enough to significantly alter her self-image for years and influence how she presented herself to the world. Because of her mother's statement, she cut herself off from something she loved and appreciated in life, the beauty of her scarves and being able to make them a part of the way that she presented herself to others. She described the scarves as being part of her "identity," and to lose this aspect of herself was like being cut off from a part of herself. As she grew older, she developed a different perspective on her mother's statement to her, and she began to feel independent enough to include them back into her life.

Tina had described in detail how her experiences with others had led her to feel "self-conscious" about the changes in her body that she was experiencing as an adolescent girl. Subsequently, she chose to avoid activities and behaviors that would draw attention to herself. But, over time, and strengthened by the support she felt from her peers in college, she started to expand her possibilities and engage in some of the activities and behaviors that had become closed to her. In doing so, she expanded her openness to new possibilities for relatedness with others and in so doing, increased her openness to her existential potentials.

These two participants provided examples of their possibilities having been constricted in some way during adolescence and then with the increased sense of

autonomy that they experienced as adults, were able to alter and expand to areas of their existence that had been closed off to them, leading to greater possibilities for relatedness. The present study, then, indicated that although as Pipher (1994) outlined, adolescent girls are vulnerable to losses of wholeness, self-confidence, and self-direction, there is potential for a reintegration of the self and a reclaiming of what was lost during adolescence. Having adult women reflect upon their experiences related to embodiment as adolescent girls, allowed a long-term view to emerge of how adolescent girls, and subsequently women, cope with the new experience of their bodies becoming objects in the world for others' evaluation. The participants of this study demonstrated that they were left to cope and struggle with the resulting losses of wholeness and self-confidence for years to come. They are at varying stages of attempting to recover what was lost to them as girls. Tina described herself as "being on a road of discovery to a more self-accepting me...It hasn't been easy, but I believe I'm making progress...I'm getting there..."

The results of the study have been discussed in relation to the literature relevant to adolescent female embodiment. The participants' experiences in relation to Self, Others, and World were described in terms of the psychological themes which emerged in relation to each sphere of existence. In summary, those themes associated with the Self included a reaffirming of the participants' experience of the unity of the body and the self, and the participants' struggles with achieving authenticity and autonomy. The unity of the body and the self was also highlighted through the emergence of the facticity of the female body as it related to menstruation and pregnancy for these study participants. These themes associated with the Self gave rise to a range of emotional responses that the

participants experienced during adolescence as well as through adulthood, supporting Pipher's understanding of adolescent changes that can manifest themselves in women's lives well into adulthood.

Strongly interconnected with those themes relevant to the Self, were the ways in which the participants' lives were altered in relation to their experiences with Others. Meanings that emerged in relation to Others included issues related to temporality, "dysappearance," alienation, and fidelity. The participants' experience of the timing of the physical changes that were occurring, were highly correlated to where they saw themselves in relation to their peers. This, in turn, was significantly related to the participants' sense of Self. Similarly, their experiences of how others were perceiving their bodies, led to changes in their own self-concept and experiences of authenticity.

Just as there were unifying themes in relation to the Self and Others, the participants' experiences of their World was strongly connected to their lived experience of Self and Others. The sense of Self of the participants was dramatically influenced by the culture into which they were born., a culture that sends powerful messages to young women their bodies, seeming to demand that they achieve virtually unattainable standards of perfection. This gives rise to an alienation or a distancing of the self from the body. The participants of this study described these kinds of experiences in relation to their changing bodies. With this came the new realization that their bodies were being objectified by others, giving rise to intense feelings of self-consciousness. These new experiences of their bodies as objects in the world led the participants to constrict their openness to experiences in the world that were either new or which they had previously enjoyed. The participants provided varying descriptions of reclaiming or re-experiencing

the freedoms from which they had been restricted beginning in adolescence, but most of them were engaged in a process of moving towards what they had identified as being lost, with some of the participants describing success at reclaiming themselves and their freedoms.

### Clinical Implications

The losses experienced by adolescent girls, as identified by Pipher (1994) and others provide examples of what is true on an ontic level in terms of that which can restrict one's openness to her existential potential and possibilities for relatedness. As Boss (1994) believed that we are motivated to restrict our openness to what we encounter in the world based upon past biographical events, adolescent girls are vulnerable to suffer loss on an ontological level as well, i.e. loss of existential potential and possibilities and therefore, loss of existential freedom. For Boss, health is freedom, being free to openly and fully perceive all that we encounter, allowing who or what we encounter the freedom to encounter us with all of its inherent possibilities for being. In this way Dasein is understood as a clearing, allowing its light to shine forth and illuminate all that it encounters in the world. The extent to which Dasein is able to shine its light openly in relation to those beings it encounters is influenced by how one is motivated to conduct oneself based upon past experiences. The participants of the current study provided many examples of ways in which their existential freedom and possibilities for relatedness had been constricted based on their adolescent experiences. The kinds of losses of freedom that they described were most often those that inhibited their autonomy and self-confidence, in turn interfering with their possibilities for relatedness.

In light of this, a psychotherapeutic approach that seems especially well-suited for clinical intervention with this population would be one that includes an emphasis upon returning autonomy and freedom to adolescent girls, as well as women, to pursue their possibilities by examining what motivates them to restrict those possibilities. Such a psychotherapy becomes an avenue for returning one to health and one's fullest potential.

Past events do not cause present or future behavior, but rather motivate one to conduct oneself in certain ways.

The openness of human existence consists of the capacity for perceiving the presence and meaningfulness of whatever appears... Human existence is equally receptive to what has been perceived at some former time and has been retained. What has once been present to a human existence is never simply past, finished, lost. What has been is retained in the openness of the human Da-sein, so that it remains constantly present in the present, speaking into this present and co-determining all present conduct of the human. (Boss, p.118).

The participants of the present study described past events in their lives that they had experienced as adolescent girls which involved their awareness of their bodies changing and how this experience altered their lives, in relation to themselves, their interactions with others, and their everyday lives in the world. One of the most consistent findings of this study was that all of the participants described their experiences of their bodies becoming objects of attention and interest for others. This had dramatic and far-reaching consequences for their their sense of autonomy, self-confidence, and self-concept.

Boss characterizes human bodyhood in the following way.

All of our experience tells us that just when a human being is existing in the most highly characteristic human way, she is totally unaware of her body as such. To exist in a characteristic human way means to be engaged body and soul by something that claims one, and to respond to that address or claim. The human being completely loses her awareness of her bodyhood as a physical body just when she is acting most genuinely human. (p.101).

The participants of the study shared their stories of becoming increasingly self-

conscious about their bodies as adolescent girls as they became more and more aware of their bodies being observed by others. One of the most poignant stories of enduring this kind of scrutiny by others was told by Lisa, who described how she had not been allowed to continue on in dance class, something she loved. She went on to describe her experience of herself as a dancer and how she viewed herself. "I enjoyed dancing...and I was the biggest, or the widest out of the group I was in during that routine. And when I saw that video, I was appalled that that was me. Cause I loved dancing. I still do. I still love dancing. And that stopped. I don't know how I stopped dancing. I don't know what happened. I don't remember the day it ended or saying goodbye to anybody, nothing like that."

Within a psychotherapy relationship, it would be possible to elucidate the story of how she stopped dancing, and how she then came to the decision to restrict dancing from her life. It would be possible to come to an understanding of the circumstances that had led her to let this part of herself go. The situation that had resulted in her no longer dancing in this situation had the consequence of her deciding that she would no longer dance at all. This was a choice that she made as an adolescent girl which has had the effect of restricting her from this sphere of her existence. In therapy, she may be asked to consider other possibilities that may exist for her related to her dancing. She may be asked to consider more fully the possibilities that exist for those from whom she is fleeing, i.e. those that she is aware are observing her dance. Is it possible that they are merely observing her rather than judging? And even if that were the case, what would this mean to her now, as an independent adult woman? She may or may not experience it in the same way that she did as a young girl, but the choice would be open to her. She can

choose, here and now, as the independent adult woman that she is, if she prefers to risk being evaluated at how she looks dancing, if in fact she is being evaluated at all, or whether she prefers to give up this part of herself, and simply close off this sphere of her existence. In either case, the choice is hers. But within the psychotherapeutic relationship, what is made clear to her is her narrowing of perception, the constriction of her thinking towards the phenomena appearing in her world, in this case the others who may watch her dance. If she is able, through the consistent suggestions of her therapist to allow them to exist in the fullness of their existential possibilities, and if she can be fully open to perceiving their different possibilities, she is no longer restricted to being negatively judged as she believed she was all those years ago. Boss suggests that when intervening in restricted or neurotic modes of being, instead of asking “why” which might be part of a more traditional, psychoanalytically-oriented psychotherapy, the therapist may be engaged in a consistent, repetitive asking of the question “why not?”

... “why” is replaced as the most important word by the question “Why in the world not?” At every available opportunity, the...therapist will ask the patient why in the world she has not dared to perceive and respond to something in her world from which she has constantly been looking away. Was it really necessary to flee and hide from things that revealed themselves to her? (p.279)

Such psychotherapy, with its emphasis upon reclaiming autonomy and the freedom to pursue one’s possibilities in the world, is one approach to intervention with adolescent girls and adult women, who are experiencing restrictions in the fullness of their possibilities for existence relevant to their experiences of adolescent female embodiment. Such restrictions in existence, in their more profound instances, may manifest as depressive and anxiety symptoms and may give rise to psychiatric illnesses such as Major Depressive Disorder and Dysthymia. In these cases, psychotherapy may be useful as a

means for restoring a sense of what has been lost; existential possibilities for relatedness and human freedom.

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This research provided a window into the lives of adolescent girls and women by allowing women a voice to describe how they experienced their embodiment as adolescents and how their experiences subsequently affected them as women. By addressing this question phenomenologically, a space was created for women to describe their own experiences, rather than being reduced to a set of responses on a research measurement. In this respect the present study contributes in a significant way to the research literature on female embodiment. Especially in light of the historical character of psychological theory related to women in general and cited earlier in the literature review, i.e. for men to be viewed as a normative population and attempting to understand women from that perspective. The present study asked women to describe their own experiences in their own voices, allowing for understanding of them on their own terms, rather than comparing them to norms established for men.

One of the most surprising findings of the present study was that the participants did not describe significant experiences of female embodiment involving their fathers, as they did with their mothers and peers. It would be interesting to examine this issue more closely through future research, either through replicating this study or specifically researching the ways in which adolescent female embodiment affects one's relationship with one's father.

It would also have enhanced the study to include the descriptions of adolescent girls

while they were still adolescents, to try and understand something about how, or if, the recollections of the adult participants tended to be altered over time. In other words, would the adult participants have chosen to describe their adolescent experiences in the same ways if they had been asked the same question while they were still adolescent girls? Would the same themes have emerged if adolescent girls were reflecting on their present experiences as did when adult women were asked to reflect upon what they had experienced as girls? In terms of the results of this study, one area in which this would have been interesting would have been related to the participants' concerns about their body weight. Most of the participants described it as a concern for them in their present lives as adult women, but most of the participants did not describe it as a concern during adolescence. As articulated in the discussion of the study's findings, the reasons for this are unclear, and conducting the same study with adolescent girls could potentially shed light on this issue. It could be a surprising research finding if most of the adolescent participants did not describe worrying about their weight as a concern.

It could also have potentially enriched the research findings to increase the diversity of the research sample demographically. All of the participants of the study were single at the time of the study and only two of them had ever been married. Only one of the participants had children, and it would be interesting to learn if marital status or being a parent altered the kinds of descriptions provided by the participants. Were the particular kinds of losses and limitations described by the participants related in any way to their life situations, or would a sample of married women with children have described the same kinds of experiences? For instance, the participants in the current study who were currently not involved in a relationship with a man, were much

more likely to describe painful experiences with male peers that occurred during adolescence than the participants that talked about having a current relationship with a man. These are some of the possible directions that future research studies could pursue, which might yield additional descriptive data to an understanding of adolescent female embodiment.

### Conclusion

This study of adolescent female embodiment sought to contribute to an understanding of how adolescent girls experience the changes in their bodies occurring during adolescence, and also explored the question of whether these experiences are so profound that, as women, they are at risk of experiencing limitation and loss of potential in the course of their adult lives.

The organizing framework for consideration of these questions was borrowed from the thinking of Pipher (1994) and Boss (1994). Pipher provides a cultural analysis of adolescent female development, and believes that the adolescent girl's changing body is something that can make her vulnerable to a loss of wholeness, self-confidence, and self-direction that can continue into adulthood. Pipher's description of female adolescent development can provide an example of constricted human potential as conceptualized by Boss, who understood health as freedom or openness to live out one's existential possibilities.

An objective of the study was to illuminate the ways in which the participants might describe their existential possibilities as being restricted in relation to their adolescent experiences of embodiment. The results of the study indicated abundant evidence of

such restricted potential, occurring both during adolescence, as well as adulthood.

The participants were asked to describe their experiences of bodily change in relation to how such changes affected their view of themselves, their relationships with others, and their everyday lives, as well as how these experiences had affected their lives since adolescence. In terms of the self, the findings indicated a dramatic unity of the body and the self, supporting previous research indicating a strong relationship between one's body image and self-concept. The present study illuminated particular kinds of struggles that adolescent girls become engaged within, struggles that, in some cases continue in their present lives. These are efforts to save or reclaim the self, and include struggles with authenticity, as well as developing a sense of autonomy and competence. The participants described how their lives were influenced by the factual nature of being an adolescent female, and shared their stories related to menstruating for the first time, as well as what the possibility of becoming pregnant meant to them. This was one of the more interesting findings of the study in that the fact that feelings about pregnancy were evoked in this study of female embodiment demonstrated the unitary, continuous quality of human experience as it relates, in this case, to embodiment.

For these participants, the interconnectedness of their relationships with others and the body/self was also illuminated as they shared their stories of trying to adjust and come to grips with their changing bodies, as they attempted to negotiate a changing interpersonal landscape. Persons most often significant in this process, were identified by the participants, as being their mothers, and female and male peers. It was these relationships that were most often cited by the research participants as sources of pain or emotional support.

Finally, the participants universally identified that they had consciously experienced the process of feeling that their bodies had now become “objects” in the world, in ways that were entirely new to them, that they could no longer continue in life being unaware of or forgetting their bodies as they had done previously. They were no longer free in that regard.

As women, most of the participants have been engaged in various kinds of struggles to return themselves, their relationships, and their freedoms in the world, to what they had experienced earlier in life, prior to adolescence.

Boss describes this most human of struggles as ultimately the freedom to be fully human.

In Boss’s view Dasein must

...establish open relationships with each of the phenomena that inhabit her world, no matter where in her open realm of perception it chooses to appear. And this bold act must be taken on not only in relation to inanimate objects but for every living creature, every other person, and for the potentialities of one’s own existence: in short, for everything in heaven and earth from which she has ever fled...repeated questioning of her attempts to flee from such phenomena encourages her to perceive, and carry out, the great task that is placed before her as a human-being-in-the-world, the task of facing up to everything that addresses her from the open realm of her being-there...(p.279).

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**APPENDIX A**

**EDITED SYNTHESIS #1****Tina****Relationship of body to perceived perceptions of peers and relationships with others**

When I think of the changes that occurred with my body during adolescence, inevitably I think of certain moments. I remember standing in the middle school lunch line the first time I wore a bra. The subtle pressure of the straps and hooks, now so familiar, was brand new.

R - The first thing that you brought up when you thought back to your adolescence, the first thing you talked about, was the first time that you wore a bra. And you did go on to describe that, but I'm going to ask you, what was that like for you the first time that you wore a bra? What do you recall about that?

P - The one vivid thing that I remember which is what I was talking about was I was standing in my middle school lunch line, and I could feel it when I was wearing it, and I was so sure that everybody else could tell that somehow yesterday I showed up at school and I was not wearing a bra, and today I was. I don't know why I got that sense because I'm sure that nobody was paying attention to me. I'm trying to think if you're asking did I like it, did I not like it. I don't think it mattered so much about it, as it was just a change.

R - It was a change.

P - Yes. I'm not real big on change in general in life.

R - So you felt sort of self-conscious.

P - I did.

The subtle pressure of the straps and hooks, now so familiar, was brand new.

R - Then you went on to describe how it felt and talked about the straps and hooks and that was such a new feeling and was brand new. So, you were just saying that you're not sure whether you liked it or not, with it being a new feeling.

P - I guess I know I've talked to other girls who were kind of proud when they got their first bra, and I was not. I'm not sure what else to say.

R - It was just that it was a new feeling and it didn't feel like something that you felt proud about, as you've heard other people say.

P - Yes.

I was convinced that everyone around me knew I wore a bra. I remember several years before that leaving an elementary school music class. A boy beside me suddenly asked me if I was “blossoming.”

R – You were convinced that everyone knew that you had a bra on. Then you talked about being in a music class and that there was a boy in your class who asked – this is interesting – he asked you if you were blossoming. I was curious about what you meant by blossoming or what did you think he meant by blossoming?

P – I really had no idea when he asked me that. I guess it, like I said, that he had no idea either. It might have just been something that he had heard his mom talking about or something. It sounded just the way he was asking it, he kind of said it softly and just the way he said it made me think that this was something that isn't good that he couldn't ask me. It made me feel kind of uncomfortable because I didn't know what he was asking me and what it meant. I wrote down that he said the word blossoming but it could have been blooming. I'm not sure which one of those two. I didn't really remember because I didn't know what it meant at the time, and it wasn't until two or three years later that I fully understood what it meant, that I thought back that he asked me that two or three years ago, whatever it was, and that's when I remembered he did ask me and that's what he meant and why did he ask me and I don't know.

R – So that was kind of an uncomfortable feeling because you didn't really know what he was talking about.

P – No, I didn't.

R – This might be a hard question but if you could think back on it, you talked about having a vague notion of what that meant, but then you said you were shutting him up. That vague notion that you had, what was your understanding at that point of what he was talking about?

P – I'm not quite sure if I knew it at that time or if I'm projecting backwards. I'm really not sure. I think I kind of had a notion that it was something that girls did and boys did not. I think that was about all that I knew at that time, that it was a term that people used for girls and not for boys.

R – So, you were conscious of the fact that he was talking about something that happened just to girls and it was a unique thing that happened to girls.

P – At least it was something that specific terminology was used for girls.

R – So you were conscious that he was referring to some difference in the way that girls mature as opposed to boys.

P – It could have been that because he asked me that he was aware too, that it was something that he could only ask to a girl. He could have been curious, like he had heard from his mom or whoever that they talk about this blossoming and they talk about girls and what is it and that kind of thing. Maybe he was trying to find out. He was curious, too. I don't know.

I had only a vague notion of what that meant – and I'm sure his understanding was no greater than my own. I shut him down with a sharp "No"!

R – Then you described your reaction to that. You said that you shut him down with a sharp "No"! and there's an exclamation point here when you were responding to him that way, and then you described it as a sharp "No"! What were you feeling then when you were telling him that?

P – I don't know if it was too strong of a word to say that I was frightened or I was scared just because I didn't want to look like I had no idea what he was talking about. I guess it was more that I just wanted him to stop because if he asked me additional questions, I couldn't answer them. I think that's what I remember most.

R – So there was a feeling of being sort of scared as well as being worried that he was going to ask you more and that you wouldn't be able to answer.

P – Yes.

I was also being judged on how I looked, on whether I used makeup or had developed a nice figure – instead of how well I did in school or whatever.

R – You talked about being judged for how you looked and whether you had makeup on, about your figure being judged instead of being judged for doing well in school. So that was like a new thing. How do you think that sense of being judged in all of these areas influenced how you were thinking about your body at that point?

P – I'm really not sure to be honest. I guess you're asking me how it was that the feeling of being judged affected what I thought about myself, right?

R – Yes.

P – Sorry, I tend to start thinking and then I forget the question. I don't know if I really had a sense at that point that I wasn't real comfortable with myself, that I didn't necessarily like how I looked. I don't think I had quite gotten to that stage yet. I guess there was just more confusion and not quite knowing what I was supposed to do and what I was supposed to think. That's the best answer that I can give right now.

R – That’s a very good answer. Just to follow up with that, what was it like for you to feel judged? Since that was new sort of experience, what was it like to feel judged for all of these things?

P – I’m not really sure that I was aware that it was happening at that time. I guess I was just aware that there were these girls that seemed to be more with it and more put together, and the awareness that people were getting a lot of attention and that my classmates would talk about them or look at them or whatever, and that was not happening so much for me. I don’t know if it was a sense that I thought that this was a good thing or a bad thing or it was just an awareness that this was happening.

And this makes me feel poorly about myself.

R – You then went on to say that you have a hard time accepting how you look. You said it makes you feel poorly about yourself. How does it make you feel poorly about yourself? How does it do that?

P – It’s one of those things that you kind of get the idea that, “Oh, if just looked good or looked like people look on TV or whatever, that your life would be better. I always prefer to do the reading or bookwork and maybe I should spend more time caring about making myself up or whatever. Does it make me a bad person that I prefer to do this other thing than paying more attention to the way I look. I guess it’s the question of are my priorities in the right place, and I want to say yes because that is what I prefer to do.

R – So it makes you feel poorly in the sense that it makes you question your priorities and whether your priorities are correct.

P – Yes.

I know specifically where some of my hang-ups come from

R – Then you talked about having what you called hang-ups. You said, “I know specifically where my hang-ups come from”. When you say “hang-ups”, what do you mean by “hang-ups”?

P – I guess hang-ups are specific things that I wish I could change about myself. If you were to ask me what I would change about the way that I look, those would be specific things that I would point out.

R – That’s what you were talking about when you said hang-ups?

P – Yes.

I think I’ve mentioned that I have always been shy, and I admit I can be a bit socially inept.

R – Then you talked about that you described yourself as being shy, and then you went further and said that, “I admit that I can be a bit socially inept.” So, that sounds like that’s a belief that you have about yourself.

P – Yes.

R – What do you mean by socially inept?

P – That I’m shy and even doing something like this research study is not something that I would normally do. I don’t do the small talk at the parties and that kind of thing. I much prefer to be off reading a book by myself. I have a horrible habit of not remembering people’s names and that kind of thing. I think just my awareness of these things means that I will avoid putting myself in places where I have to do the small talk thing.

R – So, again, it sort of puts you in a position where you want to avoid certain areas or certain things.

P – Yes.

Thinking about how adolescence changed my perception of myself is a lot easier than thinking of how it altered relationships with others.

R – You talked about when you think about your adolescence, that it changed your perception of yourself and that is a lot easier than thinking about how it alters your relationships with others.

P – Yes.

R – So thinking about how it changed your perception of yourself is easier than thinking about how it altered your relationships. How did the changes that occurred during your adolescence alter your relationships with other people?

P – This is such a hard question for me to answer. I really don’t know. I can make guesses that just my shyness makes me prefer to do things where there may be one or two other people and not to do the whole party scene or whatever. But, again, it’s the whole question of which came first and I don’t know.

R – Do you think that the changes that you were experiencing in your body made your relationships with others change in some fundamental way? Did it alter your relationships in some fundamental way?

P – I would think so and I don’t know if it’s a matter of remembering that one moment when the guys laughed at me and maybe the assumption that people are a little more

inclined to laugh or whatever. That's an idea that I have but I can't say for sure that that's what happened. So it's an educated guess on my part.

High school was better, because by then I had grown accustomed to a new me.

R – Because the way you talked about it, you had grown accustomed to a new you. Now, when you say you grew accustomed to a new you, are you talking in terms of your body? You got used to a new you, you said.

P – I think so, yes. It was also a matter of that and a matter of finding my own friends that I felt more comfortable with by that point. I was a card- carrying member of the band geeks, we were all kind of a group, and I had a set of friends and everything. That's more of how I relate when I think back to high school, I think more about the fact that I was in this group of friends and we all hung out and that I was a lot more comfortable. I had more a niche then, and I knew where I fit in the social world of high school. I'm assuming that by that point, that I had reached more of an adult level and whatever. But when I'm just thinking on my own back to that time, that's not always the focus that I had.

I remember a desperate desire in middle school to physically be like the “popular kids.”

R – Again, you had described what we had talked about before, which you characterize as a desperate desire in middle school to be physically like the popular kids.

P – Yes.

R – So you wanted your body to be like theirs, to look like theirs?

P – Yes, I think so.

R – You said, “a desperate desire,” so this was something you wanted very much.

P – Yes, I did. I think it was a matter of, it was kind of a puzzle that I wanted to figure out. How do they do that? How do they get their hair to do that? How do they get that look? The make up or whatever. What do they do to do that and I didn't know. I still don't know.

They were developing nice figures, but more importantly, they had clear skin.

R – You said that they were developing nice figures, but more importantly, that they had clear skin.

P – Yes.

R – So that was something that was important to you.

P – Yes, because I never had it.

R – What was that like for you during that period of time, that you looked at these girls and saw that they had this clear skin, what was that like for you?

P – I guess it was a matter of asking, “is it something that they’re born with and it just happens,” which I’m sure is part of it. Do they use a magical product that they haven’t told the rest of us about, and why is it that they get the clear skin and I don’t?

R – So you saw that as an important attribute to have, that clear skin was something that was important.

P – Yes, it was kind of one of those middle school equations that you set up, that clear skin equals I will be more popular.

I can credit my undergraduate experience at Vassar with helping me a lot. Here was a group of brainy, beautiful women who were not ashamed of their bodies. I saw women who did not wear bras or shave. I heard women speak unabashedly of menstruation and sex.

R – Then you went on to talk about your undergraduate years and that was a time when you went through this process. I guess it was very helpful for you because there were these women who didn’t wear bras or shave their legs. What did that mean to you to be in that kind of environment?

P – It was quite shocking at first. Where I grew up you just did those things. You shaved your legs, you wore a bra and were just more respectable, or what they call respectable. To go to a place like Vassar with all this “woman power” hanging over it. It just was shocking at first. I didn’t know how to respond or what to do. And then came to really like it there. I really enjoyed the experience. These were women, a lot of them who were not slaves to fashion, and really believed that strongly – be yourself and that kind of thing. I don’t know if it was necessarily liberating at that time. I don’t know if I’m far enough away from that experience yet to be able to really comment on it. I graduated in 2000, so it’s not been that long. I think I’m still working through a lot of that. It was really traumatic for me to graduate.

R - It was traumatic?

P – Yes. I didn’t want to leave and I talked a little about it. It was at this point I came to realize, you know what? I’m kind of unhappy and I want to do something about that.

R – When you first went to college you said it was kind of shocking to you. It sounds like maybe it was a little bit uncomfortable at first.

P – At first it was.

R – And then you really grew to become very happy there.

P – Yes.

R – To the extent that it was traumatic to graduate.

P – Yes.

R – So that was a very kind of nurturing, comfortable environment for you?

P – Yes.

R – Is there anything else you would like to say, you would like to add? Is there anything that we didn't touch on that you feel like you would like to add?

P – I had talked about how important Vassar was and I really don't know if I would have gone through that kind of revelation in junior year to the idea that, "hey, I need to do something. I'm better than I think I am." I don't know if that would have happened if I had gone to another school other than Vassar.

R – So it was that environment that helped you get to that point.

P – And I think it was, I mean it's a womens school.

R – So you feel that that experience of having gone to the all womens college that was very helpful for you.

P – Yes. I would think that a lot of the thought I got there and the theory that we talked about, kind of influenced me. So I wonder if it was because of that experience that I've done the thinking that I have.

R – It certainly sounds like it helped you in that area, and that maybe things would have been different if you hadn't been in that environment, an all girls environment. Having had that experience in college was a very positive sort of process for you

P – It was.

### **Relationship of bodily changes to self-image and self-concept**

My every day life during adolescence was not a happy experience.

R – Then you go back to your adolescence, talking about everyday life, and you said it was not a happy experience. Can you describe that, how it wasn't happy, or what was unhappy about it?

P – I just remember being really, really self-conscious and unsure of myself. I'm not sure I want to describe it. I'm not really quite sure, I just remember wishing that things were different.

R – Different how?

P – I guess one thing was, I wasn't interested in what a lot of my friends and my peers were interested in. I didn't care about buying the YM magazine and other teen magazines. I didn't really care about New Kids on the Block, the music that everybody was into, and I really didn't care about them. I had questions of "should I be interested in that, do I really want to become interested in that just to make other people happy?" I didn't become interested in guys until very late and there was the question of, "is there something wrong with me?"

R – You were wondering if there was something wrong with you?

P – Yes. A lot of questions about, "should I be different than what I am" and that kind of thing.

R – Now in terms of your body, is that also difficult to go back and think about it? It was kind of an unhappy experience, was that also true in terms of your body?

P – I would think so, but that wasn't always my main focus. It was not the sense that, the sense of uncertainty again. I guess it was unhappiness about making myself look the way that the popular girls looked. It seems to be so easy for them, why isn't it easy for me, too? I don't know if it was easy for them or not, but it looked like it was.

R – So the fact that you even had to think about this stuff and you had to worry about trying to look like the other girls and that sort of thing

P – Yes.

Even now as I write, I'm aware of a subtle reluctance even to think back to middle school.

R – It is significant that both when you were writing this, you talked about how you were even reluctant to think back to that time and just how you were talking about it, you said that you didn't even want to think about it. So what that tells us, that it is even difficult for you to even think about that time. Whatever was going on then, that it wasn't the easiest or happiest time in your life.

P – No.

R – So middle school seemed like a difficult time?

P – Yes.

High school was better, because by then I had grown somewhat accustomed to a new me.

R – And high school was better you said.

P – Yes.

It was my junior year that I first became aware that I was unhappy and should do something about it. Looking back, I think I was depressed for a long time.

R – You mentioned about being unhappy and then wanting to do something about it.

P – Yes, I think it was sometime, probably my junior year when I first realized, you know what? I'm not happy being shy. And I'm not happy, kind of thinking down about myself all the time. And that I don't know what I can do about it but I'm going to start finding out what I can do. Yeah.

R – Just getting back to the issue of your body, was that in any way related to your feelings about your body? The feeling of being unhappy and the feeling that you were kind of depressed?

P – Part of it was. The idea that I really didn't like the way I looked. I started doing some things about that, wearing make up and that kind of thing. There was also the idea that I haven't gotten to this point yet, the idea of doing yoga, ti-chi, something active with myself, and I haven't gotten to that point yet, that's probably somewhere further down the road. I think I can pretty much pinpoint it to junior year that I decided that I needed to make some changes, just the way my feelings, the way I act towards myself as well as other people.

R – Now is that something that was related in part to your body, and has that continued or has that changed would you say?

P – I think I was depressed. I think I'm a worrier. I think I have a tendency to think that the glass is half empty, but I've tried to become more aware of it, to say you don't have to be down on yourself all the time. The world is not going to explode tomorrow. You don't have to worry about this kind of thing and just do things that make myself happy.

I've now been on the road of discovery to a more self-accepting me for about three years. It hasn't been easy, but I believe I'm making progress.

R – You finished off here by saying that you've been on this road of discovery to a place that would be more accepting of yourself. You kind of started this journey about three years ago?

P – Yes, that would have been my junior year.

R – So you felt more self-accepting and you also noted that that has not been easy but that you believe you're making progress. Would you say that you're more accepting, in terms of your body, do you feel that you're more accepting of your body? Has that changed?

P – I think so. Not a whole lot but I'm getting there. There are moments, like I'm packing up right now to go for spring break. I'm going to visit my parents in California and I haven't worn my swimsuit for ages and ages. And I put it on and I looked at myself in the mirror and I thought, "that's not awful, that's not bad." And I don't think I would have done that before. I like myself when I wear make up now. So, I'm making progress, I think.

R – Yeah, it sounds like it. So you're able to put bathing suit on and not feel like you want to say something critical about yourself.

P – Yeah, or put the cover up on and that kind of thing.

R – And that you feel more okay about wearing make up than you did before. So there are those kinds of changes.

P – Yeah.

I've heard people say that girls lose themselves somewhere in adolescence. While I hate to think that that's what happened to me, I don't know what else to call it.

R – The final thing that you said here was that you've heard people say girls lose themselves somewhere. What do you mean by lose themselves?

P – It's just something that I've heard. I haven't done a lot of reading. It's just the idea that girls kind of lose their self-confidence. They learn to be critical of themselves. It seems to be, from what I've heard, that it's taught and is not something that comes about naturally. That is one thing that I kind of think about somewhat and that seems to fit. Thinking back over what I've gone through, and I don't want to think this happened, and I don't know if it's correct or not. It's just something that I thought about and wondered, "Is this true or not?"

R – So you're kind of feeling that that or something like that is kind of similar to – that may describe what you went through in some ways.

P – Yeah.

### **Relationship of bodily changes to lack of knowledge**

Their mothers let them shave their legs and pluck their eyebrows. I remember thinking that these girls must have inherited a natural knowledge of how to properly apply lipstick or achieve perfectly tanned legs. Even now, I think that there should be a handbook that explains how to apply mascara, how to avoid razor burn, or what to do if, eek!, you have hair on your nipples.

R – Then you went back to talking about their mothers allowing them to shave their legs and pluck their eyebrows. Then you went on to say what we just talked about, that having a natural knowledge of how to apply lipstick or how to achieve perfectly tanned legs. You described these different areas of the body, how to avoid razor burns or what to do if you have hair on your nipples, and all of these kinds of things. You said, “eek!” You refer to a number of things here. In general, I guess what you’re talking about here is, again, a feeling that they kind of have this knowledge that you’re not privy to and you talked about a handbook about how to do these things. So you felt that they knew things and they have these physical attributes that you didn’t feel you have.

P – Right, yes.

R – How did that influence your thinking about your own body?

P – I think that it made me feel that if I only knew this stuff, that I would be able to achieve what they did. It’s just one thought that has crossed my mind. I don’t know if it was a matter of thinking that I should have been able to naturally be able to do what they did. I think it was more the idea that, if only I could learn what they do, that I would be able to do it too. I’m trying to think back to the way I thought back then.

R – Is that something that you still experience today? Does that stay with you at all or have you gone beyond that?

P – I think so. I think I still believe that. It’s a matter of, I could probably learn to do these things if I wanted to. But I think I’m at the point where I’m not really sure I want to and that is not really a high priority for me.

### **Relationship of body to mother**

I also remember the giggle of middle school boys when I began to grow dark hair on my legs, but my mother thought me still too young to shave.

R – So you talked about hearing in middle school, you said that there were boys who were giggling when I began to grow dark hair on my legs, but your mother thought you were too young to shave. What was that like for you?

P – I was very upset with my mother.

R – With your mother?

P – Yes, because I was very self-conscious because there were other girls who were starting to shave. I have very dark hair, which is something I inherited. I wanted to be able to wear shorts and skirts and stuff like that, but I felt very self-conscious then that everybody would be able to see that my legs were all hairy. I wanted to be obedient to my mom and make her happy and everything, and she said, “No, you’re too young to shave. You’re going to be doing it for the rest of your life and you’re going to start to hate it and not want to do it, so wait as long as you can”. I wanted to be able to, and I don’t think I ever shaved without her knowing it. I would wear panty hose to try to cover up the hair so that people could not see. I didn’t like my mom saying that I couldn’t.

R – You didn’t like your mom saying that you couldn’t shave.

P – Yes.

R – So you would do things like wear panty hose and you did things that would cover the hair up.

P – Yes.

R – You had mentioned that you felt kind of embarrassed about having the hair and not being able to shave.

P – Yes.

R – It’s interesting that you said that you were upset with your mom about her not letting you shave. Were you upset at all with the boys that were giggling? Did you have feelings towards them?

P – Yes, I didn’t like it, obviously, that they were giggling at me, and then I guess I would say that I was angry at them but I didn’t really get the idea that they shouldn’t be giggling. If that makes any sense whatsoever.

R – You kind of thought that it was a normal thing for guys to do.

P – Yes. I have hair on my legs and they’re going to laugh at me, and there’s nothing I can do about it.

R – Okay, that makes sense.

P – I really didn’t think about that before but I think it’s true.

R – You think it’s true that –

P – That I expected them to do that and I was angry that they did, but I didn't really expect that I would be able to make them stop or anything like that unless I shaved.

R – Is there anything else that you want to say? You kind of look like you wanted to go on and I didn't want to cut you off.

P – I don't think so. It's just kind of a self-revelation.

R – I definitely don't want to interfere with self-revelation.

P – No.

For a long time I resisted this. I don't think it was a conscious decision. But I didn't even wear makeup or style my hair much. Only recently have I begun to wear clothes that betray any kind of a figure. Even now, I'm not that comfortable wearing them.

R – You said you resisted doing some of these things. I think that you were talking about having to put on makeup and those sorts of things. Can you say a little bit more about resisting that?

P – I think that resisting might be a word that I use now and apply it backwards, as opposed to what was happening then. I guess part of it was that my parents were not really into making themselves up and that kind of thing. My mom wears a little bit of makeup but she's not a person who puts on her face every morning or whatever. I guess I was more following their example than I was seeing other girls around me doing. I guess in that case you could say that it was resistance in that I was not following the crowd. Instead I was doing the example that I saw going on in my family. I think my thought was that it was a matter of kind of applying or following values that my family had as opposed to the other people in my age group. That's the best way that I can explain it.

R – So that sense of resistance had more to do with being somewhat resistant to following the crowd with other kids your age.

P – Yes.

R – Then you said that you didn't wear much makeup or style your hair very much, that it's been more recently that you've begun to wear clothes that sort of accent your figure, and you said that even now you're not that comfortable wearing those kinds of clothes.

P – Yes.

R – So would you say that sense of not being comfortable with the clothing and styling your hair and all that, is something that began in adolescence and continues today although you're getting more comfortable with it? Would that be accurate to say or do

you see it as two different things – you felt one way during your adolescence and now you feel a different way at your current age?

P – No, I would say that it all builds on each other. It's a continuous movement. I would think so. Whatever I experienced back then I carry with me and it does shape who I am today.

R – When you say that it shapes who you are today, how do you think it shapes you today if you had to describe it? Is there a way for you to describe how it kind of shapes you today?

P – I guess it's a learning of some of what I've done before, but trying to be more confident and more self-assured with myself. Somewhere in there, I don't know where, I kind of learned to be shy and to try to not get people to notice me just by what I'm wearing or whatever. There is an idea that there is nothing inherently awful about me. I can be a nice person. Many people like me, so it's kind of an attempt to change what I was before.

R – So you're discovering those kind of things about you and that there is nothing inherently awful about you and people like you. Those are nice things to discover about yourself.

P – Yes. I'm not exactly sure where these ideas happened. I don't know if it was directly related to what was going on in my body.

R – You were saying that you learned to be shy and that “I was trying to not draw attention to myself”. Was that something that started during adolescence or had that been there before?

P – I really don't know. My memories of elementary school are a little blurry. I would think that it was somewhere around middle school if I had to guess, very late elementary school and middle school.

Perhaps if I had a big sister or a mother who was fashion-conscious I would have learned these things. I did not, however, and my adolescence was an adventure in learning what I most needed to know and pretending everything else didn't matter.

R – Then you talked about if you had an older sister or a mother who was more fashion-conscious, and then you would have learned those things. And so because you didn't, you described your adolescence as “an adventure in learning what I most needed to know, and pretending that everything else didn't matter.” Pretending that everything else didn't matter, what are you referring to there?

P – I think I've talked about this before, the idea that my family wasn't terribly caught up in the latest trends or whatever, and that it wasn't so much a choice for me to learn to do

the make up or whatever, that it was just kind of following along with what I'd always done. The idea of what I chose to be important, academics or whatever. I told myself that this was what was important and the fashion or whatever didn't matter so much. It was what I told myself, kind of a self-selecting of what was important. Because I chose not to make myself up or whatever, I told myself that that's not so important.

### **Relationship of bodily changes to negative feelings regarding changes**

In short, I would say I did not like the changes that occurred during adolescence.

R – You described that overall that you really didn't like the changes that occurred during your adolescence. Can you talk about that a little bit? Can you talk about what you didn't like?

P – I was kind of happy as being a little sheltered girl and just the idea of growing up and I'm going to have to go off to college and become an adult. That was not anything that I was rushing into, and then I guess just the idea that the changes that were happening with my body were indications that, yes, I was growing up and I would have to go out and earn a living or go to college or whatever. I kind of equated the two and I didn't like it that way. It also is that when you grow up, there's a lot more things that you have to do to just take care of yourself. I think I mentioned in here that I have always been much more into different books and the academics and that sort of thing. When you have to go off to shave or whatever, that is time that you can't spend reading if that makes any sense.

R – Yes, definitely. So the changes were pointing towards a future where you were going to have additional responsibilities. So that was conjuring up with those kinds of future responsibilities and additional things that you would have to do as an adult. It was kind of connected in your mind in that way.

P – Yes. Just the additional time that goes into it and the additional money that you have to spend on makeup and stuff like that.

I have been unfortunate enough to inherit more than my fair share of body hair.

R -You mentioned the body hair in a few different places and you talked about it being unfortunate. How is it unfortunate or what is unfortunate about having body hair?

P – It's not socially desirable is one word for it. You know, shaving the legs, and I have a lot of hair on my arms, and I started bleaching it and that kind of thing.

R – Is it something that you've just done recently or is it something that you've done for awhile?

P – I just started recently. It's something my mom has too. I know that I got it from her. There's one incident that happened last year when I was doing an internship in St. Louis where there was one woman that I became close friends with and we went to church together and everything. She had a son who was, I think, seven years old and I had kind of a little party over at my house and she brought her son over. It was summertime and I was wearing shorts, and I remember that he came over and he was looking at my arms and touching the hair like he can't believe that a woman would have hair like that. And he mentioned that he didn't know any other adult women that had hair like this. It made me feel really bad just because it's considered terribly unattractive and it makes me feel very self-conscious.

R – So it was that incident with that little boy that was one of the triggers for you deciding to start bleaching?

P – Yes.

For the longest time I couldn't understand why I was so convinced that body hair was morally wrong.

R – You even described that you were convinced that having body hair was morally wrong.

P – That's probably an exaggeration. It's more a reflection of the fact that I really don't like it.

R – You said that it was an exaggeration. Do you have any feelings now? Does it seem that way to you now, that it's morally wrong?

P – No, not morally wrong.

R – How about during adolescence. Was that the way that you experienced it then?

P – I don't think so. It was something that I wasn't particularly happy about and that I wished would change. That's probably the extent of it.

R – So you think the idea of feeling that it was morally wrong, you're saying now, that was kind of an exaggeration and you don't think that you really felt that way?

P – No, I think that was probably me being cute or –

R – Okay, like being a creative writer.

P – Yes.

### **Relationship of body to men**

At the same time, I remember a few years later, the first time I became aware that a man was checking out my legs. I didn't know if I liked it.

R – The first time you were aware that a man was checking out your legs and you said that you weren't sure if you liked this. The first time that you had this awareness that there was this guy looking at your legs, what was that like for you? How do you think that affected how you felt about your body?

P – It's kind of strange. I was in Paris with my family.

R – In Paris?

P – Yes, in Paris, and this French guy, I assume, and I don't remember how old I was – maybe fifteen. We were coming out of a metro stop and I was probably wearing shorts and sneakers or whatever, because we had been doing the tourist thing or whatever. I remember that we were coming out of this metro stop and it wasn't actually me that first noticed it, it was my mom. She said, “this guy is checking you out”, and I'm like, “What do you mean checking me out”? I guess I felt a little embarrassed because I was with my family and it was the first that it ever happened, and I didn't know if I should do anything. I didn't speak French at all so I couldn't have gone over and talked to him or whatever. It was kind of nice. I think I also thought that I knew it was in France and it was kind of an isolated incident, and I doubt if it will ever happen again. I didn't quite know what to say to my parents because I don't think that's really something that you talk to about with your parents being a fifteen year-old. It was a combination of like, oh, that's kind of nice that he would look at me and also kind of embarrassed because I didn't know what to do. I didn't really have any guy experience.

R – So, it was kind of pleasurable that a guy was noticing you. You also had sort of an uncertainty about, you had the feeling that maybe there was something that you were supposed to do. What did you think that you were supposed to do?

P – I didn't know if I should kind of look at him where it would indicate that I noticed “that you noticed me”, or if I should just ignore him and not show that I noticed. I really had no idea, and then there is the whole, “Are the French different”? I don't know. That's probably not your typical first guy noticing you story.

R – So it created some real uncertainty for you.

P – Yes it did.

I've never been in a serious relationship and often times I wonder if my body is capable of turning a guy's head.

R – You said that you have never had a serious relationship and that often times you wondered if your body was capable of turning a guy’s head. There is again that idea of wondering if your body is going to be able to do what you want it to do. So, again, wondering if your body would be capable of turning a guy’s head. What do you mean by capable?

P – I guess it’s the idea of – do I have a figure that guys will find attractive, and I said that I’m not a snappy dresser. Should I wear different things just because I think that guys will find it more attractive, or should I go with what I feel more comfortable with? I guess those are the main questions.

R – So it actually raises new questions for you. I mean it raises these questions in your mind about, “should I wear what I want to wear or should I wear something that I think will attract a guy,” those kind of things.

P – Yes.

### **Relationship of bodily changes to increased focus on the body**

I’ve worked on creative writing and excelling in academics. It’s hard to say whether my natural inclination for thinking and “brain work,” led to a displeasure with the changes in my body or whether the changes only heightened my awareness my reliance on relating to the world through thinking. It was probably a combination of both.

R – You talked about creative writing and excelling in academics. It’s hard to say whether my natural inclination for thinking and brain work led to displeasure with the changes of my body, you said. What do you mean by displeasure?

P – I think it’s just the idea that it might not have matured the way that I expected it to and the idea that I have to pay more attention to it. It’s not quite behaving and being something that I can just use and walk around in and that kind of thing.

R – Your body was not cooperating in that way.

P – Yes, cooperation. That’s a good word.

R – It was now requiring you to pay attention to it.

P – Yes.

### **Relationship of body to feelings of competence**

Suddenly I needed to pay attention to my body as well as my mind. I needed to think about shaving, plucking my eyebrows, and buying feminine hygiene products.

R – Then you talked about, in summary I needed to pay attention to my body as well as my mind, and you needed to think about all these things like shaving and plucking your eyebrows and buying feminine hygiene products. If you can think back to that time when you were first having to pay attention to these things like shaving and buying products. What was that like for you to have to make that change?

P – I remember I was not terribly good at it and I would run out of things, like if my period starts then I don't have anything because I forgot to buy them. I just remembered and I don't know if it was confusion, but I talked about this a little bit later in my paper that it seemed like the popular girls, and I was not part of the popular crowd, I was part of the band crowd. We were the smart kids, and then there were the popular kids, and it always seemed to me that they were naturally born with the ability to look good and that was something that the rest of us just had not inherited or whatever, and I was upset about that. I guess because I wanted to be smart and to look good. I was unhappy about that and I guess it was because that was another thing that I'm just figuring out on the spot, so I don't know if it's right or not but things that mattered before, like school work, would come easily to me and these were things that didn't come easily to me. I wasn't sure why that was, and if it meant that there was something suddenly wrong with me and that kind of thing.

R – So there was this new area of you were sort of used to being competent in life, being smart, being intelligent, and being good at things, and then this was something new. You weren't sure if you were good at this or not. You didn't feel like you were good at this?

P – Yes, and I guess as things went along I began to realize that I'm really not good at this. I guess another thing is that I didn't necessarily want to be good at it. I don't know if there was a thing where I wasn't good at it, and therefore, I decided that it was something that I should be good at. Does that make sense?

R – Yes, sure.

P – That's just something that I thought of.

R – So that I'm sure I'm clear, when we talk about what you felt that you weren't good at, what exactly was that, if you describe it, the thing that you weren't good at?

P – I guess just the whole making yourself up and having the hairdo that looks good and wearing the makeup. I don't think I classify myself as a snappy dresser, and just kind of the self-presentation kind of thing.

There was no place for me in sports or physical activity. On occasion, I have thought about taking dance class or learning yoga or something, but I've always been afraid my body would embarrass me.

R – Maybe not. Probably not. Then you said that you felt that there was not a place for you in sports or physical activity. What do you mean by no place for you?

P – I guess it's just the idea that the people were on the sports teams. I don't know if it was just the "jock versus the smart person" stereotyping was developing at that time, that academics and classes was just the place where I was going to excel. And that if I attempted to go out for a sports team or whatever, that I wouldn't have anything to contribute in that arena. That's the best way that I can put it.

R – So you didn't feel that there was a place for you because you didn't feel particularly confident about your ability to contribute in that area.

P – Yes.

R – You talked about that you had thought about maybe taking a dance class or learning yoga, but that you always felt that your body would embarrass you. How did you think that your body would embarrass you?

P – I think it's just that I have no training in this area and that I would show up and I would get the steps wrong or I wouldn't be able to do a certain thing that was required, and that my brain would think, okay, do this thing but the body wouldn't follow.

R – So, you didn't have confidence in your body, it sounds like, in that your body would be able to perform as you would like it to.

P – Yes, the quote, something about the spirit is willing but the body is not able.

R – So that would kind of sum it up then.

### **Relationship of body and mind**

I've always been a cerebral kind of person. I prefer thinking to doing.

R - Then you described yourself as being a more cerebral kind of person that you prefer thinking to doing. When your body began to change, how did that affect you, being that you are more cerebral? How did that affect you? Did that interfere with you being a cerebral kind of person?

P – I think no. It's not like I stopped becoming cerebral. I guess one of the things that I'm wondering, and I don't think I brought it up in this paper so much, is if being cerebral indicated that I had greater dislike for what was happening than other people did. Obviously, I'm not other people so I can't say what their experiences were, and that's probably what you're figuring out in your project here. I'm not sure if there is much else that I can say. I don't know if it will come out in some of the other questions you're

asking me or not. I guess if I could say how it affected me then I might write a big book on it and become famous or whatever. I don't know.

R – Yes, I was curious about it because of the fact that you raised it here in your description. You talked about being a more thinking-oriented person and more cerebral. That somehow connected for you with your changing body. I'm not sure how it's connected.

P – I'm not sure either. It might be just that if you sat me down and said to describe myself in ten adjectives or whatever, that something having to do with thinking and academics and bookwork is one way that I identify myself. It might be that no matter what research question that you asked me that it would come up.

R – Okay, I see what you're saying.

P – That's the best way I can think of to describe it, and I guess I do think about things a lot. I don't know if that's good or bad but I do think about things and I guess I just wanted to indicate that. This is not a question that I've spent hours and hours thinking about, but it has come up so I kind of just wanted to indicate that I had done some thinking about it before.

R – The one thing that occurs to me is one sort of obvious thing, is that if you're more oriented towards thinking about things as your body begins changing, that sort of forces you out of that. It forces you to attend to your body and to just pay attention to it and focus on it in a way that you didn't have to before. It kind of pulls you out of that thinking sort of mode and now you can't really stay in it entirely because you have to somehow pay attention to these changes. It kind of forces you to do that. I would see in that sense, it is kind of pulling you out of that to at least some extent.

P – Yes, there is. I think that sometimes there is sometimes the idea that if I could, I would just use my body as a vehicle to move my brain around and you can't do that because if you neglect what is going on in your body, then the mind can go too.

R – That's a very interesting way to describe it because when you're going through adolescence and your body is doing all these things that it never did before, that you're not able to neglect it. You have to pay attention to it and your body becomes more than this thing to sort of carry your brain around.

P – Yes.

I think adolescence created a rift between my thoughts and my body. People speak of the mind /body divide.

R – Then you were kind of building on being a cerebral type of person. You talked about adolescence as creating a rift between your thoughts and your body, and you talk about there is a mind/body divide. When you say rift, what kind of rift do you mean?

P – I guess for me it was the way that I could kind of describe the idea that in an ideal world I would have the body as a little carrier to carry my brain around in. I guess it also goes along with the idea that I just enjoy doing the reading and the academics and the thinking much more than I enjoy doing exercising, running or playing basketball or whatever. I think I tend to try to care for my mind than my body.

R – Are you trying to care for your body?

P – I would think so just in the idea that I'm always reading books or doing things, you know. I want to learn a lot and it's a great effort for me to put the aerobics tape on.

I think this happened to me.

R – You said that you felt that this happened to you, that there was this mind/body divide.

P – I guess it was something that I remember when I was younger, like when I took swimming lessons and I did the gymnastics and that kind of thing, and I just think that I was just a lot more physically active. I'm sure all kids are a lot more physically active than most adults are. I guess it's just those memories that make me think that it was something in adolescence, that maybe at some point I could become somebody who continued to do gymnastics or dance lessons or whatever into my adulthood, but I wasn't.

I've worked on creative writing and and excelling in academics. It's hard to say whether my natural inclinations for thinking and "brain work" led to a displeasure with the changes in my body or whether the changes only heightened my reliance on relating to the world through thinking. It was probably a combination of both.

I don't play sports and I don't like speaking in front of others, so I've taken to other means for recognition.

R – Then you talked about not playing sports, not liking to speak in front of other people. So you've looked for other sources for recognition. When you say that, are you talking about the academic pursuits? That's where you really excelled - school. So, it's more the intellectual arena where you've excelled.

P – Yes.

R – So that was when you found that you could get recognition for those sorts of things.

P – I was just thinking I remember, I'm not exactly sure why this memory just popped up, but I remember sitting in middle school, probably eighth grade, and every year at the end of the school year you had the awards ceremony. I would always get one of those awards for the top five people in the class with the highest GPA. I was so very proud of

those. I was so proud of those I would take them home and I would put them on my bookshelf or whatever. And I still have them in a drawer under my bed or somewhere, and I remember the principal. Every year we had to do the presidential physical challenge in gym class, where you have to run the mile and do so many pull-ups or whatever. And you would get the academic awards at this award ceremony, and then they would give out the awards to the people who had done this presidential physical challenge thing or whatever. There was this one girl, and her name was Jenny. I remember Jenny. And she had gotten the Presidential Fitness for all of the years that they gave it. It was sort of like fourth grade through eighth grade you have to do this thing or whatever, and I remember the principal announcing that they were going to give her an award because she had gotten this every single year. He specifically mentioned that it was the highest award that they would give out at the awards ceremony. I felt so bad because I got a highest GPA every single year that they offered it and why was that considered the highest achievement as opposed to the academic one.

R – So you had achieved what she did in the academic area with your grades. You achieved at least the same thing.

P – Being equivalent.

R – Okay, you achieved an equivalent to that and there was not a special recognition for that in the way that she got a special recognition for being good at sports and that bothered you.

P – It did. Enough that I remember it all these years later.

R – That is still with you. In fact, it still bothers you.

P – It does.

R – That’s a good question, and it would seem that in an academic environment in school, that’s a reasonable question. Why is the Physical Fitness Award being held out as the ultimate in achievement versus getting the best grades. That doesn’t really make sense.

P – It didn’t make sense to me at the time and I don’t know if it’s just that he got carried away in the moment, and I think, too, that being a principal you would give at least equal honor to the academics.

R – Right. That’s very interesting. That seems kind of strange, like why would they do that? So that was something that was troubling to you, and still is, and rightfully so.

P – Yes.

It may be a stretch to claim that a disconnect between my mind and my body has in turn led to a disconnect between my myself and others, but that’s the way I see my own situation.

R – Then you talked about, you go back to the idea of there being a disconnection between your mind and your body, and you’re wondering if that has added to a disconnection between yourself and other people, which is a very interesting thought, that if I feel disconnected from my own body, has that in some way led to a disconnection between me and other people. I think that is a very interesting thought.

P – It’s a working theory. It’s my attempt to look at where I am and the kind of person that I am and I ask myself, “why are you like that?” I don’t know why I’m like that, so that’s one idea I have.

R – When you say “like that,” you mean as far as how you relate to other people, a sense of shyness?

P – Yes, the shyness. My dad says “raging introvert.” The introvert and comfort with thinking and that kind of thing.

R – So you very much see those as being related. We can say that, that there is a relationship between those two things, how you experience the difference between your mind and your body that is related to how you experience your relationship with other people. That there is a connection there or relationship there.

P – I would think so, yes.

### **Relationship of body to being self-conscious**

I rarely wear shorts or sleeveless shirts or outfits that expose my stomach. I don’t play sports and I don’t like speaking in front of others so I’ve taken to other means for recognition.

R – Then you went on to talk about rarely wearing shorts and sleeveless shirts, clothes that expose your stomach. Is that part of the shyness, feeling shy about your body?

P – Yes, I think so.

### **Relationship of body to cultural expectations**

When I was a teenager, I read the book series, “Sweet Valley High,” which told about the twins Jessica and Elizabeth Wakefield. These young women wore a perfect size six. Ever since then, it has remained in my mind that I should wear a perfect size six too, even though I would probably need to take drastic measures to do so.

R – The you went on to talk about a book that you had read when you were a teenager, and talked about the characters in the book who wore a perfect, you said, size six.

P – I think that is the actual word that the author used.

R – And that since you had read that book that you sort of had it in your own mind that you should also be wearing a perfect size six even though you would need to take drastic measures to do so.

P – Yes.

R – At the time that you read that book, how do you think that affected how you felt about your body, reading a book like that?

P – This was an entire series. The characters were age sixteen, and I think they were juniors in high school or whatever. I probably started reading them when I was in middle school or whatever. I think I kind of read these books and I got the idea that when I become a junior in high school, this is what I am going to be. I'm going to be tall and blonde and wear a size six. Just the idea that I've been out of high school for awhile and that hasn't happened. I guess it's just the idea in the back of my mind that that's what should have happened. I'm not exactly sure why except that these characters were described as the All-American high school teenage girl. In an ideal world, that's the way you would act, and I just always had the idea that since they do that and everybody kind of read those books. It was a big thing to read these when I was going through school. That was what was supposed to happen. It kind of made me wonder why it didn't happen.

R – So you were questioning why you didn't turn out exactly like these characters in the book. There was a comparison going on in your mind with these size six characters that you're supposed to be just like that and that is how things were supposed to be.

P – I guess I should give a little more background about these books. I guess I kind of identified with them more particularly than any other book that I read at this time. I still remember these characters and its kind of telling me they were important to me. They were Jessica and Elizabeth and they were twins, and one of them was very outgoing and very sociable, and the other one was more reserved and studied a whole lot. I have a twin sister and she is a lot more outgoing and social, and then there's me, and I'm a lot more quiet and reserved and even my friends would mention that "you're like Elizabeth," and then, "your sister Kathy is like Jessica." Kathy and I would talk about it, too. It was kind of like we were identifying with these characters.

R – I was just going to say that it sounded like you identified with them.

P – Yes.

I also played with Barbie dolls when I was young. Many people criticize Barbie for unrealistic proportions, but it has also occurred to me that Barbie has no hair on her body, except for her head.

R – So, in addition to the characters in the book, you also mentioned Barbie hair. You talked about how Barbie is often criticized for unrealistic body proportions. The one thing that you noticed about Barbie is that she has no hair on her body.

P – That is correct.

R – What did you think about Barbie and the fact that she had no body hair? What did you think about that?

P – When I was ten and playing with Barbies, I didn't think about it and it wasn't until later, I'm not sure exactly when it happened, it was probably in the last four years or whatever that I seemed to realize that Barbie has no hair on her body. It was just so odd. It was something that I never thought of before, and it was like when I played with Barbie when I was younger and thought, when I grow up I'm going to have breasts and hips and whatever like Barbie. And suddenly I have hair too, and where did that come from?

R – So when you were younger, you pictured yourself one day as having all of these other attributes that Barbie had, and since Barbie didn't have any hair you weren't expecting to have hair either.

P – Yes.

I finally realized I had expected to be like Barbie: perfectly hairless in every way.

R – You had this realization that you had expected to look like Barbie, which you talked about a little bit ago, that Barbie was perfectly hairless. There's that word again, "perfectly" hairless.

These beliefs that somehow my body has matured incorrectly have made me very shy about myself.

R – You went on to talk about some of the beliefs that you had about your body. I wanted to ask you about the belief that somehow your body had matured incorrectly. What do you mean "incorrectly?" How does your body mature incorrectly?

P – I think that's tying back to what I was saying that I had expected to be a size six. I had expected not to have the hair and that because I – it wasn't what I had expected, and I guess it made me think that's not what other people expected.

R – It wasn't what other people expected

P – Yeah, do I need to expand on that?

R – I was just wondering when you said that it wasn't what other people expected, that you thought that there were things happening to your body that were out of the norm, and that other people would see those things and be surprised or that other people would take notice of these things.

P – I'm not sure how to explain this. It's not necessarily that it was out of the norm, but if everything were an idealized world then that's not what would happen because there was this disconnect. I hope this is right. That there was this disconnect between what actually happened and what you would hope to happen.

R – So there was a difference that your body developed in a way that was different than you were hoping would happen.

P – Yes.

R – So that's where you got the sense that it was incorrect, that it was different from what you were expecting?

P – Yes. I don't know if it was saying that what I hoped would happen, because really I had no reason to hope one way or the other because I assumed that one thing would happen and then something else happened.

R – Then because there were some unexpected things, or not what you were expecting to happen, that did have the effect of making you very shy about yourself. Can you say anything else about that?

P – Yes. I really don't know why exactly I grew up and got the personality that I do, and I really question, "Am I just naturally shy," and I projected that on to wearing long pants and sweatshirts or whatever. Is it that my feelings about my body that made me shy? I don't know.

R – So it's like which came first?

P – Yes, or if one did come first. I don't know, and sometimes I wonder if it was the progression of things that made me shy, or these specific moments that stand out like the guys laughing at me because I didn't shave my legs. I remember one specific moment like that and if I kind of remember that one thing, and because of that one memory, I feel this way or if it's an accumulation of things. I don't know.

My life since then has been a process of trying to co-exist happily with my body.

R – Then you talked about going through this process of trying to learn to co-exist happily with your body. What has that been like for you to learn how to co-exist?

P- Part of it is the idea that if I don't like something that I should just go ahead and try to change it. Telling myself, "I'm not going to be a size six." Somewhere I read that the average woman in America is size fourteen. So you know what? I'm just about level, come to think of it. To tell myself what I see in the movies or whatever isn't the average person, and that is not going to happen. Those are the major steps.

### **Relationship of bodily changes to expectations about changes**

I do know that these changes led to me stereotyping myself.

R – Then you said the changes led to stereotyping yourself. Stereotyping in what way?

P – I guess just the idea that I'm a little brown-noser studying person over here and that I'm good at the academics and I'm good at the schoolwork and that's really where I should spend all of my energies. There are other people over somewhere else, but I'm not one of them, who are good at the sports, and the snappy dressers and accessorize themselves well or whatever. And that gain attention through looking good. I'm just not one of those people. But I'm someone who gains attention through excelling in academics and that kind of thing. There are two kinds of people in the world and I'm one person and I'm not the other person. And I really shouldn't spend a lot of energy trying to be that other person because it's just not going to happen. That might be a little severe but that's the way it is.

R – The changes that didn't meet your expectations, that you developed differently than you were expecting to. For you that sort of confirmed this idea and this belief that you had about yourself that you were this academic person, this cerebral person, and that you believed that you were not going to be able to be one of those other people or you're not that type of person. That was your perception anyway.

P – Yes.

R – Do you still believe that? Is that something you believe?

P – Basically yes. I think I'm not quite as cut and dried and black and white as I used to be. There's kind of the idea that if you're not happy with yourself and you'd like to at least get some of these characteristics of these other people, then why don't you just get up and do something about it. Like there's no law that says I cannot wear makeup just because my mom doesn't, or that if you don't like the hair on your arms, then do something about it. I don't think it's quite as cut and dried as it used to be, but I still believe there's something – there's still the idea that I'm never going to excel in sports or be one of those people who just naturally seem to accessorize themselves well or whatever.

R – It's a little integrated now, the sense that it's not, as you said, so rigid and cut and dried and black and white. You're either this way or you're not. There's been some integration because there's been movement in that direction. For example, being unhappy about the hair on your arms, so you did something about it. So the way that you're describing it now, there has been a little bit of softening of that kind of thinking, the dichotomy. There is some movement in the other direction. It's not so much an all or nothing thing, that you can be a little more like that other sort of person if you choose to if that's something you want to do for yourself. As you said, there's no law that you can't

wear makeup or whatever it is that you want to do because there are really no laws like that that exist. The reality is that if you want to develop some of those characteristics as you go through the course of your life, and if you decide if there are attributes or characteristics that that other type of person has that you can certainly move towards those if you wish to.

P – Yes.

R – So there has been movement in your thinking in that area.

P – Yes.

I came to believe I could only do well at academics.

R – Then you said that you had come to develop this belief that you could only do well at academics. When you had that sort of idea about yourself, that you could only be good in school. Was that during adolescence when you said that, experiencing changes in your body, or was that something that you had kind of long believed about yourself.

P – I think that before adolescence, I kind of had that tendency, but I think that the cut and dried, “only in academics” idea was something that developed in middle and high school. Before that I had certainly done well in school. I had done the swimming lessons and the gymnastics or whatever, but it was some time in middle school, that I decided academics is for me, that I didn’t do any sports or anything like that, and then I really strove to be the person with the high GPA or whatever. That was something that probably happened in middle school.

R – Do you see that as being related to your experience, what you’ve described to me as your perception that your body wasn’t developing in a way that you expected it to, and you described as some displeasure about the way your body, that your body was developing. Or was that related?

P – I would think that there has to be some relationship.

R – You have the sense that they are in some way related?

P – I can’t see how they’re not, obviously. I’m probably going to need years of therapy to get there.

### **Relationship of body to recognition by others**

It was at this point that I started wearing something other than big sweatshirts and old jeans. I bought clothes in brighter colors. I began to think that I might deserve brighter colors.

R – You feel like you’ve made more of a concerted effort to do those kinds of things. You talked about making a change and what you wore. You said you started to wear brighter colors even to the extent that you said, and this is a very interesting statement, you said that you started to feel that you deserved to wear brighter colors.

P – Yes, I never saw myself as the type of person who could wear red. I thought to myself, red stings, that kind of idea.

R – You now decided that you feel that you’re more deserving, you’re worthy of wearing the color red.

P – Red to me was, you wanted to be noticed if you wore red. I thought, “well, I don’t really want people to notice me and I’m not going to wear red. I don’t wear a lot of red. Sometimes I do.

R – Just a little bit of red. So you feel a little more comfortable about having people notice you a little bit?

P – Yes.

R – So there’s been movement in that area as well then.

### **Relationship of body to freedom of movement**

I don’t remember worrying about my body when I was little. I ran around and used my body however I wanted.

R – Then you said that you don’t remember worrying about your body when you were little and when you were younger, and that you would use your body however you wanted to. I think that you just talked about this a little bit. How did you use your body when you talked about using it however you wanted to? How did that change during adolescence?

P – I guess the idea that I would run around and I remember being on the beach and just kind of running around and I wasn’t really worried or didn’t really give it a second thought. I guess just the idea that I could climb on a jungle gym or run around on the beach or whatever. It wasn’t something that I took for granted. Well, I guess it was something that I took for granted, but I just didn’t really think about it.

R – When you hit adolescence then you said it was something that you would think about more. You didn’t feel free to just kind of run around like you were more self-conscious maybe?

P – Yes.

R – So it changed in that way then.

P – Yes.

I don't like pigeon-holing myself, but I don't have the courage to change.

R – So that would kind of sum it up then. Then you said that “I don't like pigeon-holing myself.” When you say “pigeon-holing,” are you talking about what you just described as far as feeling like you only fit in one place?

P – Yes. I guess I used the term pigeon-holing because to me that does kind of indicate something that is kind of cramped or whatever. I would think that I would be able to do these other things if I put my mind to it and I worked at it. Somehow I'm not doing everything that I could and maybe there are things out there, yoga or whatever, that I would enjoy, but it's my own hang-ups and my own preconceived notions about myself that aren't allowing me to do these things.

R – So that because of those preconceived notions and hang-ups and so on, that that has restricted you to this more narrow area of existence. You talked about feeling cramped, like you're cramped into sort of a more narrow sort of space than you would need to be or like to be.

P – Yes, that's a good way of summing it up.

R – Then you said that you felt that you didn't have the courage to change. What does that mean to you? What do you mean by having the courage to change?

P – I guess it's just related to what I was talking about, that I probably would enjoy some of these other things. I can't say that there was something that I would find that I would like doing, but just the idea that I've spent so much time building myself up as the academic person and the reading person, that it's a little too far out of my comfort zone. At this particular point in my life, the risks outweigh the possible gains that I might get.

R – So your thoughts about it are that it might be more risky. That it might be very risky to you to venture into one of these other areas that you had felt restricted from. Risky in what way?

P – In the embarrassment factor.

R – You're afraid that you would embarrass yourself.

P – Yes, I guess that's the big one.

R – Is that about, again, like you were saying before, about not feeling that your body would not be able to do what you wanted it to do?

P – Yes.

### **Relationship of body to time**

I do know that I have always preferred to have a few really close friends rather than a lot of casual friends.

R – Then you talked about the kind of relationships that you have had and that you preferred to have a few close friends than a lot of casual friends. You've always been shy around guys. How do you think being shy around guys is related to your experience of your body changing?

P – I would assume that because I'm not comfortable with myself, and maybe I'm only just beginning to learn to be comfortable with myself, that I make the assumption that the guys will not necessarily be comfortable with me.

R – So, you're making that assumption?

P – Yes.

R – That has to do with how you're feeling about your own self and your own body, and so you're assuming that maybe they'll feel the same way.

P – Yes. Is projection the right word here?

R – Yes, projection, that's the correct defense mechanism. We all use that word. Can you explain it a little bit more? How do you experience that? What is that like for you to be around a guy and you feel this shyness, when you think about being in these situations, what is that like for you?

P – I wish it were different. I can say that. It's a little frustrating. I kind of feel like I wish I could just snap out of it.

R – Snap out of what?

P – The shyness, the insecurities. It's just the idea that time is passing by and if I don't do something now and be a little less shy, that time might run out.

R – It's the idea that time is passing you by, that you might run out of time.

P – Yes.

R – You're twenty-four, right? I think you may have a little more time.

I'm young still I know, but I'm also impatient.

R – I think that you will find that will become less of a concern for you as you get older. You point out that you feel impatient, feel impatient about what?

P – Impatient to experience all of the things that I have not experienced yet. I want to do everything. I want to be the good academic and get my masters degree and maybe go on for a Ph.D. or whatever. I want that part of my life that I'm really proud of, and I want to go on to be a famous author or whatever. But then I see when I look at my friends who are in a committed relationship and everything, and I want to have that, too. There is the question of, can I do all of that and also, why haven't I done it yet. I've only experienced the part of my life that I've experienced. That's a very profound thought.

R – So there is impatience to experience more of what life has to offer.

P – Yes.

### **Relationship of body to comfort level about body**

Now I have a hard time accepting how I look.

R – You talked about in the present that you had a hard time accepting how you look. Can you tell me a little more about that?

P – I guess I just have this idea that when I necessarily look at myself in the mirror, I wish it could be better and that I'm just not always happy with the way I look.

R – Ok, so just this feeling that you wish that it were better. Better in what way, sort of just better, or does anything come to mind when you think of better?

P – I guess there are always specific things that I wish could be different. Like I wish that I just didn't have so much hair and things like that. I guess I've always wanted to be one of those women that was just very small and petite, but I'm not small and petite. Then I get the idea that if I were small and petite, then I would probably want to be tall. So, I don't know if it's just the universal idea of wanting something that's different and that you are not. I guess that's the way that I think about it.

Often I think that my reluctance to play sports and participate in similar activities has limited my ability to participate in relationships.

R – Then you went back to talking about the sports and the more active things, how that has limited your ability to participate in relationships. How has it limited you, when you talk about limiting you? How would you relate it or how does it limit you?

P – I guess it's the idea that if you're going to find a guy, the library is probably not the best place for that. I know that I have friends who go swing dancing on Saturday and they talk about the guys they meet. I went swing dancing once and it wasn't my thing. What I mean here is that the idea that a lot of what I like to do is not necessarily in a place where I'm going to meet a wide variety of people. They're not set up to do that, like going to the theater. I go to the theater a lot, but when you go to the theater, I found that people don't usually stand around and chat. So I can go to the theater and have a really good time and enjoy myself, but I don't necessarily meet people. I usually think of ideas like going swing dancing or to a sporting event or something, that it's more of a place where you meet people. Because those are not areas that I feel comfortable in and that's why it's limiting.

R – I see. It also relates to what you were talking about before, about feeling outside your comfort zone, that being involved in these activities where you have to rely more on your body to do what you want it to do. That's something you feel, in general, less confident about. So going to these places or being involved in these activities, which would require your body to sort of do its own thing or to do something, those would be places and things that would bring you more in contact with the kind of guy that you would like to meet.

P – Yes.

Which in turn has limited my ability to experience certain key life events, like a meaningful relationship and marriage.

R – Then you take that a step further and you describe how you think that has limited your ability to experience certain, what you call "key life events," like a meaningful relationship or marriage. So you are concerned that this is going to limit you from experiencing those kinds of things, because of your concerns about your body?

P – Yes, I guess I'm just getting to the point in my life where some of my friends are already married and that is rather frightening. I look at them, and I look at me, and I see that they have done this and I haven't and I wonder why it is. One reason is I think maybe it's because I don't do these things and I don't feel comfortable doing these things. So that's where the connection is.

R – So you're worried then, that you miss out on having the kind of relationship that you wanted, and you even mentioned marriage, that your concern at this point in your life is that it could interfere with things.

P – Yes.

R – I guess this is kind of like the other thing you talked about where this is the belief you have about yourself, that your body isn't going to be able to do what you want it to do. It reminds me of what we talked about earlier, about believing you're not this type of

person, that you're this other, academic type of person. And I wonder if there could be a similar process that takes place regarding this issue, that as you move on through life, I think you'll begin to find more of an integration on this issue as well. You'll begin to find in a couple of different ways, either that you'll start to experience your comfort level in places in those other areas, and as you also begin to have more life experiences you'll find that there are also guys who don't really like sports and are actually very content in a library or whatever. Guys like that do exist and they are definitely out there.

P- I'm not terribly concerned at this point in my life, but the question has come up.

I attended a staging of the play "The Vagina Monologues," and screamed "cunt" at the top of my lungs. Now there was something I never expected to do.

R – You mentioned that you had gone to see the play "The Vagina Monologues." What was that like to see that? How did that affect you?

P – The title kind of made me a little unsure. I really wasn't sure about that. Practically the entire campus came to see this thing. It was kind of amazing because this was not part of your anatomy that you talk about a whole lot. I don't know if it was a major life changing moment. It was kind of a realization, I guess. People can talk about this kind of thing.

R – So it made you feel like it was okay then to talk about it?

P – Yes. I don't think I'm going to go out and start talking about this all the time, but it was just kind of a realization that there are moments that this is okay. I don't know if it was women's solidarity. I don't know.

R – It altered some of your beliefs about talking about your body and made it more okay.

P – Made it more okay.

### **Relationship of body to shame**

I don't remember thinking it was abnormal or shameful in any way.

R – You don't remember thinking that it was abnormal or shameful in any way, and you were talking about your body. This is when you were younger that you didn't recall thinking that your body was abnormal or shameful in any way. How did that change when you hit adolescence? Was there a change to feeling like this?

P – I think so. I don't think that I necessarily meant shameful then. I don't think it's something that I thought about. I guess it was just kind of talking about the guys giggling when I didn't shave my legs or whatever, and just the idea that I shouldn't let them see.

Somewhere I learned to be ashamed of myself and my body. Whether it happened all at once or gradually. I don't know. It happened without my noticing. I'm not even sure I have the right words to describe what I know. Still, I've tried to write my experience as it occurred to me, without much editing or revising, and I hope it is helpful to your research.

R – The last thing you said was that you had learned to be ashamed of yourself and your body. You're not sure if that happened all at once or just gradually, and that it happened without noticing it. What has that been like for you to have a sense of feeling ashamed about your body? What has that been like?

P – I don't like it. I guess it kind of makes me angry, cause there's that part of me that says there is no reason for me to feel this way and I don't know what caused it. I don't want to be a statistic. It's just the idea that I wish I didn't have to feel this way and that if I could have gone directly from running around on the beach being happy, even beyond where I am right now. The idea that I kind of lost a number of years where I could have been very happy with myself and outgoing, maybe not outgoing, but doing more than I've been doing. I don't like that.

R – You would rather have missed this part in the middle here and gone straight from being a little girl on the beach to kind of a future sort of idea you have about getting beyond all this body stuff.

P – I don't know if that's possible. Maybe you have to go through this process to get from one point to the other. I don't know. But in my perfect world that I talk about sometimes, that's the way it would be.

R – That's how it would be in a perfect world.

**EDITED SYNTHESIS #2****Lisa****Relationship of body to lack of knowledge about changes**

Adolescence and bodily changes brings only pain into my mind.

R – Now the first thing you talked about was, you put in boldface type here, about adolescence and bodily changes, and you talked about that being painful. And you said that that brings pain into your mind. Do you want to say anything more about that?

P – The pain was mostly not knowing what was going to happen, no one really explained anything really. The facts of life, especially female changes, not being ashamed of the enlargement of your breasts, or how to handle your period at school or what happened if you have an accident. And just different – I didn't have too much problem with acne. I was lucky on that part compared to some of the other kids. But that in and of itself was very much not knowing. Just going through it and not knowing and then just being in pain from it, just finding out or just seeing the other teenagers in the lunch room or whatever, you knew that they have more information than you. Or they're more experienced at something than you were. And that was even more painful.

R – Okay, so you had the feeling that other people were better informed than you were.

P – Definitely. Definitely a gap, and then there was really no way to remedy it cause I didn't really run with that kind of crowd. The friends that I had, we really didn't discuss much of it either, there weren't really any books. I wish there would be a nice book to start from beginning to end going, "Why does my chest hurt? Well, guess what's starting to grow". You know, why be ashamed of it. I remember saying that to my mother one time. But it wasn't explained or it wasn't a proud moment to come out and go shopping to look for some items, and then my mother got on my case. I still have it to this day of being in a dressing room. I didn't have a waist. I was just kind of like, whatever, I didn't have that Victorian corset kind of, and my mother just hissed at me, like with the clothes and the jeans or something, like you don't have any waist. And I wasn't even fat. And that has still stuck with me. That's still in my brain – with belts. I hate wearing belts. And when I do, I feel weird. I don't feel feminine. I just don't.

R – And you said that your mother "hissed" at you, and that still stays with you today.

P – I'll never forget that moment. Cause I did not understand what was wrong. I'm trying on clothes. What's the problem. And then it's my body, I'm growing. Why even make a comment. Instead of just being proud. So I just didn't understand what her problem was. So it didn't make me feel good that day. And I hate clothes shopping to this day, too.

R – So still –

P – I hate clothes shopping.

I did not realize how difficult this subject still is, after all these years. I've been trying to keep all this blocked out and just be grateful that era is gone forever.

R – You went on to say that this is still pretty difficult for you, that you've been trying to keep this all blocked out. You kind of just now talked about that. Is there anything else you want to add as far as what its been like for you to try to block that out?

P – The blocking out part I don't have to relive it because I won't have any children of my own. And I'm not around any nieces or nephews, they live far away, so I won't be re-experiencing any kind of triggers. So that will remain there, but the old tapes with the prior examples I have mentioned will still be there and that's just something I'll have to work on.

R – So you kind of have those memories. You said the old tapes are still running in your head.

P – And I'm kind of mad that they're still there. I'm aware of them.

R – So it's still affecting you.

P – Yeah, I would think by this age I'd be done with it.

I wasn't going to complete the questions, but I made a promise to help with the study and I'm sticking to it.

R – You also talked about, it sounds like you had some ambivalence about writing this down. You said, "I wasn't going to complete this," but that you had made a promise to do it and that you were sticking with it. How was it for you to write this?

P – It was very difficult. I wrote this very quickly, in one sitting, in less than five, ten minutes, fifteen minutes. I wanted to get everything down. I'm not very good with essays. It was just one big, broad question. And I was thinking, "Where's the multiple choice"? So I quickly wanted to get this – cause I know I erased it off my computer.

R – So you erased it –

P – Yes, I don't want any evidence. Like after this interview, everything I have is going to be torn up. So I don't have it on my computer or disk or anywhere.

R – You said you don't want any evidence –

P – Cause it's still all up in here. (points to head)

### **Relationship of body to shame**

Beneath the shame and disgust I feel towards my body I secretly feel proud and safe within it.

R – You talked about shame and disgust, were the words that you used.

P – But it's safe because it keeps men away.

R – It keeps men away.

P – Yes, this size. I had more men looking at me – now I'm not blonde. Blondes always get a better whatever. It's subconscious for me. That's what it's doing for me. It's a wall of safety.

R – This is very interesting by the way, I found this very interesting. “Beneath the shame and disgust I feel towards my body I secretly feel proud and safe within it”. So on the one hand you're talking about a sense of shame, but then also along with that you talk about feeling proud and safe. It's an interesting –

P – It's kind of conflicting. Because I come from German-Hungarian heritage. You know, German women were strong and big, that was it. You know, as long as you were, whatever, you know, there was nothing wrong with you. It's when you were, “You must be ill,” my mother would say that to me when I would get in shape. “You look sick”. She would never, never, never be very proud or whatever as far as – she probably wouldn't care if I blew up to 500 pounds. It would only be if I went down to 150 and starting looking very whatever, thin. She had said that to me. Not that I'm looking to her for that. But why are you saying that?

R – So when you were at a thinner weight your mother would comment –

P – Negatively. I got negative feedback. She did not like it. But with as far as the heritage thing, I want to be part of, I want to be a strong woman. I do have some muscle mass. I like that aspect of it and the potential to develop it, but again, when you look at my wrists or whatever, so – but then I know men don't really go for, they go for whatever's being fed to them – video or tv.

R – You said that it kind of provides you with safety from men.

P – I have a big problem with men.

R – So you feel safer at the weight that you're at now.

P – Definitely. I will not be hit upon. I will not be whatever. I’m not cute and adorable. That was cute and adorable what I showed you (refers to picture of herself), the naivete, now I’m just – it’s like just leave me – I don’t know what to say. I’m more sarcastic, the bitter old woman. There is something to it. You can interview me when I’m eighty and you can definitely prove that one.

R – So, for you there’s a benefit to being at your current weight because it provides you some safety.

P – Uh, huh.

### **Relationship of body to mother**

I did not wear any make-up in high school...

R – Okay, and then you shifted and said that, you were talking about not wearing make-up at school, and I was wondering about that. What do you think that was about, the fact that you didn’t wear make-up.

P – I don’t know. Because my one friend, the one that blossomed early, she always had make-up on. Her hair was always nice. Some of the other girls, their hair was always nice. Some of them would get up early to do it. I never did. It was like, well, did anybody ever show me how to put on make-up? No. “Did you watch your mother”? Yes. I didn’t really like what she had to go through. She put, you know, powder, whatever. She wasn’t a big – thing either. To her the subtext was, it was a chore. And something that needed to be done for her to be presentable in her profession. It was a chore. It was a chore for her. What I got from my mother was it was a chore for her to be a woman. To get dressed, to get whatever, it was a chore. To wear a girdle, to wear pantyhose, it was a chore. It was painful. It was uncomfortable to be dressed up, it was terrible to be in high heels. Your feet hurt. All I got – I’m standing there in the doorway, watching, with big eyes. That’s what I picked up.

R – That’s what you picked up. So it was a chore to wear make-up. Part of it was that it was a chore, and part of it was, you mentioned again, that no one had shown you how –

P – Right. And of course my mother wouldn’t go for that. She would say you’re just fine the way you are. You know, not necessarily in a nice, positive way. You know, you don’t need this. But there were always good-looking girls, girls that wore that eyeliner underneath. I’d be like, how did they do that? Or there were always the couple of seniors that got “knocked up”. And they were like ostracized. And remember, this was a Catholic environment. And I could never understand why. And they always looked upset. They always looked – I don’t know what their home-life was, obviously not very good. Sometimes they were a little disheveled, and I picked that up too, as a very negative, negative, negative thing. God forbid they’re encouraging the woman because she’s keeping the baby. Instead of sending that message, they’re sending the scarlet letter “A”

message. I never understood that. So, the whole wearing of the make-up and everything. The bad girls always had that going on. Heavy make-up, and the big hair. And I was just Plain Jane.

R – Not drawing attention to yourself.

P – No attention.

...or spend hours “doing my hair”.

R – Because you mentioned that you didn’t spend hours doing your hair. Would that be the same thing, not wanting to draw attention to yourself?

P – Uh, huh. And that’s still present today.

My mother would not go for that.

R – Okay, and again your mother was involved in that because she wouldn’t go for you spending hours fixing your hair.

P – Yeah, that was not encouraged and somehow I knew not to do that. That was frivolous.

R – You felt that your mother would think that was frivolous.

P – Correct.

### **Relationship of body to anger**

...unable to safely express anger...

R – You said that it wasn’t safe for you to express anger.

P – No. My mother never allowed me. To this day she won’t talk to me if I start to get angry. “I don’t like your tone of voice”. So that was an issue growing up. I was like the mouse in my room. Great imagination and that was my world. As long as I stayed out of everybody’s way. As far as feeling angry, I was never allowed to talk back to my mother. Not even as a teenager. So it was constantly blocked out, and so I constantly started picking at myself. That started when I was, this one I got when I was age one or two (points to scar on face). And I thought this was the ugliest thing. It’s probably a scar that you can’t even see. For the longest time, I thought it was the biggest thing, that I couldn’t become a model until I actually came to terms with it, that it’s really nothing until you point it out. My mother, I don’t trust her, she put band aids and gloves on me to get me to

stop and I chewed through. So I was going at it. So, for a child in a high anxiety, stress environment, that's how it was expressed. But to get angry at her, oh, no.

...and displayed self-mutilating behavior without any intervention.

R – So it wasn't safe to express anger so you think you would mutilate yourself –

P – It was channeled. To feel the pain, you know, you're in pain, you're numb. But then you do that, you know, there's a book out, "The Scarred Soul," and it's about self-inflicted violence. But that was definitely like a very early age kind of thing that I did. And these, I'm keeping short (looks at nails). It was the longest time before I stopped biting my nails, big time. But you need to express anger and nobody told me that.

R – So from a very early age, then, one of the ways you were expressing your feelings was through your body.

P – Yes.

I have anger issues.

R – Okay, and then you talked about having anger issues. Can you say more about the anger issues?

P – Since I was not allowed to get angry, literally as a child, a pre-teen, as a teen, and even into my twenties. Even normal anger. No one ever taught me that again. Never saw normal anger. Even now, if I show anger, she shuts down. And that's all coming out now. It's starting to erupt, which I knew was going to happen. I knew it was going to happen by my mid-thirties. But I thought I was going to have a good support system in place to help me through it. And that's not there. It's more like rage. Eighty percent of it, it's because I wasn't able to express it. Twenty percent is what's going on with me. And I also found out with big relief, that both of my brothers are rage-a-holics. When they lose it, they really lose it. Just out of control anger. But that's being taken care of.

R – So that's something you're working on.

P – Anger for me is power. I'm a powerful woman when I'm angry. And to me, I'm even more powerful with this size - and angry. In my mind, I wouldn't be taken seriously if I was skinny and angry. "Oh, she can't do much damage" vs. "Oh, she might crush me to death".

R – So you feel like you're taken more seriously.

P – Well, yeah, that's my thinking. That's my belief.

R – And you said that if you were –

P – Skinny.

R – Skinny, that you wouldn't look as threatening. So that's how your body is tied into it.

P – Yes.

### **Relationship of body to weight**

I am a thirty-five year old heterosexual white female; height 5'6" and I currently weigh 210 pounds. 210 pounds is a new world's record for me.

R - You next went on to describe yourself in the present and you gave your age and a description of yourself. And you said that your current weight, you described that as a new world's record for you.

P – I have never been this heavy.

R – What is that like for you to be at your current weight?

P – It's awful. Awful. I started putting on weight because I was eating junk food and it was just slowly creeping up. I don't remember numbers. I just remember having to change jeans. That was the trigger for me. I don't have a bathroom scale. I used to be active, just walking. Now I don't know what happened. In my mind it has to stop at this level. I don't want to go beyond. I'm very fearful of it. Because again, that would force me to go out. I don't have the money to buy clothes right now. And if I did, just doing it. The process of trying clothes on – ideally I would fit into nice, petite clothes. I have no – my rib cage almost hits my rib bones. So, I'm technically a petite. They have very beautiful clothes. I don't fit in them.

R – So is part of what's difficult the going out and shopping for clothes?

P – That's one of the things that I wouldn't mind if I lost the weight, then I could wear baggy clothes. Which is still kind of hiding behind clothes. I wouldn't necessarily run out and get a new wardrobe. But I cannot get any bigger. I cannot get any bigger. I just can't. This is just ridiculous. It's just all over. You know, with my background, I thought maybe you only gain just here or here. But no, it's like all over. And then I can't imagine what's inside when they open someone up, you know, the marbling effect, you know, in your muscles. I don't like it. I don't like it.

### **Relationship of body to peers**

I was appalled one day when I saw a video of one of the dancing recitals I was in and how "fat" I was - compared to the other dancers, even though they were older and taller.

R – Yeah, you said you were appalled.

P – I still am.

R – Yeah, how did seeing the video affect you?

P – It was unreal. Because I guess I didn't have a full-length mirror in my room and since I never stood in front of it naked or anything like that. I enjoyed dancing. There was a woman in our town who put on big shows, all age groups, all the time. It was something nice to be in, but compared to the other girls that were in, let's just say, in shape, and I guess I wasn't in shape, but I was still blossoming. I was only in eighth grade, but I was really, compared to them, and then being in spandex, which was like a tight-fitting, whatever. And I just saw all, just blob. And I was the biggest, or the widest out of the group I was in during that routine. And when I saw that video, I was appalled that that was me. Cause I loved dancing. I still do.

R – You still love dancing.

P - I still love dancing. And that stopped. I don't know how I stopped dancing. I don't know what happened. I don't remember the day it ended or saying goodbye to anybody, nothing like that.

R – But seeing the video had the effect that you stopped dancing.

P – Oh my God. No that I was so overweight. I was so heavy, and I was so ugly in that outfit compared to all those other girls that were taller and thinner and maybe knew how to support their bosoms with those strapless, sequined tights. I didn't have that. I'll never forget that.

R – Did it ultimately, at some point, have the effect of you stopping dancing?

P – I'm sure it did. Cause I could have continued through high school cause I was dancing with high school girls, too. I should say women.

R – But you stopped dancing at some point.

P – It was eighth grade I stopped.

R – Okay, which was when you saw the video.

P – I would say, yeah, it probably affected me the most.

R – It affected you the most.

P – And again, obviously, it wasn't a big deal because I don't remember my mother yelling and making it a big deal. So, it's not in my brain that we stopped it. And I also remember that at one point, the group you start with, I mean I was four or five years old when I started. They were going on toe point, toe shoes. I was too heavy. I was told I was too heavy. Now I was told by my dance instructor, and I guess, of course, because of the money factor, buying toe shoes or whatever, my mother didn't really encourage it either. But I could have been great, to me, but then obviously I was getting the feedback, I am way too fat to hold myself on these things. I have excellent balance and I'm always on my toes, but to be on the ballerina toe – that's a point – you work up to that. I was shot down and the rest of my friends got to go on for that.

R – Now when you say you were shot down and you had gotten this feedback, where was this feedback coming from?

P – It was from – I remember being in the studio, the dance studio, it wasn't a really big deal, but other girls were around and they got to continue, and somehow it was explained to me, I guess as nicely as they could. I don't know if it was the instructor saying it to me, or maybe one of her assistants, but that crushed me. That was a big – because then obviously that meant I was a cow, I was a hippo, I was a whatever. I couldn't be on – I couldn't even try it. I wasn't even given a chance to – and I have such wide feet to begin with, it's terrible. I mean I like my wide feet. I can balance really well. I could have been great on a balance beam. But that was one thing I left out. That was a big – because the older girls in high school. They would perform a ballet routine. It would include some pirouettes. But I didn't. I didn't get that chance.

R – You didn't get the chance to do that.

I did have friends.

R – And you mentioned that you did have friends in high school.

P – Yes, we hung out as a group.

### **Relationship of body to men**

Ten years ago I weighed 150 pounds and was quite cute. I was involved in many relationships, only to discover I was a co-dependent.

R – Now you talked about ten years ago, you described yourself as being very cute then. How did you experience that time in your life, being very cute and being at that weight. What was that like for you?

P – It could be described as socially, I had multiple monogamous heterosexual relationships. So it would be one man after another kind of thing. I was always the

dumper, not the dumpee. But I would always put myself in different – the reason I brought up the word, “co-dependent,” I was involved with a drug user, an alcoholic. So I’m trying to fix them, love them, make them well. It’s still there, so I have to watch. I was out to prove I could put myself in a very dangerous situation and handle it. The chaos was what I thrived on. It was crazy.

R – So during this period of time in your life when you were at a lower weight and you were feeling cute and attractive, that was also associated with, for you, these experiences of being co-dependent, of having these chaotic relationships.

P – I would respond to their, every woman wants to hear the words, “Oh, you’re beautiful”. I was non-discriminant. Any guy could say it to me. And I was like, “Oh, I like you too”. I was the pursuer. Because, again, control’s a big thing for me. So I was trying to orchestrate the whole relationship. I liked hearing it, that I was cute. And I still needed that outside validation, and of course it was the bottom of the barrel coming up to me and saying that. And I was like, “Oh, cool, well, let’s hook up”.

R – So during that period of time, as you’ve described it, things were sort of chaotic and you felt kind of out of control. You wanted very much to be in control.

P – Things were out of control. I was in control. Then, when things started going bad, I had to take it up a notch.

R – Take it up a notch. What do you mean by that?

P – As far as being stalked. I had to go into when prey becomes predator mode. But it was an awful time.

I am currently using my heaviness to keep men away.

R – You go on to say that now you’re using what you describe as your heaviness to keep men away. You’ve talked about how being at the weight you’re at now makes you feel safer. Is that right?

P – Somewhat. I see it as a ninety percent societal, face value, guys will just move on. I’m not in heels, I’m not very tall or svelte, so whenever they do that scan, and of course, they always stop for blondes. Immediately, they always stop for blondes. You’ve gotta watch their behavior sometimes, but I’m very, whatever, against blondes. They’re my competition. But that’s how I see it.

But this year I found out that men will f--- anything regardless of body size and without regard for a woman’s feelings. I’ve always looked just for physical affection in my relationships and had sex early in them to prevent any violence.

R – And then you described that men will go after anything regardless of body size and without regard for a woman’s feelings.

P – That’s my stereotype. That’s just how I feel. And then on the flip side, for the next thing. I’m looking for something in a relationship, but then for some reason, I don’t know why, I’m always afraid of violence when it comes to s-e-x.

R – Okay, so it sounds like, I’m thinking in relation to your body –

P – I’ll sacrifice one for the other.

R – Can you explain that a little bit.

P – To get physical affection, I’ll have sex with them. And nobody told me again, “You can stop at any time”. Any time. Regardless of what response they’re having or you’re having. And that’s still with me. I don’t want to cry. And that is still with me. That is still with me. That I don’t have enough, or have someone to even practice that with. I just wanted to get it over with, just so I can get a little bit of physical affection. Because you’re naked, that’s all I want. And basically, that’s what they’re looking for. So I figure it’s a trade-off. Even though it’s inside, it affects me.

R – And the way you’ve described that. Is that still that way for you today?

P – Yes, and I don’t know how I could tackle that and resolve that. Cause first you need a boyfriend, and one that has insight. But I’ve basically taken myself off the market.

I’ve been stalked twice in my life.

R – You next talked about being stalked. So being stalked in some way is connected for you.

P – I felt powerful.

R – You felt powerful when you were being stalked.

P – I felt I could fight. There were only two guys. I always stayed five steps ahead of them. I always wanted to punch somebody out just to see what it feels like.

R – But being stalked actually made you feel more powerful.

P – It forced me to protect myself. Instead of cowering I went into my tactical maneuvering. I was glad that I was physically strong. Because at that time, I was strong from lifting patients and so on. I was able to fight back. I was never, in any of my relationships, none of them ever laid a hand on me. But it did take a toll on me, emotionally. But it came out for the better for me. I gathered evidence, I did this, I did that. I took care of it.

### **Relationship of body to father**

I grew up without a father...

R – You talked about not having your dad around. Not having your dad around, how did that influence the way you thought about your body? Because you mentioned it here.

P – He died eight days before my first birthday so I never got to know him. He died at the age of thirty-six of a heart attack which was the result of a lot of different types of sicknesses he had had. So, according to the reading I used to do in my psychology books with the father-daughter relationship, I didn't get any of that, any of the complexes that you go to, vying for your father's attention against your mother. Sitting on daddy's lap, being held. Feeling safe at home, none of that. And that's what came out in my later adult relationships, that's what I was looking for.

R – So you were looking for –

P – Just someone to hold me. To be the daddy kind of thing.

### **Relationship of body to brothers**

...lack of adequate physical affection or emotional support, teased by my one brother regarding my weight constantly...

You mentioned a lack of physical affection or emotional support. Do you mean in relation to your dad not being around?

P – In general, when I grew up as a child, I had multiple caretakers because my mother had to work. My mother was just too busy trying to keep the three of us together, my brothers and I, just the survival mode. And I was a skinny child. I was fine. I was a normal height. My one brother always teased me. Even though there really wasn't anything wrong with me. But just name-calling and the neighborhood kids would sometimes call me names. It was very weird. And I couldn't really fight back.

R – Did your brother teasing you, did that affect how you thought about your body?

P – Uh,huh. I mean just one time can do it. Repetitive type behavior. That's enough to grow inner hatred. I still kind of have that a little bit towards him even though we're all older. Why did you do this to me? Or, even besides the body thing, he never, neither of them helped me feel safe. So the teasing, you know, big as a blimp, he'd make fun of something about cowboys making fun of fat calves. I was not heavy until I started eighth grade, so I just didn't understand it and I went through braces and that was okay. I just didn't understand, and that was their way of coping obviously with the stress in the house. I still don't like him for that. Even if he says he's sorry and I didn't know any better. Save it.

R – So that definitely affects you today.

P – Yeah, they were seven and nine years ahead of me so I could not compete.

### **Relationship of body to sex**

Sex was never discussed in my house when I was growing up.

R – Okay, the next thing you talked about is sex. You said that it was never discussed in your house when you were growing up. And I think we touched on this before, how that kind of influenced your thinking about your body, that there was this kind of not sharing of information, and this feeling that other people were better informed. Was that what you were talking about there?

P – Uh, huh.

R – Okay, and then you brought up being Catholic. Was being Catholic related to sex not being discussed?

P – I guess so. We didn't get it in high school and the first time I actually saw "it" happening was in my first year in nursing school.

R – You saw "it" happening?

P – Sex. Because they made us watch a tape.

R – Okay, because you mentioned being Catholic.

P – I was being sarcastic.

R – Oh, okay. Because I didn't know if that had anything to do with it.

P – No, it had nothing to do with the belief system.

If it was mentioned, somehow "dirty" was implied in the subtext.

R – You said in relation to sex, that if it was mentioned that somehow the word "dirty" was implied in the subtext. How was that significant for you, the fact that you sort of got this message that it was dirty?

P – It was stay away from it, or it was trouble, and for me I thought, okay, I'll just mind my own business. I won't do anything, and again it was nothing that was an everyday, actual, normal thing that happened in life.

R – You got the idea that there was something dirty about it.

P – Yes.

I did not attend my senior prom because I thought my “date” was the one I had to have sex with.

R – So it’s kind of back to the safety issue, that the weight protects you and keeps you safe. Now you talked about not going to your prom because you had the idea that you had to have sex with the one you went to the prom with.

P – Oh my God yes. That was my biggest fear. I ended up playing in a concert. I was in a jazz band so I ended up doing that on my prom night. But I was scared to death. And only one guy asked me. And he was the one who was going off to become a priest. And I’m like “great”. This is all you can get to ask you.

R – So you didn’t go.

P – No, I sort of crushed him. It was just too much. I was scared. I was scared to death. Did I mention this to anyone? Did my mother make a big deal about it? No. Did she try to help me? No. She could have said, “Come on, you can go, we’ll get you a dress”. Come on. No. End of story. And I thought I avoided the big initiation.

R – So it began avoiding –

P – Being safe. It was like, who am I going to be with, and we’ll be out late at night. And who’s driving? And you hear the stories of having breakfast in the morning. Major anxiety, major anxiety. And I wish someone would have talked to me and said, “You don’t have to do anything, you don’t even have to kiss the bastard”. For God’s sake, why didn’t anybody tell me.

P – So later, you found out that your idea about that wasn’t accurate.

R – Uh, huh. But it’s still getting back to what I said earlier. It’s hard to integrate.

R – It’s hard to integrate.

P – It’s hard to integrate, because even with me now, it’s hard to stop initiating “it” or stopping “it”.

R – Sex you’re talking about.

P – Right. That’s a big thing. But I use that as an excuse. I feel bad because I really wasn’t attracted to him. And I always thought it was boyfriend-girlfriends that went to

proms. And I thought, this is it? This was all that he wanted to ask me? I didn't feel that great.

R – You didn't feel that great.

P – No.

Having sex is a decision or choice...

R – And then you said that having sex is a decision or a choice.

P – It's nothing that's forced. Technically. Even way back then that was a decision or a choice that nobody could make but me.

R – Right.

P – But I didn't know that.

R – So that was another area you didn't feel like you had all the information.

P – Oh God no. Did we sit down and talk, my mother and I? No. Did I bring it to her attention? No. Not stirring anything up with mom.

...I still continue to struggle with that fact to this day.

R – And you said that that's something that you still struggle with. You used the word struggle. You struggle with? Can you tell me about the struggle? Can you tell me what you struggle with?

P – I don't know if I've ever had, with men in my life, that whole thing of, if you go out to dinner, you've got to put out. I still feel pressure about that. It's 2003, the year of, and that stereotype, even down to who paid for dinner. Because I insist on either dutch, or whatever. Because immediately, when it goes into their court with cost, then I think that it can come back to me, and they can say, well, I paid for dinner, I paid for whatever. Two hundred dollar tickets at the Benedum Center. Well, then I guess sex is in order. See, that is so warped. I know it's dysfunctional thinking. It's a terrible belief. Because any man I hooked up with, it's like, right away, between the sheets. And it's not necessarily that I want that.

R – Yeah, so you feel that's a struggle. That it automatically comes with going out.

P – Yeah, it's a struggle. How do you hold back. Weeks, months? What do they expect? What's the criteria?

R – So that's an area, again, where you feel unsure of yourself.

P – I don't know what to do.

R – Feeling that you don't know what to do.

P – Right.

R – Does the way you feel about your body right now relate to that struggle?

P – Now it's like, oh God forbid that anybody should see me naked. No way.

R – Okay. So definitely the way you're feeling about your body. It does contribute to that struggle because you said you don't want to –

P – Yeah, I wouldn't have sex now because I'm fat. But then I look at couples out there, and I say they're doing it. There's more to it than just sex. Get over it. Don't worry about it.

I was a freshman in college when I experienced my first kiss.

R – Now you talked about having your first kiss when you were in college. What was that like for you?

P – It was nice.

R – Okay, did that influence the way you felt about your body? The fact that you had this kiss?

P – No.

R – It didn't change anything?

P – It made me feel wonderful.

I lost my virginity at 21 just to get it over with...

R – Okay. And then you talked about losing your virginity, and that you lost your virginity at 21 just to get it over with.

P – Yes, at 22 I was “officially an adult”. And I thought, let's just get it over with and find out what this whole thing is about. And I was so, maybe frustrated, because again, I knew I was the outlier on the statistical plot, that a lot of other people were doing it already, and I was like, “What are you talking about”? So was thinking, let's just do it because this is how it is, always will be. It's an act. So just get the act over with. And I started off with way too old of a man.

R – So, again there was a feeling of being left out. You said you were an “outlier”.

P – And then in my mind I was safe from my mother. Because in my mind I was an adult. I thought, now you're 21, you can make your own decisions.

R – How did having sex and losing your virginity affect how you felt about your body?

P – Well, it wasn't very pleasant and I didn't like it. And I thought, "Why did I do that"? Didn't really need to. I didn't feel too bad about myself. Well, actually I did. Sorry, it was a time in my life. I knew him in my junior year. But yeah, with the body thing. It was nice. I mean he tried. I still felt "the Catholic girl". It's a sin, you're not married. I thought we were going to get married. Because once I did it with him, I thought we were going to get married. I'm so warped.

...And I regret doing that, only because it hurt.

R – You said that you regret doing it just to get it over with. Is that something you still regret now?

P – Uh, huh, because it's a shame that he didn't have more insight into women's feelings. He didn't give a rat's ass. A nicer man would have said, "You're just doing this to want to do it". And I would have said, "Yes," and he would have said, "Well, let's just wait". No, that didn't happen. This guy jumped on me. Obviously, he picked me. He targeted me. He was more than willing to be a participant in this.

R – You said you regretted doing it only because it hurt. Do you mean physically it hurt?

P – Yeah, it wasn't too great. I mean sometimes it was good and sometimes not.

R – Now that experience, you talked about that sometimes it was physically painful. Did that influence how you felt about your body? At that point, having that experience.

P – I felt like I was vulnerable. That you are vulnerable. That being a woman, that you're a target. And then I started having these little, not that I ever thought about carrying it out, but I would think, if I kill you now you won't hurt me ever again. You won't have the chance. I call it the black widow syndrome.

I thought an older man (38) would be better, but I was wrong.

R – Okay, you mention that you thought an older man, that a man of thirty-eight that that would be better. How did you think it would be better? What did you mean by better?

P – Patient, understanding, more verbal. I picked the most emotionally void, dried up, whatever.

R – You said you were wrong about that. That it wasn't better.

P – Right. And I couldn't change that. You can't force someone to love you, or to hug you.

R – And how did that experience –

P – I kept trying.

R – You kept trying. How did that affect how you felt about your body? Having that sexual experience with a man who was not any of those things that you were hoping for.

P – On the one hand I felt good about it. It was something I could do so they could find their release. And they were vulnerable after in my mind. So I was proud of that. And I would spoil them after, like with back massages. I didn't feel too self-conscious as long as I was doting on them. But they could never return it. I would never allow it.

R – You wouldn't allow it. It would be very difficult. And you think you couldn't allow it because –

P – It would make me vulnerable. And they'd be in control.

R – They'd be in control. Okay, so that was difficult for you.

### **Relationship of body to menstrual period**

I was about thirteen years old when I got my first period. What a way to start off that new year.

R – Then you went on to talk about getting your period. You said that you were thirteen, and I guess it happened around New Year's Day. You said, "What a way to start off the new year. What was that like for you? How did that affect how you thought about your body, getting your period?"

P – I didn't like it. It wasn't really explained a lot. I wish, I wish everything had been a little more open. Again, when I mentioned how to cope in school, for the longest time I really didn't know what a tampon was and why are they used. It was just awful, and I did have a couple of accidents. It was just very humiliating for me. You know, your school sweater, you had it with you all the time. I went to a Catholic school. But it would have been nice. I didn't have any sisters, and I didn't have a mother that was open about it. Sex wasn't talked about. And, of course, when you're Catholic it doesn't exist.

R – Okay. So getting that message, did that have any particular effect on how you thought about your body at that point?

P – I just knew it was normal to have it. My one girlfriend had it earlier because she had developed. Because when we had “the talk” in school, she recognized the diagram. She knew what it was, and I’m thinking, “Why don’t I know”? She had four older sisters. So I didn’t say it was abnormal for my body to have that. I just knew it was something that was going to come and this is it, and now you’re going to have to deal with this. It wasn’t very positive for me to be proud of. So I didn’t think it was the greatest thing in the world to be happening, bottom line.

R – That was the bottom line. And again, there was that feeling of uncertainty and the sense that other people were better informed than you.

P – Oh, yes.

The perfunctory phone call to one of my mother’s friends was made. She was so proud and that was that.

R – And you talked about your mother making calls, that there was a perfunctory call to her friend. How did that influence you –

P – That reminded me of – that will go on over the ages. A mother was always proud when that happened to her daughter and to tell a friend. For some reason, that was all the women that stand on your shoulders and you’re standing on their shoulders from ages past. I don’t know if it’s mythical, but it’s just something that happens, that the motherly, earthy, matriarchical kind of thing going on – I mean she was happy but I wasn’t.

R – You weren’t happy about it.

P – No, no, no, no.

I was informed enough about “it,” but other than anything else, nothing much.

R – In this part, I wanted to ask you if you could clarify. “I was informed enough about “it”. I think you meant your period.

P – Yes.

R – But other than anything else, nothing much. I was wondering if you could clarify that.

P – Well, as far as, I don’t know if this would be too much for a young mind, but it would be nice to know about the cycle, or your lining builds up and this is what happens. And even introducing PMS. I know it has gotten worse for me, after I finally diagnosed myself and tracking myself. It looked like a big EKG paper on all my moods. And then when I was supposedly ovulating and when my period was and where my mood was. I remember having this big roll of paper. But nothing was said about that either. Again,

nothing positive, and sex wasn't there. It didn't exist. I wasn't having it. There wasn't even the talk of "don't get knocked up," kind of thing or you'll get kicked out of the house lecture. I never got that.

R – So the fact that it wasn't talked about, nothing was mentioned –

P – It was just a thing that happened, just a thing that happened. And you didn't know when it was going to hit.

R – In terms of how that influenced your thinking about your body, did that give you any particular messages about your body, the fact that these things weren't being talked about?

P – To me it was just a disadvantage, compared to boys.

R – You were at a disadvantage being a girl.

P – Because I don't want to use the word vulnerable, but during that time you're messing with something else. It's just one more thing you have to deal with for that day. And guys don't have to go through that. I don't even know what the hell guys go through. The shower, and comparing sizes and God knows what else. I know more about that than - but I didn't know growing up either.

I had enough "accidents" to be humiliated and not thrilled about this monthly curse.

P – I always called it that. When I first heard menstruation or however it's pronounced. Ooh, it's a yucky word. I know my one friend, when I first got to know her used the phrase "on the rag". Ooh, what is that? Why would you say something like that? And I always called it the curse. And then I realized on the rag is sort of a biblical term. Good God, what did those women do back then? No wonder they were pregnant all the time. What did they do?

R – So having the accidents was very humiliating.

P – Eech. It was terrible. Cause people could see. I mean if you didn't have a sweater to cover your pants. I mean I wore pants. I didn't even wear skirts. We had an option, and I didn't feel that safe again to be wearing a skirt, in high school.

R – The fact that you were thinking about it as a curse. What effect did that have on how you were thinking about your body?

P – Well, it was I hate "it," and then that turns into I hate being a woman. But I don't know if I thought about it that way back then. I do now. Cause I want men to feel pain (laughs).

Painful cramps were absolutely blinding and I almost passed out from the pain one day in school, but I toughed it out.

R – Then you talked about the cramps and how they were “absolutely blinding”. You said that you “toughed it out”. What did that mean to you to be able to tough it out?

P – Just to get through. I remember a lot of times in school there would be girls who would walk up to the teacher, and all of a sudden they would be in the infirmary. And it was really because they were cramping really bad. I never did that. Because I didn’t want anybody knowing I was having my period. Unfortunately, my mother worked at the school. Big time whammy. But it almost seemed like the thin, the cheerleader type, and they kind of used that, or maybe legitimately. But, maybe, if I had tried it once I would have discovered, wonderful Ibuprofen. That helps relax muscles, that I use now. I don’t know. But they were treated like, with kid gloves. But I never did that. But I don’t know, to answer your question, there really wasn’t anything I was trying to prove. It was more of an avoidance behavior, of attention. Same as being a B student. I was always a B student instead of an A student because you get all the attention when you’re an A student. And, God forbid, you slide down, then it’s even worse. You get attention, then you get negative attention if you slide down, then it’s even worse.

R- So, if you weren’t toughing it out, that would have brought more attention to your body, the fact that you were having your period. Okay, I see.

P – Talking to whatever teacher it was.

R – So this way you were able to avoid having those conversations.

P – Yeah, I was never at the infirmary.

I never wore a pair of white pants.

R – And then you went on to talk about not wearing white pants. So it affected even what you wore.

P – Well, yeah. I had dark blue pants, dark blue jeans all through high school.

R – Did you feel inhibited or restricted in what you were able to wear, did you feel that you had less of a choice?

P – No, because I hated clothes shopping. So it wasn’t necessary to go out like once a month and go new clothes shopping. Again, I wasn’t bringing attention to myself. I didn’t bother my mother. I was a good child. That was the goal. I never caused her one bit of headache and I should have because it’s coming out now. And when you’re an adult in an adult world, adolescent behavior doesn’t fit in. But that’s another thesis.

I still hate this monthly thing.

R – Still talking about your period, you're talking about how it affects you today and you still hate this monthly "thing". You call it a "thing".

P – Yeah, it's not integrated.

R – It's not integrated"

P – That's behavior. Obviously, if I can't say "sex," it's s-e-x. Obviously, I'm having problems in that area. To say that, and it's still there. In my mid-thirties. That's a problem. That's not right. That's not normal.

R – It's still hard for you to talk about.

P – It's God's curse on women. That's what I would say.

### **Relationship of body to comparison with boys**

I never felt attractive in high school.

R – You said that when you were in high school, that you never felt attractive in high school. What was that like for you, this sense you had about yourself that you didn't feel you were attractive? What was that like for you to be in high school and feel that way?

P – It wasn't fun. I remember having a couple of crushes, crushes on boys but never having that returned. Just kind of sitting on the sidelines. Just observing, and I know partially, my mother had something to do with it. Because I'm sure nobody wanted to get in trouble and have the teacher kind of be there and then, oh, that's your mother. And my mother was no daisy there. She was a bitch. She was a very tough cookie. But that whole, you know, a couple of guys hanging around your locker, nothing like that ever happened.

R – So it was a kind of feeling –

P – Of just being left out. When you pair up, or the dating, or the whatever. I was just an observer.

### **Relationship of body to potential pregnancy**

And even wanted a hysterectomy since early twenties.

R – Well, in the context of hating “this monthly thing,” you pointed out that you had even wanted a hysterectomy since your early twenties.

P – And I remember being told I was way too young by whatever doctor, to be considering that at that time. And I was like, look, I’m not not planning on having kids, I don’t want kids. I mean the whole physical thing. And I want this monthly stuff to stop.

R – What would that mean to you, to have a hysterectomy?

P – For me, it would mean I’m safe. I’m free of monthly costs, monthly pain, monthly “thing,” monthly surprise. I’m free of ever getting knocked up, and for me it does not change, I’m maybe the one out of ten. The rest of women would probably say maybe it makes you less of a woman. I’m the one who says it wouldn’t matter to me one bit. I’m still me. My weight would be the big thing that makes me feel more or less of a woman than the little organ. So, I’m the outlier on the statistical map there. That’s how I would see it, as a “thank God”. And I’ll deal with, if they leave the eggs in, or the ovaries in. I’ll deal with whatever comes down the pike as far as changes. But to me, it means a man can’t ever hurt me anymore, or entrapment by pregnancy kind of thing. That would be all taken care of. When I mentioned it, of course, I was way too young. They were like no, no, you can’t have one of those.

R – So that’s something you still think about.

P – Oh, yes. If some doctor would do it for free, or even as a research thing, sign me up.

I had a miscarriage.

R – You also mentioned that at one point you had a miscarriage. How did that influence your feelings about your body?

P – Technically, since this is anonymous, it was an abortion. I’m not proud of it. It’s something that affects me to this day. It was in 93. It was an awful experience. I was not equipped for it. My boyfriend was away. He was told it was a miscarriage. I didn’t want to be roped into the relationship because of this. I knew I would abuse the child at that time in my life. I even feel that a little bit now.

R – You said you would have abused the child.

P – I wouldn’t have been able to handle it. I didn’t tell my mother. I hid it from my friends. I had like vertigo in the morning. I couldn’t climb a flight of stairs. It was awful, and again, I had no information. It was scary. I didn’t have any support system. Nothing was positive.

R – So, in terms of your body, this was another situation where you felt uncertain –

P – Out of control.

R – You felt out of control.

P – And I kept going back and forth. You know, there are services you can apply for if you're single. But then, no, I don't want to have to marry this guy. And I would never want to bring a child into this world and have my mother near it. Never.

R – So you felt very out of control. You felt like your body was out of control.

P – Back and forth, back and forth. I felt so guilty about it. I still feel like I should have went through with it. Body-wise it was kind of like, my body let me down. It turned on me. I got knocked up. I was careless. It's a vulnerability I'm talking about.

R – Your body felt vulnerable.

P – And to this day, I would not – that third trimester. Scared the hell out of me. A woman is so vulnerable to being attacked. There is no way. I would have a man beside me twenty-four seven. There is no way I would go through that. That physical thing? Every now and then I have this little thing, "Ah, you should have went through with it". Cause then you'd have that thing, you could have been a nurturer. And have that shield, "I made it through labor without medication stories"! Every now and then, I think I should do it. Now. And have labor pains. Then you could sit in with some of these women my age now.

### **Relationship of body to emotions**

I also "attempted suicide" at age thirteen by taking four antihistamines, but nothing happened and I told no one.

R – Well, then you talked about attempting suicide at age thirteen.

P – Yes, I had a lot of adolescent pain, crying a lot.

R – You said you had taken some antihistamines. You didn't tell anyone about it.

P – Took them with some vodka and went right to bed. That was my gesture. I don't know why I did it, but I just wanted to be pain-free. It had nothing to do with having my period at the time. I just didn't want to be around. I don't know why. And somehow that all blew over. I remember not feeling well.

R – How do you see that as being related to the changes in your body?

P – I don't know if that was the time when I started my overeating. It was probably after I started the eighth grade, right in there. Obviously, I was crying out for something, someone's attention, or something. I don't know why. I just know I was in pain.

I remember being in pain, but not being able to deal with it or figure out what the hell was wrong with me.

R – That you were feeling pain.

P – Emotional pain, not physical pain.

R – The emotional pain that you were feeling. Was that the pain that you talked about at the beginning, when we first started talking? You said that adolescence and bodily changes brings only pain to your mind. Was that the pain that you were experiencing?

P – I think so. I think it was a matter of not knowing things, not knowing what's going on, what's going to happen. And I guess hormones, whatever hormones do. And then everything kind of being swept under the rug, or not even being forthcoming.

R – You mean as far as the changes you were going through. Any discussion of that was swept under the rug.

P – Yeah, I mean I can't really remember how I dealt with bras. That doesn't even come to mind. I just remember my chest hurt. Other than that I don't really remember anything negative that came after that, trying them on or whatever.

R – You talked about feeling that there was something wrong with you.

P – Uh, huh. I felt out of place. Don't know how, why, when. I drank some wine coolers to try and numb myself out.

R – What were you trying to numb yourself from?

P – Anger, lashing out, if something was going on, if I was feeling hurt. I think that's what's underneath anger once you get through all the layers. And I just wanted to get through it, whatever it was. A party, a holiday, a visitation of people coming in, whatever it was. And just kind of be there but not be there.

R – In other words, I would have to worry about myself just keeping steady.

### **Relationship of body to food**

In eighth grade I started my overeating behavior.

R – Sure, sure. You also talked about, when you were in the eighth grade, you started what you described as your “overeating behavior”.

P – Definitely, yes.

R – Okay, what do you mean by overeating?

P – I remember this very clearly. I would come home, make myself – mostly it was like those macaroni and cheese boxes, make myself an entire box of that, eat all of that while sitting in front of the tv, and then when mom came home which was like five or six o'clock, have dinner. And I would have dinner. It was a constant, it was just an eating thing.

R – And did that affect how you experienced your body then?

P – That was the end of my dancing days, cause I mentioned it here. I'll never forget that moment either.

I continue over-eating/emotional eating now. I refuse to attend an OA meetings.

R – So you said that you're continuing what you describe as overeating or emotional eating. Now I was wondering if you could tell me about emotional eating. If you could tell me what that is.

P – I've had that since I was a child.

R – Yeah, what is that? Emotional eating?

P – The refrigerator was right on the other side of the wall of my bedroom. The kitchen was right next to my bedroom. Whenever – I was a very shy child, and experienced anxiety, which I'm now aware of. And would use food. It wasn't because I was hungry. I would use food to soothe myself. I still do it to this day. But that was always, always there. There was always something I could nibble on or run to. And I would never have a problem putting away supper, or eating lunch. It never interfered.

R – So the idea of emotional eating, that's a way to –

P – Stuff down, stuff down feelings of anger, stuff down feelings of pain. It's a way of numbing yourself.

R – I see.

P – I didn't smoke, I didn't drink. That little thing of doing a shot of vodka, that didn't last very long. I got nothing out of it.

R – So, it was a way of numbing, it was a way of stuffing down feelings.

P – And feeling full. Having something to hold onto. I'm the bulimic without the purging. So I don't know what that is. And I'm a perfectionist. So why wasn't I an anorexic?

(laughs) Why didn't I go that route? I'm still asking myself that. To get rid of the food. Oh, no. I wouldn't care how many calories, even to this day I refuse. First of all, because it's rough on my system. Cause I cannot stop once I start. So, I'll then deal with the guilt.

R – You mean after eating something, you'll deal with guilt?

P – I will not get rid of it. “Look at what you just did”. I'll eat three boxes of Dove bars. You know how many calories that is? You know how much that makes your pancreas scream? I call it stress testing my pancreas. So I go through some of that every now and then. I say here, I don't want that taken away from me. When I was going out with one of my dysfunctional men, I went to Al-Anon meetings. I don't want to sit around with a bunch of women and hear about whatever, because I think, obviously, I still want to do it. Because then, it's like “What do I do with that hole”? I have my anxiety. That started, that was always there as a child. So it would start with smaller amounts and now, since I'm an adult, and even through a lot of stress things. I swear, the more therapy you get, the worse you get sometimes.

I look at those meetings with fear.

R – Your sense that you don't want to attend those meetings, you said that you look at the meetings with fear. That it's kind of a frightening thing for you to think about going to those meetings.

P – Cause what else would I have left? I won't be able to eat my chocolate when I want to.

R – So that's a scary thing for you to think about.

P – Oh yeah. I mean it would help but –

I don't want anyone taking away my ability to soothe myself through food.

R – Yeah, and then you go on to talk about that more and you say you don't want anyone taking away your ability to soothe yourself through food.

P – And I still do. I have no physical affection. So that takes the place of it. And that always took place of it.

R – It takes the place of physical affection.

P – To me food equals love kind of thing, and I take it to the extreme. Because it's an energy source for your body. It's not psychological love or whatever.

### **Relationship of body to body image**

I will never forget that image and still feel sick thinking how I looked at that time.

R – Okay, you said that you would never forget that image and still feel sick thinking “how I looked at that time”.

P – Uh, huh.

R – And when you think about it now, you feel sick. So it still affects you.

P – It’s like how could they allow me to look like that with the rest of the girls. That’s how hard I am on myself. I mean to you or anybody else probably viewing it, you’d be like, yeah, I’m watching some dance routine or whatever. In my mind it’s still – I didn’t like it.

What I’ve learned so far about body image: is that as long as you have blonde hair, big breasts, are thin and have a tight ass, men will get whiplash to look and will give you anything you want.

R – Now you said here that what you’ve learned so far about body image –

P – I was being very sarcastic here.

R – Okay. As long as you have blonde hair and big breasts, and a tight ass, men will get whiplash to look at you and will give you anything you want.

P – Yep. That’s always going to be there. And I know that started in caveman days. Always will be there. Always will be there. And technically, it’s almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy if you look for it, you’ll see it. It’s like, “Oh, I saw that man looking at that blonde, I saw that man looking at that blonde. Only because I’m looking at blondes. Reality, it really is. And I’m not any kind of scientific whatever. That to me is it. That’s why it kind of makes me mad, or makes me p.o’d. Because I still think that if you do get hooked up with a nice guy, somehow I think that deep down inside they still want this.

R – That’s what you think they want.

P – Yeah, and of course it’s natural to look. I look too. It’s natural to look, even if you’re with somebody. You try not to be as obvious. You know, but I’ll never be enough for anybody.

R – You’ll never be enough for anybody.

P – Not the way this body is. And I know that’s such skewed thinking. I know it’s the emotions and cognitions just clashing.

R – That’s a belief you have. That feeling that you’ll never be enough for anybody.

P – I’m getting too old for this, to be struggling like this.

R – To be struggling.

P – Yes.

I lost a lot of hair last year trying to dye my hair blonde.

R – Okay. Well, you mentioned that you had lost a lot of hair last year trying to dye your hair blonde.

P – Oh, yes.

R – So what did being blonde mean to you?

P – I was going to be – I would get more attention. Because I was working on my consulting business. The years 1999 – 2001. I was doing everything you need to do. Again, I wanted to look successful while presenting myself to people, mainly lawyers, and thinking that blonde hair would definitely get me in. More than any kind of catchy, whatever, allure kind of thing.

### **Relationship of body to self-esteem**

I wanted to be a high maintenance female, but I subconsciously know I will never be that way.

R – Okay, you used the term “high maintenance,” and I wondered what you meant by that.

P – Hair done, make-up done. Very nice. Hair’s always nice. Nails, and then, always a flashy something. That’s high maintenance. And then there’s the high heels. To me, that’s a high maintenance female.

R – That’s a high maintenance female.

P – That’s what I always wanted to – that picture that what I wanted. I want to wake up in the morning looking like that okay? But I can’t be bothered trying to do that day after day after day after day. Because I know it’s not going to turn out perfectly like that everyday. So I don’t even bother.

R – So it’s the feeling that you’ll never attain perfection that keeps you from trying?

P – The same thing, the consistent thing. You know, I'm having an insight. What if I looked good yesterday, but now having a bad hair day or whatever. The people in your workplace would notice, they would notice a difference. And that would bring attention to you. Cause there is something physically different. And I used to wear my hair in different styles. It used to be very long, permed, whatever. But I don't spend more than five minutes on my hair. That's what I'm afraid of. I'm afraid of trying to keep up that appearance.

R – You're afraid that you wouldn't be able to.

P – That's right. In my mind there's no way. There's no way. What do you do on that day if you can't keep that up? What do you do if you don't have those ten perfect nails?

R – What do you imagine would happen if you're not able to attain this?

P – You're ugly. You're not together. Something's not right. You're not paying attention. You're not taking care of yourself. You're neglecting yourself.

R – So it's safer to try not to attain that.

P – It's safer to stay on the basic maintenance level than to try to maintain that high maintenance level. Because when you fall off that high maintenance plateau, there's a change. And to me that would affect my little self-esteem or worth or whatever.

R – Okay, so you talked about wanting to be high maintenance in high school, and this is something that you still think about today.

P – Same with the weight thing. Let's say for sake of numbers, 150. I was doing fine, I was doing great, and because of my work schedule, fell off the wagon. Here I am now, over 200 pounds. What was all that for? Why should I bother again to go back. I'm angry about that. So why bother? I worked very hard. I enjoyed walking. I'd come home from work, it was very hard, I'd be exhausted. Every year I'd buy a new machine to work out. But I'm trying to accept the fact, trying to give myself some leeway, it's not a sin. Getting back to the Catholic, it's not a sin to look beautiful or to wear mascara. Because in high school that was the big thing. The girls' eyeliner or dark eye shadow or eye thing going on. Ooh, that was the big thing, the anti-nun thing. Because we had nuns, we had a bunch of nuns running around that were covered head to toe. You could barely see them. And now, after talking about this, I realize, well, okay, you have anxiety, anxiety of what to wear, what was I going to wear to look presentable. And it's okay, maybe, that I didn't do that in high school where I took out ten clothes and tried on each one of them on. Never did that. And say, I don't have anything to wear. Never did that. And now I'm realizing it's okay to have anxiety about that. It's okay to have anxiety about you're going to be wearing make-up and stuff, and you're going to look good. And people are going to look at you. And it's okay. And it's okay to have short, stubby nails, but you can paint them. And I'm like, okay, I'm going to paint them. And I don't have to have ten perfect nails that I'm going to see, and God bless them, the one's that do. More power to

you. I did have them done professionally once. I felt ten pounds lighter. And they were the glamour ones. Out cutting grass that same day. Pulling on it with my glamour nails. I felt ten pounds lighter. I felt very feminine and very sexy. And they lasted one week. And I pulled them off because I like touching things. I cannot stand when nails are too long that I cannot touch things. This interview is really helping me.

R – Oh, I’m glad. I’m glad to hear that. So you’re having this thought during the interview that it’s okay, maybe it’s okay to have some anxiety about these things, that that’s okay.

P – Yeah, some days I can make that effort of curling my hair and putting on make-up, or whatever, and looking nice, and some days I don’t have to. I still can kind of quote, unquote, get away with it in society.

R – Okay, well I’m glad that this is happening for you. Okay, so we talked about being a high maintenance female, and here in your writing, now you’ve since had kind of an insight, but you said in here, subconsciously I know I will never be that way.

P – Because I’m kind of a down to earth kind of gal anyway. And if push comes to shove, I don’t have to rely on, what if I ran out of this or ran out of that. That all I would need is Dial soap or whatever to wash my face. I don’t need, I don’t need that much to keep me happy. I would love to get a manicure every week, but I need to touch things. I don’t know how the other women, how they do their laundry or mechanical things, but more power to you. But, it’s not really me.

To also fill the lack of self-esteem...

R – You talked about having a lack of self-esteem.

P – I don’t know why I threw all that in.

R – No, this is interesting because you were talking about bodily changes so I’m wondering what the connection is. I’m wondering about the connection between lack of self-esteem and your body.

P – I think it’s related. No matter what body you’re given, there are things out there, clothes, whatever, that can make you look good. Mostly, I’m thinking job-wise. But I hid again, in my job, in scrubs. How asexual is that? I never wanted that nine to five job with having to dress. I didn’t want to show off anything. I sort of do now, but there are no clothes for that in my size. I don’t know. I suppose with high self-esteem, I wouldn’t be doing the treading every night, or checking the mirror all the time, looking at every little blemish. But I lost all that weight and I have nothing to show for it. I’m right back where I started, and I’m angry about that.

### **Relationship of body to religion**

And since I was raised a Catholic, it also didn't exist.

R – So, would you say your religion, or being Catholic, had anything to do with how you felt about your body? Did that have any influence?

P – It did. It was just a very repressive upbringing. The whole fire and brimstone. I came from a very small town. I was so impressionable. And my God, to think of doing anything wrong. I'm sure my brothers got away with a lot more, I'm sure experienced a lot more life than I did growing up. And yet I don't know. I remain clueless, because they were so far ahead of me in age.

R – Are you thinking that because you were a girl, that there were limits placed on you that were not placed on them.

P – If there were limits I wasn't aware of it. I would just say it was because I didn't even test any limits. I just didn't do anything.

### **Relationship of body to feelings of envy**

I was always jealous of the girls that looked good and still carry that with me today.

R – And you talked about being jealous of the other girls, that they looked good.

P – Because guess what? They got the guys' attention. Or they seemed very animated. Or very popular. And I didn't like that.

R – Okay, so that created some feelings of jealousy for you.

P – Yep. Or envy.

R – I think it's envy because you want to be in their place. I wasn't one of those girls.

P – Okay, so those were the kind of feelings you were having towards them.

R – And because of my body I didn't try out for cheerleading. I would have been really good cause I can still do a split. I was really strong, with the pyramid. I would have been the one on the bottom helping out. But, again, in my mind I was too fat for that. I could have expressed my anger and my energy. But I hid in band. There was a whole uniform Real asexual.

R – Again, not drawing attention to yourself.

P – But then watching them, I was like, “Oh, I could do that”. But they got the attention. They got to look good. Who cares if they freeze their little asses off in the winter time in the parade.

R – So that was your feeling that you were too fat.

P – I don’t want to blow it out of proportion. But I feel like I was, I don’t want to say four hundred pounds, but just totally looking outrageous. And then one girl, she was big. She was overweight. She was the baton thing, and they just wore usually a leotard, or just a sequined thing. She didn’t care. But for me, fitting in with those cheerleaders, and the ones who did their hair and make-up. Missed out on that too.

R – That was something you missed out on.

P – I figured, it’s a damn shame I didn’t go for it. I regret everything. Does everybody? I don’t know.

R – You’re regretting-

P – Yeah, I’m living with regret today. Oh, yeah.

R – You’re living with regret today because you said that that’s something that you still carry with you today. It’s that feeling of regret?

P – Oh, as far as being – that I carry with me today is that women now, out there in the world, the high maintenance, especially the nails. God that gets me, the nail thing. Cause I’m wondering how do you pull out that laundry? Which I would find really hard with long nails. I want to be that, but am I making the effort to do that? No, because here’s me, I can’t be bothered.

### **Relationship of body to boys**

I did not date in high school, not even a kiss from a boy.

R – And you said that you didn’t date in high school, that you didn’t kiss a boy while you were in high school.

P – That’s a shame. I think you should get to do something in high school.

R – Is that something that still affects you now, when you think about it? What does that mean to you now that you didn’t kiss a boy?

P – To me, it just kept me naïve. I didn’t prepare me for the real world. And technically, that’s what high school was supposed to be like. Now that I look back at it, not when I was there. Or actually when I was there. Cause I remember one girl got to go to a senior

prom when she was a junior, cause a senior asked her. And then she got to go to her own senior prom. So that was like a twice thing. And it's just a shame because it's like a learning thing. How else are you going to learn? Where else are you going to learn how to connect with the other sex, how to kiss or have fights, or how to have a relationship. I didn't have any of that.

R – So now then, like today, is that similar to what you talked about earlier, feeling that you lacked information, you were not as well informed as other people. Like did that –

P – I still feel that way, and I know I lacked seeing parents argue, fight, make up. I didn't have any of that. Never saw that. My mother reminded me of that a few times. Well, you never experienced that. This is something you're lacking. And how do you make up for that? Really, how does a person, and then I didn't even have a “boyfriend-girlfriend I'll throw the class ring back at him kind of fight”. Nothing like that. How am I going to learn how to get along in the world when there's all this other stuff. You've got to get it together when you're an adult. And yet I'm still at this kind of baby step kind of stuff. So, it still affects my relationships to this day. High school was a time when you went on dates. I didn't know. What was a date? I saw it around me. So it's a shame. It's a shame I didn't get a little bit of a jump start. And maybe that way I could have experienced something or maybe I could have hooked up with somebody. Or maybe their parents would have helped me. The guy's parents, or somebody. Another female to help me. But no.

I felt repulsive. Still do.

R – You said that, you used the word “repulsive,” that you felt repulsive in high school.

P – Yeah, I felt like I couldn't attract any guy. Why couldn't I get something from them. A hello. I was just a blip on the radar, a little blob. I didn't have a suitor, you know, come and woo me.

R – And when you used the word repulsive, did you feel that way about your body?

P – Yes, and maybe personality-wise. Yes, I actually felt I was not pretty enough to even attract anybody. Which really isn't true.

R – Right, right.

P – I was okay. I was okay in high school really. It was like, what happened? What did I do wrong?

R – That's how you were feeling.

P – And then, I just accepted it really.

R – That you felt that way?

P – What was I going to say, or what was going to change. And again, mother wasn't the one to go to say, I don't feel so good about myself. Oh God, she had more things to worry about than me having a teenage crisis kind of thing. There was no way I was going to be able to do that with her. Or her sitting down saying there's more fish in the sea. Maybe it was the mood I was in when I was typing this. Yeah, I sometimes feel like that. In reality, I don't look like the Hunchback of Notre Dame, out there in society. I think I kind of blend in, fit in. So why am I not getting the nice, why is that not in my energy field. Why am I not drawing that?

R – So you still feel that way today.

P – I feel like I'm permanently cursed with this kind of co-dependency, sending out into the world. You know how what you send out in the world comes back to you?

R – Well, this is a kind of belief that you have about yourself. And beliefs can be changed. Because beliefs are just that, they're ideas or a belief system that we have about ourselves.

P – And that's what I think. I'm the beauty queen for dysfunctional men.

R – And of course, the only thing that's really holding that in place is your belief –

P – That's all I can have. And this opens up a whole other Pandora's box that I could have someone normal.

R – Okay, so that might be part of the danger for you.

P – Yeah, because then I'd have to deal with real stuff – that's how relationships are.

### **Relationship of body to cultural expectations**

I am a shopaholic but that has dramatically decreased due to financial reasons these days.

R – Okay, then you talked about being a shopaholic. What was that like for you?

P – It's a thing I used to do which hits every now and then. With the men, it was always them. Going and buying for them. That made me feel like somebody. When I put that plastic card down, to this day it says I am somebody important because I have money. That is a belief that is so ingrained. Actually, it gets rewarded by society.

R – Oh, sure.

P – I did that one time. I got gussied up and went to the mall. Great service, every store I went into.

R – You noticed a difference –

P – Oh, I never wanted to be the societal norm. But then I tried to prove how society treats people. By how they look and how they dress. Maybe it was because I looked confident. I was feeling good about myself because I got gussied up. Is it that one causes the other? But you are judged. But there would be no way I would draw attention to myself. But that shopaholic thing, that's power to me and it always will be. The power to be able to get what you want.

R – And in terms of your body –

P – I would be able to buy better clothes, and I would feel better.

I thought I was somebody when I used my “plastic money”. I felt so powerful and important.

R – Yeah, because you talked feeling powerful and important, and feeling like you were somebody when you used your plastic money. And you were describing, now, how your appearance has a lot to do with that, whether you feel powerful and important. If you get “gussied up,” you said. Did you feel more important then, like you were somebody?

P – Uh,huh. Even though they didn't know me from Adam. I know it's really up to me to have the self-esteem or whatever without this.

It felt good to be able to obtain something I wanted right then and there.

R – You talked about how it felt good to be able to obtain something you wanted right then and there.

P – That's power.

R – And when you would do this, you would alter your appearance.

P – Either I would get dressed up or look halfway decent, but what I was buying, hey, they didn't care what I looked like. I was paying for it.

I was a real person, someone of worth.

R – Well, you said that when you were engaged in these sorts of things that “I was a real person”. What do you mean by real?

P – I was out in society, playing the little societal rules, the little games. Whatever we have set up on this planet. And according to society, I was someone of worth, because obviously, I deserved it. I have this power to buy it. I must have done something to have this privilege. I was accepted.

R – And in terms of your body, I want to make sure I understand. It would affect your appearance because it sounds like you would “dress the part”. Part of that experience for you –

P – It’s kind of like fooling society. I was fooling people by my appearance.

R – So you felt like you were “somebody,” you felt real, you felt powerful. You said you felt like you were someone of worth.

P – I had money to spend. I always pick the most expensive thing. But to me that’s being someone of worth. And that’s a shame.

R – Okay –

P – I don’t know why I put this all in. I’m sorry.

R – No, don’t be sorry. Because in some way, the fact that you included all these things, means that these are all connected to your body for you. You included them when you responded to the question.

### **Relationship of body to feelings of disconnection**

...and experienced more than once acquaintance rape.

R – You also talked about another experience where you experienced what you termed “acquaintance rape”.

P – Again, with my little knowledge. Is it always violent? When the woman says “No, stop please”. When there’s nothing violent going on? Because there have been times when I either do it or I wanted to stop but I just keep my mouth shut until it’s over with. Not pleasant though. I don’t know if that was too strong to say, because in my mind there’s always violence involved with that word.

R – As far as how you felt about your body, did it change anything about how you felt about your body?

P – That you could disconnect from it.

R – Oh, is that what it was like for you during that time, like a disconnected sort of feeling?

P – Yes, that something can happen to it, and you can just pick up a book and read. Or just move on. That it can be violated, that you can separate out from it, and just move on. But always knowing, you're at risk.

### **Relationship of body to depression**

...and currently being treated for depression (recurring)...

R – And then you said that you're being treated for depression that has been recurring throughout your life. Do you think – what's the relationship, since you mentioned it here, or do you think there is one, between the depression and your body?

P – Well, last year was the episode where I lost weight, because I wasn't eating for days. I was stuck on my couch, literally. And I liked that, even though I was really depressed.

R – Because you lost weight.

P – I liked that. Literally at that time I was really slightly happy.

R – Sure.

P – Don't eat. Thin body. And we're talking ten pounds maybe. I don't even want to think fifteen. If I had kept going I wouldn't be alive. Even then, that was a big deal. I was kind of happy. I didn't want to start eating.

R – So even in the midst of being depressed there was this sense of, you were happy about –

P – I could look in the mirror and go “Oh, good, you're starting to get those little gaunty, whatever, face look.

R – Okay.

P – Almost like, now you can scare mother with it. Since you're sickly-looking, getting skinny.

### **Relationship of body to age**

I now know that coloring your hair every month does not make for happy hair.

R – Well, you finished up by saying that coloring your hair every month does not make for happy hair.

P – Right. That whole year I was box-coloring every month. Because I would watch the color wash down the drain when I would wash my hair. And then I'd look in the mirror, and it's not there three weeks, four weeks later. So then I wanted purple hair, or burgundy hair. I just wanted to try to look whatever. And then I was thinking blonde, blonde. Try blonde. I was just frantically searching for some sort of beauty thing. And then I realized certain people can have blonde hair. I was constantly going for that hair color, covering up the white hairs, the gray hairs. And I was panicking. I didn't want to see one. And I would constantly pull them out.

R – You were pulling out the white hairs. Now what did that mean to you to have white hair?

P – Old.

R – It meant that you were getting old.

P – And what did that –

P – Not attractive. It's only going to get worse.

R – You said it meant getting old. Does that mean being less attractive?

**P – Yes. Well, for me it means I didn't capture a man yet. In my youth. So now it's doubly or triply hard, or difficult. After a certain point you might as well pack it up and forget about it. Go your own way. Maybe I'm set in my ways. It's nice to know someone when you're young. I wanted someone to see me when I was that picture (points to picture she brought of herself from several years ago). And then, you know, we'd grow old together. All I knew were my grandparents. They were together for sixty-three years or some astronomical number. And I thought it's kind of nice. They get to see the young part of you. The kind of skipping rope and then flying kites, and then getting a little older and then settling in. Now it's like, they're just going to be presented with old already. God help us all when I'm forty.**

**EDITED SYNTHESIS #3****Chris****Relationship of body to peers**

I have several vivid memories, or defining moments, in my life connected to the question...The first was when I was lying on the beach with a friend-were both about ten or eleven years old, I think. "Do you have hair down there"? she asked me.

R – Well, you said that you had several things that stood out, several vivid memories that related to the question. Do you want to say anything more about that?

P – The only other thing was I had another memory, and then I thought, oh, I've got to stop. But those were the ones that first came to mind.

R – Okay. Well, then you described this situation where you were on the beach with your friend, and she asked you if you "had hair down there". What was that like for you when she asked you that question?

P – I just totally remember that moment. I remember all the – it was a nice day – I remember all the – it just seemed to be important. It kind of struck me with a little bit of fear because I knew I didn't.

R – So you're saying it struck you with fear.

P – Yeah, I think there was a little bit of that.

R – Oh, okay. Do you remember what you were afraid of?

P – It was almost afraid of being found out that I wasn't maybe where I should be at.

R – Okay, so that created a little bit of anxiety for you then.

P – Yeah.

"I do", she informed me and pulled her bathing suit bottoms aside to show me. One black hair jutted out of her otherwise hairless crotch.

R – Okay. Then she told you she did in fact have hair, and she pulled down her bathing suit to show you.

P – Yes.

R – Now what was that like for you when she did that?

P – Well, it was kind of like, I didn't want to go there. If I could have changed the subject or think of anything, but I was frozen you know. It was just like when she did that, it was like, "well, I'm still not showing you mine". Cause there's nothing to show.

"Let me see yours", she said.

R – Okay, and then she said, "let me see yours". And you said – you told her "no". Well, when she said, "let me see yours, did that kind of, did that-

P – That was just like when she initially said, when she initiated the whole thing. It was the same kind of feeling. It was more of the same thing.

My sense of connection to one of my own disappeared.

R – And then you talked about a sense of connection, when you had this conversation with this girl, you talked about this sense of connection and feeling like that disappeared.

P – Yeah, cause it hit me. I think it hit me. Cause I thought, maybe we're not as connected as I thought.

The funny thing was that one sprout of hair did ultimately seem to change the nature of our friendship.

R – And then you went on to describe how it really did ultimately seem to change the nature of your friendship. Can you describe, how did you feel that it changed your friendship?

P – I don't think it was just that she had more hair. I don't think it was as simple as that. But she was becoming different than me and she took kind of a sense of pride in that. And I think she was on a level, she was on a level where she was more ready to experiment with boys and things like that, and I wasn't. It was just – like after that we never – I think there was an innocence lost in our friendship. It seemed like we hung out, our parents did stuff together, and now that kind of stopped. It seemed to coincide with that same time.

Before, I had been more the leader and she followed. Now, her sprout gave her courage and a new-found strength.

R – And then you kind of described a little bit, how in the past you had been more of the leader and she kind of followed, and now you thought, you described it as this gave her courage and a new-found strength.

P – Yeah, and it wasn't – in the past, I was more the leader in terms of I'd say let's go to the store, let's do this, let's draw, let's color in books, and stuff like that. Whereas, she did become a lot more focused on boys and on how she looked, and on her hair. I remember thinking, "My God, she's so good with a curling iron". Like I can't even use it. I would every morning get up and use the curling iron. And I didn't have an interest in that, and I thought well maybe that says something. I thought maybe I should have an interest, I wasn't sure. But we just then totally started going separate ways.

When we got a little older and interested in boys, I often deferred to her on her ideas as I think we both viewed her as the more "mature" of us, even though we now both had a healthy patch of triangle between our thighs.

P – Yeah, because we didn't live in the same town so I wouldn't see her all the time, so it would be, I don't know, maybe three or four times a year. Always in the summer and a few other times. So she did appear more mature. She didn't act silly or anything ever, and her hair was always perfect, and she always had a tan and things like that. I guess I equated that with a kind of fake maturity or something. But she ended up, I totally lost touch. My parents are still friends with them. So the last time I saw her I was probably twenty-three or something, around there. It was after college and she had gotten married because that was the thing to do, at a really young age. She hasn't had kids, and she never really got like a real career or anything like that. To me, actually, she's a loser! (laughs). I'm trying to be nice about it. No, that's bad. But we just took different tracks. She was so, ow that I look at it, I can see, she was a whole lot more superficial. She just seemed to have a grasp of the latest styles and everything that I just wasn't. And people, you know, you run into people nowadays when you're older, and that's fine. They're into that, or whatever. But back then, it just made it seem more separate somehow.

R – Okay, well that was situation number one.

P – Okay.

### **Relationship of body to feelings about specific parts of body**

I lay there willing a pubic hair to grow, hoping I would have something before the day was out.

R – And then you talked about that you lay there "willing" a hair to grow. What was that like?

P – Well, it didn't really work I don't think! (laughter) I don't know what kind of thinking that was. It was like magical thinking. It was like, "please God, let it happen".

R – It sounds like it was pretty intense. You were really wishing for it to happen.

P – Oh definitely, yeah.

R – So, you had this sense that a sense of separateness grew on that day, that you felt more separate from her.

P – Yes, and then I thought that it could be not only from her. It could be from other people too. It just made me feel like I was different.

R – So not only from her but it created sense where you were wondering whether you were more separate from other people as well.

P – Right.

We were both females and we would one day be women, I realized. But how and when that happened seemed – at least on a superficial level – to be different.

R – And then you thought about how you were both females and one day you would be women, but how and when that happened would, at least, on a superficial level, be different. So you're continuing to talk about that sense of separateness, that how and when you both arrive at that it would be different from her.

P – Right. It did seem like I knew in my head that one day we're both going to be there, you know. We're both going to be fully women. But that didn't seem so much to matter as I wanted it to be now. It didn't seem like a journey or anything. I just wanted it to be now.

R – You just wanted it to be then.

P – Uh, huh.

### **Relationship of body to timing of adolescent bodily changes**

"Maybe", I said, not wanting to commit one way or another until she told me if she did or not.

R – And then you said you really didn't want to commit one way or the other until she gave you her answer.

P – Did I use that term "commit"?

R – Actually, yeah, you did because I have it circled because I thought it was interesting.

P – Yeah, that is interesting that I wrote that. I guess I was thinking if she had said, “No I don’t have anything”, then I would have said, “oh, yeah, me neither”. Do you know what I’m saying?

R – Uh, huh.

P – But I guess I just wanted to play it safe I guess.

R – So you kind of wanted to see where she was at. It sounds like you had a concern that you wanted to be in the same place she was.

P – Right. And whatever way she was, was probably the “right” way.

R – Oh, okay. It was the “right” way.

P – Yeah.

“No”, I told her. “I don’t have any hair yet but I can feel it coming”.

R – Okay, and then you said that you didn’t have any yet, but that you could feel it coming. Can you tell me about that?

P – Its not like I could literally feel it coming, but you know, its got to be happening soon you know. I had read the books and stuff. So, you know, on one level I knew it was all like a superficial thing. Hair in your crotch area is totally superficial. But, yet, it seemed so important at the time.

R – Okay. So you were anticipating that it was going to be coming.

P – Yeah.

I could sense her disappointment.

R – Okay, and then you talked about, you felt that she was disappointed.

P – Yeah, that’s what I felt. Just that she was always much more mature than I was. You know, she wore her hair like a Farrah Fawcett style, cause that was in back then. And she introduced me to the world of boys in terms of, like she got us a Playgirl magazine. It was kind of like, I just looked up to her. So, I just kind of like, I’m not in her league.

R – Okay, so you felt that you were not in her league.

As we continued to lie on the beach, I felt the existence of one strand of hair separated us by a thousand years.

R – And then you went on to say that you felt separated from her by about a thousand years.

P – Yeah.

R – So, it had that kind of effect on you. That difference, at that point in your lives, it created this real sense of separateness.

P – Yeah, like I think in some ways I always felt a little bit like in some ways I could see how she was different from me. Because I felt that she was more mature and stuff. And at that moment it was like, oh no. Now she knows it too. So it made it even worse.

R – Now she knew there was this difference. So that made it even worse then.

P – I definitely felt it more, but also that added to it, that now she knew.

### **Relationship of body to family**

I remember lying in bed that night, wondering what else wasn't as it seemed.

R – And this went on into the evening when you were lying in bed that night and you were thinking about things. And it sounds like it kind of led you to wonder about other things. You said I was wondering what else wasn't as it seemed.

P – To be honest I can't fully remember, but I kind of remember because this was at my grandfather's. I remember I could hear them in the other room. I could hear the TV on and my parents talking and my grandfather. And it was related to my relationships with people. Are things as they seem? So I can't remember the specifics but I definitely remember them in the other room and the TV going and them talking and laughing and me thinking, "well I'm not an adult to be out there watching TV with them. I have to be here in bed.

### **Relationship of body to mother**

The other moment that sticks out in my mind is when I was eighteen years old and visiting home one weekend from college. I entered the kitchen wearing a pair of jeans that tied around my waist and buttoned at the ankle. I had taken up the habit of wearing scarves around my neck. I was excited for my mother to see my "new look" and I remember feeling attractive that day as I entered the kitchen.

R – And then you went on to talk about the time you came home from college and you walked into the kitchen and you were wearing a scarf around your neck, and you had this pair of jeans on and you were really looking forward to having your mother see what you talked about as your “new look”, and you felt very attractive that day when you walked into the kitchen.

P – Right. Cause I had felt – I just remember wearing those at school and I just remember that I felt really good in them. And I just felt like I’m more maybe my mother’s equal, you know I’ve lived away, I’m no longer her child. I’m this adult woman coming back to visit, to home. And she commented that I looked hippy. And that just – and you know its interesting, I picked a different example, but it had the same impact. I just froze. I did the same as I did when she said let me see your hair kind of thing. I guess for totally different reasons.

“You shouldn’t wear scarves around your neck like that. It makes you look hippy”, was the first thing out of her mouth. I froze.

R – Yeah, what was – cause you wrote about here that, yeah, she makes that comment. “It makes you look hippy”, and you said you froze. When you froze, what was going on there do you think when you froze? What was happening there?

P – It was probably a million things. I remember thinking I cannot believe she’s saying this. I guess I was appalled with her behavior, but at the same time, I took it more personally. Not so much, I was somewhat appalled, you know, I can’t believe she’s doing this. But I’m like, “Oh my God, you know, maybe she’s right”. So how I perceived myself, a healthy, attractive young woman. I’m like, “Oh my God, I’m walking around with hips that are like hitting walls or something”. So that was that.

I couldn’t believe she was cutting me down like that. I felt horrible but I acted as if her words did not bother me.

R – You said I couldn’t believe she was cutting me down like that. I felt horrible but I acted as if her words didn’t bother me. When your mom made these statements to you, these comments to you, how did that affect how you felt about your body at that point?

P – I felt ashamed. You know, how could I have thought that I looked okay. Because my mother – to me I really did. I respected my mother’s beliefs of other people. She always seems to be right on about other people. So here she is saying something about me. So, maybe she’s right.

R – So you thought she might be right.

P – Correct.

I wanted to run, but walked casually to the bathroom to inspect myself in the bathroom mirror.

R – And then you went in, you said you walked casually into the bathroom to look in the mirror.

P – Right. I guess I didn't want her to think that her words had power over me. And they did.

R – What was that like when you were checking, looking in the mirror. How did you experience that?

P – I guess I was looking at myself, obviously critically, you know – instead of – I was looking for the flaws. Looking at myself through my mother's eyes. Because in mine they had been fine.

R – Right, right.

P – Cause when I walked out of that bathroom, I had gained a hundred pounds.

R – And you said that you were looking at yourself through your mother's eyes.

P – Yeah.

I took the scarf on, then off. On then off.

R – So after you spent some time looking in the mirror, you describe how you took the scarf off, put it on, took it off.

P – Yeah, and you know its funny because as I'm sitting here I'm looking across the room, and I have a scarf hanging over the back of my door. Cause I love scarves. I just think they're beautiful. And I can remember the ones I had that had the little silver things running through them, kind of metallic. So I remember all my scarves I had, I just love them. I ended up putting them away. I think I may have used some of them to fill baskets, to set things in baskets eventually. But I let that part of myself go.

R – So that was a part of yourself.

P – Right, it had been an identity. It was cool, you know. I wore these scarves and these long funky earrings. And I just felt like – I loved it, you know. But oh my God, if they made me look fat – so I shouldn't were them.

R – So you still have the scarves, but you don't wear them like that anymore.

P – Well, I didn't for a period of time, you know. I just totally put them away. And actually it's only been more recently that I started wearing them again.

R – Oh, okay.

P – Actually, I just got one – actually this is kind of funny. Cause this woman that works with me just came back from Pakistan. She gave me this beautiful scarf. And, so I've been wearing it. And actually my mother saw it and she's like, "Oh, that's beautiful". She didn't say anything about hippyness. I don't know if she'd forgotten that.

R – So now your mother likes the way the scarf looks. So she likes that look now.

P – Yeah, but I decided, I ended up wearing them despite, down the road, what she thinks or not. But for a period of time, it really did, it impacted me.

I put the scarf back on, wore it all weekend in front of my mother, but the minute I returned to school, I ditched the scarf and all of my other scarves for that matter.

R – And then you described how you eventually put the scarf back on and you wore it all weekend, in front of your mother.

P – Yeah.

R – But then when you got back to school, you said, "I ditched the scarf", and all of your other scarves.

P – Right.

R – So it sounds like, I guess you were trying to make some sort of a point or a statement in front of your mother.

P – Right, right. But I didn't want her to think she could affect my behavior. What you say, that it could affect my behavior. I don't care what you think. But truly I obviously did. So it was important that she didn't think that it did.

R – Right, yeah, it obviously affected you very greatly because you got rid of all the scarves after that.

P – Right.

My mother's comment had burned into me and affected how I saw myself as a woman.

R – And then you went on to talk about that some more, how it affected you, and you said that my mother's comments had burned into me and affected how I saw myself as a woman.

P – Right.

R – So it really did have a great impact on you.

P – Right. I think it made me much more critical of myself, instead of just being, you know, whatever. Cause even if it was true, which looking back, I know it wasn't. But even if it was, who cares, you know?

I felt a sense of isolation.

R – And the other thing that it did, you described feeling a sense of isolation from that event.

P – Yeah.

R – Can you describe that a little bit?

P – I think some of it was, cause her comments hurt me. Well, you're my mother. How could you hurt me like that? To me it was kind of cruel. So I kind of protected myself, obviously now I'm not totally telling her how I feel about things. Or what she said to me, it just, you know, it did put up kind of a wall between us.

In retrospect, I get angry thinking about it. Angry with myself that I allowed a senseless comment to impact me as strongly as it did. I got hung up on something so stupid, wasting precious time worrying about how I appeared to others.

R – And then you talked about the anger you felt. You said, I get angry thinking about it. The way you wrote it here you wrote it in the present tense, and I wanted to ask you about that.

P – Well, you know, just going through it right now, I'm getting a little pissed. Oh, this is good. Now I gotta go visit my mom tonight. Oh, this is good (laughs).

R – Cause that really stood out to me, cause I think for the most part, its pretty much in the past tense. It is really interesting cause you said, "I get angry thinking about it".

P – Right, right. And that's funny because its only the last – I can feel my body being tense thinking about it. I do get angry about it. Yeah.

R – Yeah. You talk about, it made you angry with yourself because you talk about , it was a senseless comment and it impacted you very strongly. You said I got hung up on something so stupid, and you got very angry thinking about the time you had wasted or time you had spent worrying about it.

P – Right, right. And how silly. How I see that as silly. And I’m the one who allowed that comment to impact me, and other comments. I know there were other comments within that one hippy comment. That probably just wasn’t the only comment, you know. Even to this day she might say stuff, but it doesn’t impact like it did back then. Cause, okay, that’s like your issue, you know?

It wasn’t until graduate school and ten more pounds later, that I unburied them and wore them proudly again around my neck.

R – And then you finished up here by saying it wasn’t until graduate school and ten more pounds later, “that I unburied them”. You’re talking about the scarves – and wore them proudly again “around my neck”. So you wore them proudly you said.

P – Yeah, I just, I mean it was similar to how I initially wore them, but I kind of lost that innocence of, an awareness or something. You know what I mean?

R – Uh, huh.

P – I don’t know what you call it. And now I wear them, I still wear them. And occasionally, I put on a scarf and I think, I guess every time I put on a scarf I still think of that comment. Probably most every time. But its not – when I put it on I think, oh she said that. That’s too bad she’s made that comment. I feel bad for me back then. But not now, it doesn’t –

R – You feel bad now about how you felt about it back then.

P – Yeah, I almost feel badly for the child that I was when that happened.

R – Okay, so that’s something you think about when you put the scarves on now.

P – Yeah, I may not think of – I’ll just think of that comment. Sometimes I’ll go one step further and think, oh yeah, my mom doesn’t like scarves on me. They make me look hippy. And I’m out the door and that’s it.

### **Relationship of body to weight**

With the start of college, I had put five pounds on my then one hundred and ten pound frame. I was conscious of that fact but didn’t think I looked bad or hippy.

R – And then you talked about that when you started college, that you had put on about five pounds, and that you were conscious of that but you said, I didn’t think I looked bad or hippy.

P – Right.

R – So putting on the five pounds, from your point of view, didn't have much of an effect on you.

P – Right, right.

### **Relationship of body to self-esteem**

I became much more self-conscious for a period of time.

R – Right, right. You said that it made you, you felt more self-conscious for awhile.

P – Yes, definitely. Cause I even remember, those jeans tied around the waist, they were the coolest things I thought. And I remember standing in line at the dorm getting dinner or whatever, and I remember wondering, my gosh, I wonder if people are noticing my hips.

R – Oh, okay.

P – You know? And it was like a burden, to think that people were checking you out. And I really wasn't like that before. I wasn't that self-conscious.

From my mother, from my new friends but most strongly from myself.

R – Yeah, because you said here, not only from your mother, but you said also from your friends, and you said most strongly “from myself”. Can you say a little more about the isolation you felt, you said most strongly from yourself?

P – You know, even thinking back to that moment in the cafeteria, or other moments. It's like why, I wasn't being good to myself, that I was focused on something so stupid. That irks me. I don't know, I wasn't being true to myself, you know, in terms of pursuing my goals, learning. You know, I'd be doing my, going through life, going through college. I was pursuing things, I was working. But at the same time, every once in awhile, those thoughts might crop up. Like, I'm not, I'm hippy or I'm fat. And it's like – critiquing my self in that way, was beating myself up, and it just wasn't good.

### **Relationship of body to perceptions of body**

As I gazed at all of my 5'7” my hips seemed to grow before my eyes.

R – And then you talked about, you gazed, I guess this was when you were at the mirror, you said that, “My hips seemed to grow before my eyes”. Which is kind of what you just talked about a little bit.

P – Right, right.

R – So you saw yourself very differently when you were looking in the mirror then.

P – Yeah, it was a transformation, not necessarily in a good way.

“My God”, I thought. “How could I have been walking around campus looking hippy and fat like this and not realized it before now?”

R – And then you said, you thought, “My God, how could I have been walking around campus what you described as looking hippy and fat, and not realized it before now. So there was a kind of transformation again where you describe you saw yourself in a completely different way when you looked in the mirror.

P – Right, and it was like questioning my perceptions. This is what I was thinking, one way, and how could I – it was totally different, totally different. You know, and what else may be that way.

R – And that was due to your mother’s words that kind of created that question for you.

P – Right, exactly.

I felt like I was “out of touch” with my body.

R – Okay. And then you said that you felt like you were out of touch with your body. What was that experience like, to feel out of touch with your body?

P – I guess because, you know, I thought I had a certain awareness of how I was going through the world, and you know, I felt that I was a good young woman, confident. But I also, I guess on a certain level thought, cause I know society thinks, oh you should be a certain way to be a woman, and you should be somewhat slender or whatever. And I felt that I was, you know?

R – Uh, huh.

P – And it wasn’t a big deal kind of thing. Then, you know, to be looking at every piece of that. That I may not – I wasn’t truly in touch with my body. I wasn’t thinking of myself as “oh isn’t this great, my body”. I’m able to, I need to take care of it so that I can live and I can help other people. You know, it was never like I need to do it for – or just to do it, you know. That its important to have your body, just to be healthy, you know. I think my mother’s comment ended up getting me out of touch. I mean I let it happen or whatever, but in terms of thinking about my body as a vehicle to allow me to do, you know, great things in life, and to go places and literally walk around and to – how pathetic it became more of an object. So I was almost distanced from my physical self.

**Relationship of body to menstrual period**

R – Okay is there anything else you want to add or is there anything else you want to say about what you've written?

P – I had only one other thing, and it was about the day I started my period.

R – Uh,huh.

P – And I didn't even write it because I thought, "Oh my God, I could keep going on for years. Because that was a very similar moment. When something happens in your life. Oh my gosh, I'm on a whole new plane.

R – What was that like for you?

P – I remember leaving school. I had a uniform on. I can't remember, it was seventh or eighth grade. I think it was seventh grade actually. It was spring time. And I was passing the principal. And she tells everybody, "Have a good day". And I'm like, "Oh my God, I think I'm gonna have my period". It was just my stomach was really bothering me. And I looked at all the girls in line and we all had on our uniforms and everybody was dressed the same, you know. But its like, oh, I am different. And I got home, and I went to the bathroom and sure enough, I had my period. And of course, I started screaming like a maniac.

R – You started screaming like a maniac.

P – And my brother came to the bathroom door and I said, "get mom". And he got her and she came in and she's like "oh, my baby's a woman", and she's crying, she's all happy about it. But I just remember just not being happy about it.

R – You remember not being happy about it.

P – Right. Up until that point, I kind of couldn't wait for it to happen, you know. Oh, this will be cool, and the minute it happened, it was like, oh, this is not cool at all. You know, I'm bleeding from my crotch.

R – Okay, so you thought it was not cool. Do you remember anything else about what that was like for you?

P – Just like, I had been forced out of childhood or something. Like it wasn't my decision to go on to this next stage you know?

R – Oh, okay, you were forced out.

P – I had no control over it.

R – You had no control over it. And you said it was like you were forced out.

P – Yeah, I mean what if I wanted another week of this, to not have my period. But no, it came.

R – Yes, you had no control over it.

P – That was the only other thing that kind of hit me.

R – Uh,huh.

P – A memory that I thought, well, I'll stop now. That was it.

R – Oh, okay. Well, thanks for adding that.

**EDITED SYNTHESIS #4****Sue****Relationship of Body to Potential Boyfriends**

During Adolescence: I was 5 feet 6 inches and always weighed one hundred and fifteen pounds.

R - You start out talking about your adolescence and you said that during your adolescence at some point you were 5 feet 6 inches and you weighed about one hundred and fifteen pounds. At that point, how did that influence how you felt about your body? How did you feel at that point?

P - I probably did not feel that bad because I always was considered to be a fairly good dresser and best dressed at our school. So, like I said, back then I would have to say in the sixties, it was different because the styles certainly were not like they are now and so, I felt pretty confident with my body, but it just seemed that I did not have a steady boyfriend or anything like that. I'm not saying that you have to have a boyfriend to have a good body image or something, but I guess I felt shy and our family was pretty religious so we wore clothes that were more traditional. I think for some reason I just did not feel real comfortable with my body but I was just looking at some old pictures in the last couple of weeks, and this was a little bit further than my being a teenager but I did have on a two piece bathing suit, not a bikini, in Florida. That was when I was in nursing school and I thought I did not look that bad in that picture, but I still never really ever had a steady boyfriend that I think would make you feel more comfortable and think that you looked good. I always associated having a boyfriend with feeling comfortable with your body and I do not know if that makes sense to people. I think I had a complex about that or something.

R - Okay, so there is a relationship for you. Are you saying that you think you would feel better about your body if you had a boyfriend?

P - Yes, this is what I had always thought. I was just very backwards and certainly never had any confidence. I would say that I just had a lower self-esteem for some reason.

R - So, that was from your adolescence?

P - Yes.

R - Would you say that has continued at other points in your life?

P - I definitely feel so. In fact, I think what might have affected us at adolescence is that my mom's whole family was always overweight and I always remember my mother being on a diet and my mom and dad having words about my mother being heavy. Once again, I was just looking at these old pictures and you sort of forget about how my mom really was fairly overweight, but my sister and I were not. We were built pretty nice, in

fact, we were pretty thin, but like I said, I don't know if that had something to do with it with my mom always struggling. She had four sisters and they all struggled with weight, which was interesting and plus I have two male cousins that really struggled with weight. So, maybe we were just more aware of that because other people in our family were struggling with it is what I think. Consciously you may not think of it, but I think it does affect you.

I did not have an extreme awareness of my body due to the styles back then

R - You said at that time that you did not have what you called "an extreme awareness" of your body because of the styles, so at that time in your life you felt less aware of your body than you did later on?

P - Yes, I think so because I think I was just more into, how could I put this, we were always able to buy nice clothes and my sister and I shared clothes, but it was not anything. I don't think I'm making any sense here. I think I was just more shy and I never really even had a steady boyfriend, so I keep going back to that.

R - Yes, you keep coming back to that. That is very connected for you huh?

P - It is, yes, and maybe that's why I continued to have a bad body image because I never had successful relationships with being divorced and then having another bad relationship, I associate that with people not liking me because of my body. That is what I want to say. Men, as far as that, because women always find me attractive. You know what the interesting thing is, that I can be out and people will always tell me they cannot believe I do have anybody, because you look like such a nice dresser and you look nice and you look good or whatever, but I do not have men telling me that, only women.

R - Do you think that if you were in a relationship that you would characterize as successful, that you would feel better about your body?

P - Yes, I probably do think that way because I could start the day out so good, being on a diet, but then when I get frustrated by the end of the day I say, "who cares what I look like anyway", and there is nobody that is even looking at me so why should I care. Those are my self-statements. My self-statements are always about there is nobody because everyday you wake up and think maybe a miracle is going to happen and there might be some man who is going to want to meet me or something like that, but it never happens. So I guess I just associate it with it.

R - So, you're thinking that if there was somebody in your life that would, say, be a man who would be looking at your body and would be noticing you, that it would be easier for you then?

P - Yes, I think that I would care about myself more. Not having that makes me feel more hopeless about it. I don't know if that's normal, but that is how I feel.

I also feel that maybe people who are married or have a significant other would try harder to have a better body.

R – The final thing that you said here was that maybe people who are married or have someone to look at them, a significant other, they would try harder to have a better body because there was someone to look at them. So, that would make it easier for you to have the body that you wanted if there was someone there to notice it.

P – Yes, for some reason I think that. I'm always thinking, well, you're never going to meet anybody and that is why I should eat a hot fudge sundae. Probably I will meet someone who will want to eat an ice cream and have me eat one too. You just never know.

R – So even that is something, even thinking about eating a hot fudge sundae. That thought is in your mind.

P – I try to block all of that stuff out of my brain or I would have myself totally depressed all of the time. Its not like I go anyplace to meet anybody, but for some reason that is an important thing, but I try not to think about it.

Maybe that is why, most days I do not feel happy.

R – In your last sentence here you said that your relationship, this idea of having someone notice your body, you said maybe that's why most days I do not feel happy.

P – Yes, because I think that I was raised, like I told you, to think that being married is just like a success in life. My family beat that into our heads or something. Nobody in my family is divorced, but when my one cousin did get a divorce I was almost like, alright, and oh, yeah. Not that I would want unhappiness for her but it made me feel less like I was the loser in life in my family. And I know that I did feel that. I felt like at least I'm not the only one. Certain families do take stuff and then you meet other families, in fact, we used to always laugh because I'm divorced. Then, John's wife's parents had a nasty divorce and they are both remarried. Then, my other son, Lisa, her mother has been married three times. At that time I was thinking like on Kathie Lee and Regis, they had this thing that they would pay for your wedding. And I was going to write a letter and I felt by the time we got all of the families on there, with the divorces and everything, it would be such a mess. It wouldn't be like we had these happy families. But see, my sons are only dealing with divorced people. Isn't that weird? I don't know. Whereas, to me that was like a thing, and maybe somehow I made them go towards divorced people or something. I don't know.

R – Its probably not because of you.

P – Probably, because years ago there were not that many divorced people and now there are more.

R – There are a lot of divorced people. That’s probably a little more likely than it being because of you. So, to sum it all up, you mentioned that in your family, that to be married is to be successful and that having a good body is the way that you get that.

P – Yes, obviously I think that for some reason and I realize that I do think that.

R – That’s interesting because you were saying earlier about how you have periods where you’re happy with your body. Actually the reality is that really does not seem to be the case in having a relationship because you’ve had times when you’ve felt good about your body but still didn’t get a relationship.

P – I’m just going to have to start keeping outlines and an album.

R – When you look at the reality of it, that really doesn’t seem to be what drives you.

P – No, it doesn’t. That’s true. I think my whole thing is like the one day I had myself all upset because this woman met a guy at the cemetery. Their spouses died and so then I got all upset because I was fixing the grave and I thought, well, nobody here at the cemetery is meeting me. I take everything to heart. Whatever, I guess if I’m meant to be at the right place at the right time, I’ll be there right? I’ll keep trying.

R – Is there anything else that we didn’t talk about that you’d like to say before we stop?

P – No, I think that just I realize that I have a poor body image and sort of a poor self-esteem when my body is not in shape. I wished that I could just realize that and somehow no matter what extreme I would have to go to make time and stick to something so that I would feel better. So, I will have to keep trying. Like I said, maybe it will happen if I keep trying. Every once in awhile the one interesting thing that I do want to mention is I have never, ever tried but once in awhile I do read in the paper those singles things. And I always crack up because nobody is looking for anybody that is out of shape and overweight. When you do read those, its like the guys say petite or weight appropriate, or how do they word that somehow. Even them, they’re all obsessed with meeting somebody who is thin. Maybe that’s where I get that. That is a reinforcer for me when I read that, and I shouldn’t read them, but I read them all the time.

### **Relationship to Peers**

And also because I never had a steady boyfriend and did not date much.

I had seven close friends.

R - That makes a lot of sense. Then you talked about not having a steady boyfriend and not dating much, and you talked a little bit ago about how that affected you. You also

mentioned that you had a lot of close friends and you said that you had seven close friends. How was that significant for you?

P - My friends and I hung out and we all did everything together. Honestly, practically everyday in the summer we would get together and just hang out or go swimming or anything like that. In fact, one time I can remember, I don't know if your nose has anything to do with this not eating and your body, but I had a nose job when I was in high school because I had a complex that my nose had a big bump in it and my parents let me have plastic surgery, and my friends, I could remember that we had a session before I went in for the surgery because they told me "if you think that your life is going to change because you get a different nose, it is not going to change". And I said "I'm not going to get it done for that reason". Probably deep down inside I wished it could get me a boyfriend or something like that. I even went to that extreme and I still certainly did not get a steady boyfriend or anything. Then we had a big discussion about what parts of our bodies that we liked and that. The thing that I was picked for was having the nicest feet. The point that I was trying to make was that none of us ever sat around and thought we looked fat or anything. I think that back in the sixties it just was not like it is nowadays. Girls are so obsessed with their bodies or you hear little girls that are twelve years old saying that they are fat. I cannot honestly remember anybody saying that.

R- It was not as much of an issue at that time.

P - No, it was not. None of my friends had eating disorders or anything like that. We were all pretty healthy. In fact, what we did when we got together was eat. One of the things we used to do was walk over to the pizza shop and get pizza. I can remember I used to be able to eat four pieces of pizza and drink soda and not gain any weight.

R - You said that your friends had this conversation with you before you had this surgery on your nose, and it sounds like they were pretty supportive of you.

P - Yes, I think that they were trying to tell me that I did not have to go to that extreme, but when you get teased, something bothers you. This one kid called me "broken nose" and that bothered me, and he did end up taking me to the prom and after he caused me that plastic surgery. He never knew that, but he was one of the guys who called me "broken nose" and then I did end up going to the prom with him.

R - He must have liked you. You know how kids will tease each other. They tease the ones they like.

P - Yes, maybe, and I took it more seriously.

I do feel that maybe happier people do have better bodies throughout life. But they have to work at it.

R – Then you return to that theme where you said, I feel that maybe happier people do have better bodies throughout life, that they have to work at it. There is a very strong correlation between having a better body and being happier.

P – Another thing that I didn't mention was, coming back to that segment, was that my best friend who was my roommate in nursing school, and we were best friends all through high school. And she has this husband and she is a runner and she works out and she has always been this person that she lives down in Florida. I cringe to get her Christmas letter or card or whatever, because everything is, for example, I just ran into her mother and she said, they're just getting ready for their annual trip to St. Bart's. And I'm thinking that maybe if I start running and get into shape, then a lot of things I relate to her and I look at Kathy, she's a runner. Why am I being that way that I'm looking at her because its not as if I even talk to her or see her. We just sort of exchange cards. We've kept in touch but she's one person that I would relate to. The reason that she has this happy, healthy marriage is because she is a runner and has a good body. She would be one person that I would be relating that to, sort of like a jealousy thing, but I'm not too proud to admit. I will admit it.

R – So she has all of those things in life because she has a good body is what it comes down to?

P – Yes.

R – So, you're thinking because, you've said this several times here today, that if you would only stick with it and work at it, then you would have that kind of a body too.

P – Yes, then I would have somebody there that would be bringing me stability and happiness.

R – So all of those things come with having a good body.

P – Yes, in my eyes and its not even as far as, like I'm not relating to any movie stars or reading any magazines or anything like that. Just to people that I know is how I would be thinking.

R – They are far more significant in your thinking than stuff you see in a movie.

P – Yes. Those old photos that I told you about that we were looking at, I just went to my class reunion and there was that picture of when we met for lunch for the class reunion. Now, I did really get down. I exercised and looked good for my twenty-fifth class reunion. But in those pictures there was Kathy and Mary, my other friend. She was there and she had not even married, and then all of a sudden this teacher that she was working with fell for her, and he was divorced and she was at the reunion and she had her man and everything. I don't know why I focus on things like that so much but I do.

R – It really does sound like when you’ve talked about it here that not having the body that you want is sort of the key to everything.

P – Yes, that’s true. You do look at it like that. You summed it up pretty good there.

### **Relationship to Physical Activity**

And we all walked to school and walked to each other’s houses. That was good exercise.

R - You talked about walking to school with your friends and you walked to each other’s houses and that you got good exercise at that time.

P - Yes, we did because we used to just walk everywhere. Nobody drove anywhere. It was just so different with me being older. I don’t know how much older other people that you’re interviewing are, but we really did. It wasn’t like we drove places. We walked everywhere. We walked to school and that was good exercise everyday, plus we swam in the summer. We did a lot of swimming but I was never good at sports or anything like that. My family tried to get us into gymnastics and my brother stayed with it. We used to go and get on the balance beam and I could not even learn how to do a cartwheel. I’m just not coordinated, so I was never good at gymnastics, but my parents encouraged us to do stuff like that, but it just didn’t work out.

R - So it was a much more active lifestyle back then and that was a good feeling, being healthy and active.

P - Yes.

I know it is because I do not exercise.

R – So, you said that you don’t exercise and when you talked about the exercise you talked about having determination.

P – Yes, I feel like that I could almost be hypnotized to want to do things because I can be driving home from work and thinking I really do need to exercise and get out and do something. But I just can’t force myself to do it. Look at all the exercise people like Jane Fonda and a couple of people that are popular now. I get it and do it a couple of times and I don’t stay with it. I bought a yoga tape. It’s just like I wished that I could make myself do something and I’ll think about it, but I would rather do something else. I’ll do anything. Its almost like I’m allergic to it.

R – Does that affect how you feel about your body, lets say, when you’re exercising and when you’re not?

P – Yes, I think so. I would feel better if I could make myself do it because then I bought a big, expensive treadmill. I forgot to add that part, and when I was doing that I really felt pretty good. I really did feel like maybe it was lifting some of the depression and negativity in my brain. But then I just for some reason quit doing it. Even my mom will say, “Get back on your treadmill, you did so well when you did that”. But then I just do not do it. Maybe after meeting with you today, I’ll do it. I just wish that I could do it. I know that even Susan tried and she went to a hypnotist and it didn’t work for long, but I wish that something would work for me. Like I said, maybe it’s the determination. I guess I’ll just keep trying.

### **Relationship to Pregnancy**

When I was in high school we could not wear pants yet to school, so the styles were skirts (needed to touch the floor if you knelt) and no revealing styles.

R - You talked about when you were in high school of the styles, like you were not allowed to wear pants, so the skirts needed to touch the floor and they could not be revealing. What was that like?

P - Well, that was really back in the old days because you figure the styles you really did have to wear knee socks or hose or tights with your skirts. They really did make you kneel down on the floor, because I remember culottes had first come in and there was a big thing at the school about whether you were allowed to wear them to school, and now you see the kids how they are dressing, and you think isn’t it interesting that you even go through it. In fact, when it was cool to wear penny loafers and no socks, there were some guys in my class who were sent home from school because they didn’t have any socks on. It was just much different then because things were just stricter wherever you went. Even when I went to nursing school, there were mothers who sat at the front desk and you had to sign in and out of the dorms. They had to know where you were. A house mother was what they were called. Could you imagine the college kids now dealing with that much restriction? You couldn’t even take a shower in the dorms after like ten o’clock or you got demerits, and you were eighteen years old and that was happening. I think another thing is that I went directly from high school. I only had one week off from school. I graduated and then only had one week off and then I started nursing school. So, I became a nurse before I was even twenty-one. It was the first time that they had to make special provisions that you could take the state boards of nursing younger because everybody was older because there were three years for nursing school. Then they changed it and I went to the first two year program. I became a nurse then before I was twenty and then I only had a job for a short time and then that is when I got pregnant and got married. So, I never really did have any time in my life where I was like, like you know, a college student who would go to college and try to date people for four years or something. For two years we were over at ABC college trying to meet people and things like that. It was just a shorter time than what most people experienced is how I always look back. Maybe because I got pregnant at such a young age, too. I didn’t mention that in my writing, but I’m thinking, like here I was at the age of twenty, pregnant, and

gaining all that weight. I happened to be lucky and thankful to have twins and then my body went completely, like at a young age. I don't know if teenagers feel that way when they get pregnant. So, then that happened and I remember my ex-husband's father embarrassing me at a meal because I asked to have seconds. We were at their house, and he said "You're going to look like your mother in five years". I told you that my mom was heavy. I'll never forget that he said that to me because I thought, what does that have to do with anything? My mother is a nice person. It is just like so many people associate being overweight with being a horrible person because you are overweight and that is certainly not right.

R - That was not a very nice thing to say.

P - I'm getting off track again. I'm sorry.

R -So your father-in-law made a statement like that.

P - Yes, and then of course once you have children, I never did get back down to one hundred and fifteen that's for sure. Then it seemed like that is when I started to gain weight every year and then you do not take it off. Everybody would like to be a size eight or ten.

R - So, being pregnant definitely sounds like a major turning point for you as far as your body.

P - Yes, and probably because I was probably so stressed out because with having to get married. That was the hardest thing I ever had to tell my parents, that I was pregnant and getting married. And I didn't know my ex-husband very long. It certainly was not a great situation but I was going to try and make the best of it. I can honestly say that I always wished that I could have had a pregnancy where you and your husband thought this was the most wonderful thing that happened to us. And I did not have that. So, I felt sort of bad about that.

Until I had my children, I could eat anything and everything and not gain weight.

R – Then you talked about when you had your kids and the difference that being pregnant and having your kids made. And before that you could eat pretty much whatever you wanted and gain weight. At that point, would it be safe to say that before you were pregnant, were you feeling pretty good about your body?

P – Yes. I didn't worry about it, but then after I had my children is when it just seemed like I tried different diets and I have gone to Weight Watchers. I'm not that big into exercise. I wish that I could be bigger into exercise, but I've tried different things in that area. Like I've tried to go to different exercise classes but I just never really stick with it. I'm really poor with sticking with something. I can start out all motivated and then it fizzles out. I wish that I could stick with something, but I don't.

After my pregnancy I probably weighed one hundred and twenty-five pounds.

R – I know you said you gained weight after your pregnancy. You weighed about one hundred and twenty-five pounds. How was that significant for you, the fact that you weighed one hundred and twenty-five pounds, because you mentioned that in here?

P – It was more than I had ever weighed before I ever got pregnant. But then each year it seems like you gain five pounds back on, and with my age you wish that you could get back. Like when I went into that extreme thing like getting liposuction done. But unless you exercise and watch, forget it. All that's going to come right back on you, which is what happened. When I think of all the money that I spent to have that done. A couple of people that had that done told me that was exactly what happened to them. In fact, the plastic surgeon tells you that very few people really, unless they're stars, and I think the stars just continue to get it done every couple of years, because unless you follow an extreme diet and exercise and be perfect, then it 's just going to come right back on. Which is what happened. I just look at that check that I wrote and I just think at least it felt good for a year or so that it lasted. Mine lasted pretty good for a year and a half and then after that I went downhill.

R – Was having the liposuction done initially a good feeling?

P – Oh yes because I was just really determined that with my son getting married and after my ex-husband's father making the comment that I was going to look like my mother, and I knew that his wife was a little pudgy, and I thought that I was going to look better than her and I didn't care what extreme I had to go to. It was worth it. I guess that temporary satisfaction of feeling good about yourself is good. Even then I think what made me go back to my eating habits was that I didn't meet anybody. I didn't have any relationship. Why am I basing everything on meeting somebody? I don't know, but that theme seems to be the theme of my unhappiness here.

R – So that was a period of time when you were more happy with the way you looked.

P – Yes, and I felt good and I said that I wasn't going to gain the weight back and then I just eventually just sludged back into my little ways.

### **Eating Behaviors in Relation to Father**

Family History: My mother is one of five girls – all who I remember were dieting my whole life.

R - Back during high school you talked about being less aware of the styles and the skirts were so long and so on, and you were less aware of your body. Then you went on to talk about your family some and said that your mom was one of five girls and that her and her

sisters were pretty much dieting for your whole life. How do you think that affected you, the fact that your mom and aunts seemed to be dieting all the time?

P - I don't know. I think the main thing I remember is my parents arguing about it. My mother would even go to these appointments for a weight loss thing and it was about a half an hour from our house. My father would drive her because she never drove. All that she basically ate was hot dogs and pickles and she had lost weight and things like that, and yet it must have been hard on her because she had to cook all these big meals for us because my dad was the type that when we were raised, I think one of the reasons we are such big eaters in my household is that my father always told the story of when he was little, if they dropped a piece of bread on the floor, they had to pick it up and kiss it because it was a blessing and you had to eat because they did not waste food or anything like that. So, we were all very good eaters. My mother used to weed a big garden and my father worked in a steel mill, so like I said, he wanted a big meal for dinner. I can remember us always walking to the bakery at the end of our street and I can remember eating really big meals. Nowadays, people don't cook like they used to then. My mother would make meat and potatoes and we would have a vegetable, or from the garden in summer we would have a big, giant bowl of cucumbers and tomatoes cut up fresh from the garden. I used to eat healthy. We used to eat endive and a lot of things. Now they're popular. People use to think, we were probably like who would eat dandelions, but here it comes out they are good for you. So, we were always raised to be very good, big eaters and I can honestly say that there are probably not very many foods that I do not like. We were not picky eaters at all.

Growing up in my family – we were very big eaters and my father encouraged us to like all foods.

R – You talked a little more about your family saying that you were big eaters and you described yourself as a big eater. What do you mean by big eaters?

P – Well, big eaters as we would eat all of our food. You know how some people will stop eating when they're full, or recently I tried this thing that said only eat half of what is in front of you, and I will do that, but it was so funny because my sister and I were just in New York City, the one thing that I noticed about my sister is that she always eats all of her food. I don't even know how sometimes she eats it all, and I notice that, and I know its because of my father wanting us to eat all of our food at all of our meals. At least with me sometimes I'll get a doggy bag. But my sister will never have a doggy bag because she eats it. I can see that if you're raised that way and your parents tell you to eat all of your food then you'll do that. Whereas, it was so funny that my cousins from California didn't eat any vegetables and it was because her father didn't eat any vegetables. I can remember staying over at their house, and I don't understand because the only vegetable they eat is corn, and her son is exactly the same way. Sometimes if you're not exposed to those foods like them, then you're going to be like your parents if they present that to you that all vegetables are bad or something.

R – So your experience was that your dad would encourage you to eat a lot of food and now, later on, you went on this thing where you were trying to eat smaller portions.

P – Yes, but when I was younger I grew up with my brother and I can honestly remember that we would be doing our homework at night and I would go into the kitchen and I would actually make us hamburgers at nine o'clock at night and we would eat two or three hamburgers. We would ride back to school with my dad because my sister was going to ABC school here, and at first McDonalds had opened on 17 and I remember if we rode in with him, he would let us go in there and then my brother would get three and I would get two and we would eat hamburgers late at night. Even now, I'm a very late night eater. Like I said earlier, I can be good and be on a diet and watch and be healthy all day, but late in the evening if I'm feeling frustrated I could order a pizza or eat bad foods and blow it just because I think it's a habit that I had picked up like my eating.

R – That was a habit that you had when you were younger and you said that when you get frustrated you'll eat bad foods late at night.

P – Yes, that's what I do and I know that I do it because I'm not even hungry and I do it.

R – So food is one way to deal with frustration.

P – Yes, when I'm having a bad day, in fact, I have to honestly admit that when I've left work on many days, in the summer not in the winter, I'll get a big giant ice cream cone. I'll be driving up past the mall and I'll think I deserve this because it's my reward, and then I feel a little bit better.

We had a large garden and ate healthy.

R – You guys were big eaters and you had this big garden and you ate a lot of healthy food. So you felt like you were eating for the most part pretty healthy.

P – Yes, fairly healthy food except for, we did have a lot of sweets sometimes. But not candy because my father had a health food rule. We never had soda at our house ever. We weren't allowed to have soda. We drank milk and goat's milk and stuff like that. My mother would bake stuff and sometimes store-bought stuff. But we didn't have candy, but did have rolls or cake or something like that. No candy or chips. My mother would never buy chips. We never had chips. Our neighbors always had it. They had the soda and the chips and the candy, and we thought that was so great and we were missing out on it. Back when I went to school, you figure until I went to high school, we came home for lunch. That's hard to believe that there weren't any school cafeterias. We used to walk home for lunch in grade school and this goes again to my thing with food, because one of my favorite lunches was, I can remember coming into the house and my mother said that she didn't have anything to fix for lunch. So she made us homemade strawberry shortcake. I can still remember at the table having that. And one other thing about how food influenced my childhood is that when I went away to camp, I sent a postcard home

to my parents and wrote “Dear Mom and Dad, we had steak for dinner tonight and it was so tender that you could cut it with a fork”. What would make you, if food didn’t mean so much to you in your life to write that as a kid? Don’t you think they would write we’re having fun, we’re in the pool, we lit the campfire, we’re singing hymns or something? No, I have to write that. My mother saved it. We threw it away eventually, but I thought, why did I write that? But I did. Food must have meant security to me even back then.

R – That could be. You really enjoyed that steak didn’t you? The fact that your dad encouraged you to eat in a healthy way, did that have any effect on the way you thought about your body, or did that affect you at all?

P – No, my dad always told us to be healthy. One thing he always said, he always told us this story. He said, “Even the richest person in the world, if they would get something the matter with them, you cannot buy your health. You have to take care of your health with trying to eat a lot of vegetables and things like that. So, he always encouraged that, and I would probably just associate more like to have a healthy body, was what was stressed to us.

### **Relationship to Mother**

My mom was tall, about five feet eight inches tall, and always weighed over two hundred pounds. I remember her hiding sweets while she was “to be dieting”.

R - You mentioned that your mom pretty much always weighed over two hundred pounds. How do you think that influenced how you feel about your own body?

P - I guess I was always fortunate because I always thought that I could eat whatever I wanted and still stay thin, and I think because my sister was thin I related it to that. I didn’t worry about it. We would try to help my mom because I can remember she used to hide candy and cookies upstairs. You know those funny stories that you would open something and you would find cookies or something. That is my mother because she would always hide things and then we would have to say “Mom, you’re not supposed to be doing that”. We would try to help her but back then I can honestly say that besides doing housework or stuff like that, it wasn’t like my mother was going to the gym or anything. Nobody back then was exercising to lose weight because none of that came out. I really do believe it is a good deal of probably your family genes that influence it a lot. Although, one of my mother’s and her sister’s favorite stories was that their mother used to bake ten pies every Sunday, but none of them could make a pie, and so maybe it was eating all of those pies that brought them to the start of eating bad foods instead of good foods and with liking sweets. We like sweets in my family.

I finally was wearing size sixteen pants.

R – You said that you were finally wearing size sixteen pants. How is that significant for you?

P – I think it reminds me of my mom like wearing a big size or shopping at Lane Bryant or something. I'm edging up again and I'm in fourteens right now. But it did feel good to wear those smaller sizes.

R – You felt better.

P – Yes, you do. You just really feel good and I really don't know why, since I know all of these things, that I don't choose to do something about it, to try again to get back into better shape. Maybe part of it is still having to deal with my mom and her two sisters. I'm not saying that I would want anything to happen to them. We still see them all of the time. It sort of seems like its going around in a circle or something.

R – With having to deal with her health problems too?

P – Yes, and now my aunts are skinny. My mother still has to worry a little bit but she's not as heavy as she used to be. With old age you do lose weight so maybe I have that to look forward to.

So, as an adult, I found myself dieting at different times and being more like my mom and her sisters.

R – Now, here you're talking about dieting at different times, and you said that as an adult you were being more like your mom and her sisters. Can you say a little more about that?

P – Well, I don't know. I think I do. For some reason, I see myself as them. So, that's interesting. I think any weight gain like that just makes me think of them, and I don't want to be that way. And I know that I'm not as bad as the problems that they had, but still it worries me. I didn't add that I do try a lot of things to help you lose weight. I will buy it and try it, but never stick with it. I have a whole cupboard of all these things that are on TV or in the magazines or in the drugstores that are going to help you lose weight. I'm a big one for being, I don't want to use the word "sucker", but for some reason I'll try those things, but you see it doesn't work either.

R – So, that's something that has been on your mind, though. The possibility of becoming more like your mom or her sisters.

P – Yes, and I don't want to. I've been lucky. Its not that I'm that bad, but like I said, I worry about that a lot.

## Relationship to Family

My one aunt even weighed over three hundred pounds and she and her son had a lot of medical problems.

R - You also talked about one of your aunts and that she weighed over three hundred pounds, and that both her and her son had a lot of medical problems. How was that significant for you?

P - It was because my aunt was so huge that I was working at XYZ Hospital at the time and she was an inpatient and they had to take her down to the scale in the basement and weigh her, but once again, I'm relating to back then when people more or less did make fun of people who were real heavy. My cousin graduated with me from high school and I'm sure he got teased because he was very much overweight, but he married a girl that also had an overweight problem and he even had that bypass surgery and all that stuff which he tried his whole life. But then he would eat bad foods. I do believe that they both probably passed away from problems with being overweight their whole lives. My cousin who died developed diabetes at the end and all of that, and he was awaiting that new surgery at the end when he died. Not that it made me exercise more, but I think it still is in the back of your mind that you worry about it. I would always have conversations with my sister and we would always talk about how we were at least a little bit overweight but we do not have the problems that could be in our family. My other aunt's daughter has always struggled with her weight too. It seems like I'm always relating to people that have issues with that.

R - So you're always relating to people that have-

P -Yes, I have had to do that a lot.

R - So in some way you said it's in the back of your mind and it makes you think about your own health issues.

P - Yes, I think so.

I remember working at XYZ Hospital and my aunt was a patient – they had to take her to the basement to weigh her. ( those days – awareness of the overweight was limited).

R -You also talked about they took your aunt down to the basement to weigh her. How did that affect you? What was that like for you with you working there?

P - I wasn't there but just hearing the other people talk. I was working at the hospital and I don't know even how it happened, but somebody made a comment about somebody having to go to the basement to get weighed. I don't think that I even spoke up and defended my aunt. I should have, but I was just quiet. But a lot of people say nasty things about heavy people. I think Richard Simmons is one of the best people in the world because he has helped so many people with their weight. Sometimes I'll just watch his

show just to hear him talk. He's not on that much anymore but I think he's an inspiration to people.

R -He's more uplifting.

P - Yes, he understands it. A lot of people aren't heavy because they want to be heavy. I'm not saying that maybe they could be doing more about it, but that doesn't mean you're not a nice person. Some people do tease people or are negative about anybody that is heavy. They wouldn't give them a chance or something.

R - So it was kind of hard for you with this situation with your aunt because you worked there and there were comments made and you said that these comments were made in front of you.

P -Yes, and I didn't speak up which I probably should have, so maybe I feel a little bit guilty about that too.

R -You feel now that you should have said something.

P - Yes, I probably should have.

### **Competition with Sister**

But I remember in high school, in the evening around eight or nine PM (we had dinner at four-thirty PM everyday). I would make pizza or hamburgers and my brother and I would eat before bedtime.

R – You talked about what you described with you and your brother staying up and eating pizza and hamburgers before bedtime. What was that like for you? How did you experience that?

P – Back then school was so important. About the only thing we did was that I belonged to things after school, but during the school year you would come home and be doing a lot of homework, and taking a break and eat and do some more studying or homework because we all made pretty good grades like all A's and B's. I always just had maybe a C in math once in awhile, but otherwise we all studied and did our homework. That's just about what you did. In the summer you might be out more, but during the school year, besides going to some of the activities I was in, like something after school or the Rainbow Girls or whatever like that. Our family was very close and we're still very close. I have just always been very close to my family.

R – That just sounds like a nice time, you know, you and your brother doing your homework and eating your hamburgers.

P – Yes, we're still very close. I never really argued with my brother. My sister was four years older than me and I always competed with her. I always thought that she was the favorite because she was the oldest and she had so many boyfriends. Honest to goodness, she could just walk out on the sidewalk and somebody would stop in a car and want to be with her. She was always very popular and I remember one time that she was in nursing school and I was still in high school, and we had gone out ice skating and these guys were trying to hit on her and pick her up. She always had guys after her. She was always very attractive. I never felt as attractive as her.

R – You felt this sort of competition.

P- Yes, like middle child-type syndrome. I felt that my parents liked my sister because she was the oldest and then my brother was the only boy and he could do no wrong, so I always had a middle child complex. It's funny because I often think of when my dad got sick with the Alzheimer's, I thought I'm going to be the black sheep of the family for getting married, and for things not going right, but then who ended up taking care of my dad. Not my brother or sister. So, it's funny how life does turn out, but that had nothing to do with any of that. I always felt like I was the least liked.

R – Do you mean among your siblings?

P – Yes, when I was younger. In fact, I thought I was adopted because they had blue eyes and I had brown eyes. I had myself all worked up back when I was in grade school, and I said to my mother “I think I'm adopted”, and she said, “No, you're not adopted. Then I told her my evidence because that they have blue eyes and I have brown eyes. She said your father has brown eyes. Then, that made sense to me that I wasn't adopted.

I had an older sister and she was about five feet four inches and weighed about one hundred and ten pounds. She was very popular.

R – I think that you write more about that down here. I want to come back and ask you about some of these things when we get there. Okay, so you have an older sister and she was very popular. You just talked some about this. The fact that your sister was very popular and you said you were very much in competition with her. How did that affect how you felt about your body?

P – Once again, I could honestly say that I don't think I ever really had any thoughts like back then, because I didn't have to worry about my weight. I can't remember sitting around and worrying because my sister and I were both pretty thin and we shared each other's clothes. I used to just think that she's lucky that guys like her and guys do not like me, is what I would think.

R – So, it really didn't have so much of an effect about how you felt about your body. It was just more in terms of in relation to boys.

P – Yes, how things were going. It wasn't like I was thinking that she's built better than me. I don't ever really think that I thought that, but it was just that for some reason she seemed to maybe have a better personality or something. She was friendly. Maybe that was it, and she smiles more. So that could be it.

R – Well, I can see the connection as far as why you brought it up, and the context of this, because you talked about that at the beginning. About how having a relationship would affect you, that you would feel better about your body if you were with somebody. So that's the connection as far as that guys liked her. That's where the common denominator is.

P – Yes, that's true and she was the type because she got the doctor's son. I can remember like the guy that she married, that his father was a doctor. And when they went to the prom the whole neighborhood was out there. My mother paid to have her gown made. When I went to get my gown, she said, "No, you can only get this gown, and of course the styles were different. When my sister went they wore the big, full gowns and you would have thought it was a wedding with the photography that was going on. Then, she's another one like I said, she went to school and then she graduated from nursing school and got married. She graduated on a Wednesday and got married on a Friday, and then she moved to Chicago. And then we were never real close together because she always lived away from here until recently. Then she moved back about six years ago. We're re close and we talk on the phone about three or four times every day. We do everything together. So, things reverse back.

I have always had a middle child complex and felt my parents liked my sister and brother better than me.

R – Then, you talked about having this middle child complex, that you felt that your parents liked your sister better. What was that like for you? You kind of talked about it, but is there anything else that you want to say about that?

P – No, in fact this just hit me because I used to cry a lot, I really did. When I think of kids who have the impression that, I think, whatever. If it would have been popular to go for treatment, I might have gone because I really did used to take things to heart and just cry and feel very frustrated. So, I don't know. I wonder sometimes if, at times, I don't know what was going on. Who knows what was going on back then. I used to feel sad all the time. Not all the time, but sometimes because I just used to think that everything went right for her or something. Now, we were just talking when we were away a couple of days ago, and both need to lose weight, and we're both in the same situation. So, things stay the same.

R – You talked about in the past that she had this sort of perfect body and now that isn't really the case anymore.

P – No, she's gained weight. In fact, I look better than her to tell you the truth.

R – You look better than she does now.

P – Yes, I do but things can change.

R – So now you're the good-looking one. That's really interesting. In the past you were talking that she had this perfect body, and everything was better for her. But now, as far as appearance goes, you look better than your sister. Does that affect how you feel about your body?

P – No, because she still has a lot of things that I don't have and I'm still by myself. I would probably still have to go back to, in my thinking, I guess I never realized how I would associate it with having somebody. In fact, the one thing that I do pray for is, well, I don't really like to pray for myself because I don't think that you should, but I do say a little prayer and say that if you would think that I should meet somebody, could you give me a blessing that that could happen? It still has not happened. That still is on my mind that I think that it would be a great feeling to meet your soul mate or something like that or to be with somebody.

R – But you don't think that its okay to ask for that or that God wouldn't want that for you?

P – Oh no, I'm just saying that I pray for other people more. I pray for everybody else and I just say, "Let your will be done". But sometimes I wonder and think, can you have somebody pay attention to me or something like that, but for some reason it hasn't happened. Although, I will say that somebody told me that its not helping because its not happening because "God wants you to do without". And I wished he didn't unless I'm going to become a nun or something. I'm focusing on that a lot aren't I? Maybe that's just part of my thing.

R – You did really lay it out very clearly earlier on that there definitely is a connection for you between having a relationship and having a nice body. You said that a big part of it is having somebody there who would be able to notice or comment on your body and not having that has definitely affected you.

P – In my family, I was really about the first person to ever get divorced, and I'll tell you what, I felt like I was the worst person on earth because this is happening. Just to have to deal with all of that was really hard. My mom has made several comments that you're the one who chose not to be with somebody who would take care of you. If I complain about working or something like that, my family is the type that they would make a comment because my mother never worked and my sister is a nurse and doesn't work, and they would look at it like you would meet someone to try to take care of you. I don't think that way, I wouldn't want a relationship for that reason.

R – But she somehow thinks that you would look for somebody to take care of you still?

P – Yes, they still do, which I think is odd.

### **Feelings About Own Body**

R – Yes, and that’s kind of what you wrote about here, that you went to the extreme. Then you talked about every year putting on about five pounds, and so during that process you were also saying that you would not feel as good about your body and putting on about five pounds a year.

P – Right, because then I tried different things to get into shape and it just wasn’t going to work. So I don’t know but I just don’t stick with things and I don’t know why, but I guess its just not having the determination to do it. It just seems like that you go back and forth and back and forth. I still think that I’m the type of person that in the winter I feel so lousy or horrible. Even just those last couple of nice days that we had, I just feel so much better when I don’t have to wear a coat and its nicer outside. I still think winter is hard on people. I just wonder if people who do live in nicer areas feel better about themselves and they’re healthier. In fact, my sister just did get me one of those lamps for my birthday. It just came. So, I’ve been trying to sit under that and read and thinking that will cheer me up or help me be in a better mood.

R – It’s a special lamp isn’t it?

P – Yes, its those that they call happy lamps that you sit under and they’re supposed to be the spectrum, that they’re not exactly those lamps that help you with depression. It’s similar. They said it can help you a little bit. So, I thought a little bit might help.

It got to the point that my son was getting married. I had liposuction (quick remedy) and weighed one hundred and fifty-five pounds afterwards.

R – You talked about your son getting married and you said that you were getting a “quick remedy” you called it, of getting the liposuction, and I know you talked some about what that experience was like for you. It was a very good feeling when you first had the liposuction done. So, you felt differently about your body when you first had the liposuction done?

P – Oh, yes, but I wouldn’t say in the first couple of weeks. Then, its horrible to go through. I wouldn’t even really recommend it. It was a lot more than what I thought it was going to be, but then, I don’t know why I let myself fall apart again. I should have just stuck with it and maybe tried harder to exercise and to watch so that I wouldn’t gain the weight back. But for some reason I didn’t.

R – So actually having the liposuction procedure is more involved than you thought it would be.

P – Yes, it's not an easy surgery. Maybe it was because of age, but seriously, for the first week you're like someone beat you up. Maybe its because of the abdomen, and if you could just get your thigh done, you could walk around, but it was much worse than I thought. They can remove the fat and you could be right back where you were with bad food choices and not exercising.

R – How do you feel now about having had it done? Are you glad that you had it done?

P – I'm glad that I had it done, and probably if I was rich and had money, I would probably have it done like the stars. I would probably go and get it done again. Now I wouldn't waste that money because now I have to worry about other things. If I'm going to get skinny again, I would have to exercise and eat healthy. It was my one splurge in life is how I would look at it. I don't have enough money to splurge again, but I think there are a lot of people that it happens to. I've talked to two other ladies before and they said that it doesn't work unless you follow through. You think that you're going to be that person that is going to stand steadfast, but with my track record, I should have known that I have been back and forth my whole life trying to find a success. Maybe if I would just stick to something, it might work. So, we'll see. It might happen yet.

R – It's interesting that even as painful as it was, and it was a much bigger deal than you imagined it was going to be, and still knowing how it would be, is it still something that you think would be worth it?

P – Yes, it was worth every minute to get thinner than my ex-husband's wife. Isn't that terrible? But seriously it was worth it.

The plastic surgeon said if you don't eat healthy and exercise, the weight will come back.

So here I am, three years later this month and I weigh one hundred and seventy pounds. If I could only lose fifteen pounds!!

R – You had the surgery and the plastic surgeon told you that if you didn't exercise and eat in a healthy way that the weight would come back and you've been talking about that. Now its three years later and at the time you talked about being one hundred and seventy pounds, and you said that if only I could lose fifteen pounds. So, you have the idea that you would feel better if you lost fifteen pounds.

P – Yes, definitely. If I could weigh about one hundred and fifty-five pounds, I know I would feel much better and look better.

R – How does that change your life, or how does that change things for you when you were at a lower weight? How does that change your life? How does that change your relationships? How does that change things for you?

P – I think that you generally feel better because you're not looking at bulges on your body. The worst time for me is when you're shopping and trying on new clothes. In fact, I think I told you before that I think I have the difference because I'll go shopping and not try clothes on and when I get those clothes home, I think I have the opposite of an eating disorder. I think I have a better body and then I'll put these clothes on, and think how I was going to fit in these or how I was going to look in these. I think, why do I think that way, and then I'll take them back. I think its just looking better. Like today, this top that I put on, at first I thought this is so tight that I shouldn't even wear it. But my thinking was, no, I'll wear it and it will make me not eat because its going to make me stay on a diet. I think things like that. I think to wear something snug because its going to make you not want to eat so that you'll fit in your top or your clothes. I should just be more determined and then I wouldn't have to worry about that and I would be fitting into my clothes and not worrying so much and not feeling good about myself. Which I know it makes me feel not good about myself.

R – Depending on how much you weigh.

P – Yes, because I know that now I don't feel good about myself because I weigh too much. But maybe with nice weather coming and if I straighten up and lose some weight, then I'll feel better.

R – It sounds like from what you've written, that has always been a concern for you.

P – Yes, it has been. I know that I feel not as good when I'm heavier and then if I get healthier and weigh less, then I feel better.

So it seems, at present I don't feel good about my body and I can't seem to motivate myself to care.

R – You finished up by talking about at the present time that you don't feel good about your body. What is that like for you to have those kinds of feelings about your body?

P – I guess everyday we wake up and think its going to be a good day. You're going to make the best of the day, but then you sort of get complexes or something will happen. In fact, when I went back to work I said, "My new philosophy is going to be that I'm only going to live for today because nothing in the past has even affected me and its not going to affect me". And it didn't even last ten minutes to half an hour with me being at work and ended up being my old complaining, and grumpy self. So I don't know why I can't stick with things. I wish that I could. I just wish that I could look at things and think everything is great and wonderful, but there are just not that many days that I think that. So, I wish that there were more days that I did. Maybe I would have written something different if the weather would have been nicer. In fact, this one thing that is getting to me right now is these girls who are wearing all of these tops that are showing your stomach and your midriff and you do look at them and you think I wish that could be me. At least

I think that. Unless I do something about it, its not going to be me. It makes me think things like that.

R – It makes you feel that you want to do something about it.

P – Yes.

**EDITED SYNTHESIS #5****Kelly****Relationship of body to body image**

As everyone knows, adolescence is a tough time for teenagers.

R – You start out saying that adolescence is a tough time for teenagers. What did you mean by tough? How is it tough?

P – It is probably the hardest time in your life, obviously I'm only twenty-three, so I don't really know, but talking to some older people, I used to work with the elderly, they were talking about all of the things that you have to go through and the changes in your body and trying to figure out about college, peer relations, and now divorce issues – all of the things that you have to deal with at once and all the stress of, like, extracurricular activities. I was forced to be in the marching band and I absolutely hated being in the marching band.

R – Is that right?

P – Yes, a lot of kids had dance class, tutoring and all these different things, and jobs. And they're still expected to maintain good grades. The body image, too, plays into that. You're trying to look good and impress everybody.

R – Is that how it was for you?

P – I didn't really have too many extracurricular activities. My grades in junior high were not so great, but ninth grade and on, I maintained a 3.5 to 3.0, and so it was pretty good. The majority of girls want to look good, working on that and doing the hair and everything.

R – Do you remember being concerned about this kind of thing?

P – Yes, definitely.

R – So it was a tough time in a number of different ways, including how you felt about your body and trying to maintain a certain image. Specifically relating to trying to maintain body image, is there anything else that you want to say about that, as far as how it was for you?

P – Nothing really that much as an adolescent, pretty much more starting in college I think I noticed a lot more. The media portrays all of those skinny girls, but I never really paid too much attention to that until after high school and then it just seemed like it was everywhere. I think probably because I did gain a little bit more weight, like I put in there, from drinking a case of beer a night and you know all that adds up.

I encountered a huge growth spurt in the eighth grade. I grew four inches taller that year.

R – You talked about having what you said was a huge growth spurt and grew four inches in that one year. What was that like?

P – I was never really sure but then when I grew, I didn't really like it at first, because, I mean, most girls' average height is maybe 5'4", and I was not extremely tall. I was a little bit taller, so I felt a little awkward at first, but finding jeans that fit that were not flood pants. That probably was the hardest thing. I don't know if it was because I drank a whole bunch of milk or if it was just a growth spurt. I don't know if it was the growth spurt and the milk, or just the growth spurt. I don't know, but my brother had moved in at that time and he drank a whole bunch of milk and I was hanging out with him. So, it was a little awkward but now I really like being a little bit taller.

R – It's a different experience when you're older.

P – Yes.

R – What is nice about it now vs. - ?

P – Being able to reach things and just everyone would always say you have nice legs and long legs. It makes you feel good.

R – At that age, it was kind of a sense of awkwardness, but now there's a difference.

P – Oh, it's great.

R – Do you recall, like in relation to the other girls that you knew, did the growth spurt that you had put you taller than most of the other girls you knew at that point? Where were you in relation to them?

P – I guess I was about the same. I guess a lot of my friends were kind of tall back in junior high and middle school, so I was about average with them.

I always liked being taller and being able to help my friends reach things.

R – Then you said that you liked being taller because you can reach things. So, there was a positive aspect to it.

P – Yes.

I gained all the weight back plus more. This is when the problem started.

R – You said you gained the weight back and then you said that this is when the problem started, and I wasn't sure what you meant by problem. You say you gained all the weight after you had gone on the pill. When you say problem, what do you mean?

P – Constantly thinking about losing weight and trying to be skinny and thinking about it all the time, kind of like an obsessive type thing. Yes, that is pretty scary.

R – Is that how it was for you that you were thinking about it all the time?

P – Yes.

R – And you said that it was pretty scary.

P – Definitely. I never went to any extent of anorexia or bulimia, thank God. I was able to control that but I would constantly, even I would eat a cookie. I would seriously feel guilty and to let something like that get to that point, it is really scary.

R – You said that you never considered yourself to have an eating disorder. So, you mean by that that you never suffered from anorexia.

P – No, I never binged or purged.

R – Were you worried about going in that direction at that time, because you said it was scary.

P – It was just the thoughts, the obsessive, compulsive thoughts. But I never really felt that I would develop a problem because I have had a few friends – I still do, and actually my cousin is actually anorexic at the moment. She actually went to outpatient treatment and only lasted a few days. She was only five feet tall, so she was pretty small. She was maybe one hundred and ten – one hundred and fifteen pounds, and she is eighty-five pounds now. I just saw her the other day and she is starting to dry heave. Even her kidneys are starting to fail and I told her that if you don't start doing something, you could get very sick and you could even die. I really didn't want to tell her that. I did go with her and her mom and her friend last summer, and then I know that usually in the eating disorders they usually don't let them see how much they weigh. But they let her see and when it said eighty-nine pounds, she came out and she was glowing and she was so proud. The cool thing was that afterwards we took her out to eat and she ate a big sandwich. So it was like, she isn't bulimic, she's just like anorexic. She might eat a bowl of cereal in the morning and that's it, and then she's using cocaine and oxycontin now so everything is blown out of proportion. My aunt contacted me and I'm willing to help. I e-mailed her and she never writes me back, but I'm there just to let her know if she needs anything. You know, it's really hard. I think seeing my friends and everyone deal with that, and losing teeth for one, it's kind of an incentive not to be like that.

I was still considered attractive but wanted to change my appearance.

R – Then you said, “I was still considered attractive, but I wanted to change my appearance. What was that about, wanting to change your appearance?”

P – Just to lose the weight and fit into some of my old clothes.

R – So, when you said that you wanted to change your appearance, you were specifically talking about losing weight.

P – Yes.

R – Is there anything else or was that it?

P – No, that’s about it.

Since I started graduate school I’m back up around one hundred and thirty pounds.

R – Since you started graduate school you said your weight is around one hundred and thirty pounds, back up to the higher range of that fifteen pound margin. What is that like for you now?

P – I think I’ve lost a few. I haven’t actually stepped on the scale since July, and way back when I lost all the weight, it would be everyday. It’s very weird. It’s a Healthmeter, so you can adjust it exactly to the zero, so it’s never wrong. I don’t want to step on there and it says something that I don’t want to see, so I’m not even - so it’s all dusty. Let it stay in the corner. I don’t even want to use it. I think that it’s better than being on it everyday. Some people will get on it after they eat. I’m not that bad and I’m glad.

R – So you sort of don’t really want to know.

P – No, I don’t want to know until I’m certain that those Christmas jeans will fit, you know, something around those lines.

R – So, it has a definite impact as far as how you feel about yourself and your body in a way that it doesn’t tend to affect your interactions with people or the way people relate to you. You don’t really notice that much of a difference and it’s more internal?

P – It’s definitely more internal.

Body image is very important to me.

R – You said, “Body image is very important to me now.” Can you describe that a little bit? Can you talk about how it’s important to you?

P – Like I stated earlier, it just makes me feel better and maybe even I can go so far as to say it even makes me more motivated to get things accomplished. It might sound weird, but it definitely makes me more confident and more outgoing a little bit.

R – So, when you're happier with the way that your body looks, you feel more confident, you feel like it actually helps accomplish something.

P – Absolutely.

R – Okay, so for you there is a definite relationship between those things.

P – Yes.

R – When you said that body image is important to you now, do you mean now as opposed to earlier? I know that you were saying before that it was not something that you really thought much about.

P – Since college, it has definitely been since college.

R – So, it's more important to you now than it was during high school.

P – Yes, definitely.

I feel very fat compared to many people

R – You went on to say that “I actually feel very fat compared to most people.” How does that feeling, feeling very fat, your view is that –

P – I know it's a distortional thing. But the whole thing like the magazines, which I really don't read too many of, and watching the TV and seeing the beautiful women and that just compared to them I just don't feel up to par with them. Obviously, there are very few of them that are actually really skinny like I stated, maybe one percent. I don't know where I got those statistics, but I believe it's fairly accurate and most of them are air brushed, and I know they're fake. But it's just so hard to get over that though.

R – Okay, so even though you know all of these things, you know that it doesn't really represent the real woman, it's still hard to get over?

P – Yes, I don't know why, it just is. I think it's like that for a lot of people. The majority of the guys that I talk to would rather have a girl that is a little bit overweight than one that is skin and bones. Personal friends of mine and acquaintances, we were talking about this in the past week, and they all agreed. But you still don't want to think about that. It's the truth.

R – So knowing all that still causes a certain amount of distress when you think about it in comparison with these other women.

P – Yes.

R – You said that viewing yourself in comparison to them, that you identified that as a bit of a distortion.

P – Definitely, because I know I'm not – even when we were in California, the mirrors were really odd. They seriously widen you out or something. I don't know. I asked somebody else, "Is this just me?" And they said, "No, we're all seeing the same thing." I know I'm not – It's just a mind thing.

R – It's a mind thing that bothers you.

P – Yes, definitely.

Being 5'7" tall and weighing one hundred and thirty pounds is by no means overweight – but I hate to look in the mirror.

R – Then you talk about being 5'7" and one hundred and thirty pounds is by no means overweight.

P – Yes, and I know that.

R – But the fact is, you hate to look in the mirror.

P – Yes, when I'm in my high stage and now it doesn't bug me.

R – What is it about looking in the mirror, what do you hate about it?

P – I don't know. Maybe how I look at my clothes or when I'm in the skinny stage, I can wear other clothes and I think I look nicer. I just feel a lot better.

R – So being at the higher weight, it just makes it difficult for you to look in the mirror.

P – I just feel disgusted.

R – Oh, is that right?

P – Yes, I just feel disgusted with how I let myself get like that.

R – So, they're feelings of disgust.

P – Uh, huh.

R – Disgusted at what?

P – Just like with me being lazy and not getting out there and walking and just eating all that junk. I just get disgusted with letting myself do that.

R – When you're feeling like that, you have this sense that you should be more in control over those things?

P – Yes.

R – That pretty much directly correlates with your weight. When you're in the lower weight, is it easier for you to look in the mirror?

P – Oh, yes.

R – You do not have those feelings of disgust?

P – No.

### **Relationship of body to cultural expectations**

The media places more of an emphasis on the female body in advertising though.

R – So, you went on to point out the media's placing an emphasis on - more on the female body, more on the appearance values in advertising. The fact that that's true, how do you think that has influenced how you think about your body?

P – Everywhere I look, TV, billboards, magazines it's everywhere, absolutely everywhere. In a way its like, I know they're too skinny, but in a way, I'm jealous, not of some of the ones that are really, really skinny, but the healthier skinny. I don't know if that makes sense. It kind of just makes you jealous in a way, and these people have such rigorous work-out schedules, and what they eat – I don't know if they live on carrot sticks or whatever, but I don't know how they can do it, seriously. I've seen so many shows on how the models' managers will get them addicted to cocaine or the diets with very little intake of food. It's just really bad. You know it's bad, but then again, you try to push that aside. It just really bugs me.

It bugs you as far as-

P – The lengths that these people will go to look good. They see that piece of cake and could probably just eat like three cakes, but they can't do that. The thing is that I know people that actually quit eating all fat altogether and say if they would eat a slice of pizza, they would gain a pound just from not having any of that and then when they eat, they will feel all depressed or I cannot believe I did that.

R – It seems like it was an extremely difficult lifestyle and yet, at the same time, there was also some jealousy.

P – Definitely, jealousy, but I know I would not want to be like that, but still then they look so good but then I can only imagine what they have to go through. Even though I know that I just still cannot help to feel that. It's like I want to be like that in a way.

And the media is constantly portraying deathly skinny girls.

R – You said that the media is constantly portraying, and it really does feel very overwhelming.

P – Yes, everywhere you look.

Even though I know only one percent of women are actually that skinny, they seem to be everywhere I look.

R – You said that “Even though I know that only one percent of women are actually that skinny, they seem to be everywhere I look. Is that just the women in the media, like in television and magazines or does that include other women too?”

P – Oh yes. There are a bunch walking around here in the city. They're everywhere.

R – Do you have the same experience when you're on campus and you're comparing yourself with these other women that you see?

P – Definitely, and I think that a lot of the girls are, not just myself.

R – Other girls do the same thing.

P – Yes, it's definitely a woman thing. Most guys could care less. They say, “Let's go and eat a whole pizza and drink beer.” They don't care.

R – When you see these other women walking around the campus, does it still seem to you that you weigh more than most of them? Is that the same as seeing the women in magazines?

P – Not necessarily, because they're real people. It doesn't affect me the same way.

R – Not the same way as the girls in the magazines.

P – No.

R – So, do you feel more –

P – I feel more comfortable, yes.

R – Because they're real, as you said.

P – Yes, they're real. I know they're not airbrushed.

### **Comparison of concerns about body image with boys**

Body image is important not only for girls but for boys as well.

R – Then you went on to mention that body image is important not only for girls but for boys as well. Do you think they experience it probably in different ways or do you think it is the same?

P – I think for one I know that for the eating disorders, it is really prevalent in wrestlers and swimmers, and a lot with the girls having to show their bodies. I think it is as prevalent in the boys. They just want to show off for the girls. They just want to show off their muscles and things like that, but more for the sporty types that have to show off more of their body.

R – So you think it is probably, if we think about your adolescence for instance, do you believe it was more of an issue for you than say boys that were the same age?

P – Oh, yes.

R – In what way would you say?

P – You know you always have certain girls who just stare in the mirror in the bathroom. Obviously, I was not in the guy's bathroom, but the guys are always busy chasing the girls around and you hear stuff in the hall. You never would hear anything from the guys relating to body image or anything. Whereas, with some of the girls you would hear and see things.

R – Comments as far as concerns they had of their body?

P – Oh, yes.

R – Do you recall any of that?

P – Not too well. It was awhile ago. Just little things like he isn't going to like me because I look like this or my hair, my weight, just different things.

R – Do you remember worrying about any of those things yourself?

P – I was never really that much concerned at that age.

### **Relationship of changes in body to relationships with boys**

Body image wasn't a big thing for me until probably eleventh grade.

R – Then you said, as you just said, you lost your hair a little bit. You really didn't think so much about your body image when you were younger, but starting at about eleventh grade, it started to become a big thing. So what changed? What made it a big thing in your life?

P – It was just the thing of noticing the guys, and I never really had all too many boyfriends, especially not in junior high and not even really throughout high school actually. Sometimes, you know, just their heads would turn and notice me and I'd be like, that is kind of cool. I have always been kind of self-conscious. I just feel like people stare at me sometimes. I don't know why. It's a really weird thing. It started to be a good thing and whenever I was on the shot and lost some weight, people were like, you are looking really good and that made me feel good and that was a good thing.

R – So, one of the things that was going on was boys were starting to pay attention to how you looked and that was what made it more of a big thing, getting noticed by guys.

P – Yes.

### **Relationship of body to dieting and weight**

My body always fluctuated throughout junior high and senior high school.

R – You talked about how there were some fluctuations. You said my body always fluctuated throughout junior high and senior high. What was that like?

P – Like I mentioned in there. I was on that Depo shot and that really did a lot of terrible things to my body. It did make me lose weight and it also made me lose hair, abdominal cramps and very moody. So, I got off of that and I got on a birth control pill, which made me gain about fifteen pounds back. So between 1996 and the present, I have fluctuated between fifteen to thirty pounds and I am losing a little bit now because I am getting up at 6:15 every morning and walking for forty-five minutes. I get up early. It kind of wakes me up. It's a nice refreshing way to wake up but everyone says you're crazy for getting up that early. It does elevate my mood, too. Walking is very good for you and I'm trying to just stick to a healthy lifestyle.

R – The fluctuations in your body, the ups and downs, and depending on where you were, and depending on how your body was fluctuating, did that tend to affect how you felt about your body?

P – Definitely, about myself too. When I was at the most, one hundred and forty pounds, I just didn't feel very good about myself and my clothes didn't fit. I was like, "Oh, no."

Even this past Christmas, I had gotten a pair of jeans and the brand runs smaller, and I'm like, "Oh my gosh, these are never going to fit. But I'm going to keep them for an incentive. Even my mom says the same thing, she gets these dresses and she'll keep them hung up as her incentive to lose weight. They've been there for awhile but she still keeps them up there. You really just have a negative view and just do not feel comfortable.

R – So you're saying that as your weight went up, you would not feel as good about yourself?

P – Definitely not.

R – Okay, so there is a correlation there.

P – Uh,huh.

During that time I was on the Depo-Provera birth control shot. I lost about twelve pounds on it and realized how much better I looked and enjoyed the compliments I received from friends and family members. I switched over to birth control pills because the side effects from the shot were too much for my body.

R – Okay, then you said you were on the birth control shot. You talked about how losing the weight was a very positive thing for you and that gave you confidence. When you switched over to the Pill because of the side effects, when you switched, did that make you gain weight?

P – I'm pretty sure because it can either make you gain weight or lose weight and my body just decided to gain weight. I have a few friends and one has had two kids and literally not even a week after having her kids, she had her half shirt on again. You know one of those kinds of people that can eat anything, whatever. Unfortunately, I'm not like that. So, my body decided to pack on the pounds. My lifestyle didn't change. Well, I guess I was working at McDonald's and did get free dinners, so that probably kind of contributed. I was like well, I'm going to get a salad, but then I get ranch dressing and put french fries on the salad. So, that probably contributed.

R – So when you had this change of, at first you lost weight and then you gained weight on the Pill, how did that influence how you felt about your body when you had that weight gain? How did that affect you?

P – It still at that point did not really affect me that much. I think at that time I was a senior, maybe even a freshman in college, so I didn't really let it get to me that much. I think when it really started was when I had my New Year's resolution was actually in 1999 to start losing. That's when I lost the forty pounds, because in 1997 and 1998, my freshman year in college, I had one buddy and we would go out every night and drink and eat a feast at three in the morning and then go right to bed. That was for about five

months, so obviously that is not very healthy, but the same thing happened with her, too. It wasn't just myself. We kind of went through it together.

R – Did that make it easier to go through all of that and have a friend to do it with?

P – Definitely, because it's like I'm not the only one looking real chunky here, she is too. So, it was not as bad.

And watched what I ate in spurts.

R – The other thing you said was you watch what you eat in spurts, you said.

P – Yes, like the whole thing like when I first moved down I was eating all those cookies and stuff. Whereas, say tonight, I'm going to make a tuna salad and some rice or something like that and I like tofu. I'm not a vegetarian but I gave up beef a year ago. But I still eat - I just tried buffalo.

R – Is it good?

P – Yes, it's really good. It tastes like venison. I don't know if you like venison or not.

R – I've had it, but I don't really remember what it tastes like, but I've had it.

P – It's like beef, but a little drier, and it's much better for you, too. I eat seafood, so I'm not a vegetarian by any means, and I could never be. I tried once for a week – it just couldn't happen. I tried beans. Since I gave up the red meat, if I don't have any protein I eat beans and rice and vegetables. I like lots of fruits and vegetables and when I was living at home, I was cooking really healthy for my dad and I, and my dad had actually lost from his physical from one year to the next, he had lost forty pounds and his cholesterol went down forty points. So it's really beneficial. Everyone was like “What have you been doing?” And he said, “Well, my daughter has just been cooking me a little bit healthy,” and it really showed. And that's another positive sign, too. And I just got my blood pressure read yesterday, and it was 120/80 – perfect. And that really makes me feel good.

R – It makes you feel healthy, too.

P – Yes.

R – So, at the times when you watch what you eat, you feel healthier?

P - I definitely all around feel a lot better. Then we went out to eat a few weeks ago before I left, and I got a rib and chicken dinner, and then we had an appetizer. It's just like by the time we were done, I was like, “Ooh greasy.” I ate everything. I was very hungry. I love grease, don't get me wrong, but when you eat too much of it, you just kind of feel nauseous, and when I eat a little better, I just feel better all around.

I gained a lot of weight in my freshman year of college due to late night drinking binges and midnight munchies.

R – Then you talked about that you said that you gained a lot of weight your freshman year in college because you and your roommate were going out and having the munchies. I know that you just talked about that, but is there anything else you want to say about that, just as far as how it affected you and affected how you feel about your body?

P – There’s not really much more to say about that. All I can say is that it kind of affected my grades that first semester, but after that I really got my butt in gear. Even at that time, it wasn’t really until a year ago that I decided to take charge.

R – To take charge?

P – Yes, to try and lose the weight and not to drink every night and just to focus on school.

### **Relationship of body to peers**

After all, spring break is only three months away and we all know what that means!

R – Then you wound it all off here by saying spring break is only three months away and we all know what that means.

P – Seeing all those stupid things on TV like the “Girls Gone Wild” in their bikinis and stuff like that, and usually the typical spring break is at the beach. Obviously, I chose the alternative, which I’m very glad I did. I usually don’t go to the beach for spring break anyway. For most people, the girls are like, “Oh, it’s time for spring break, better go tan and I better lose some weight.” It’s just a college, especially college-oriented type thing. They start stressing out about the first of the year.

R – They start stressing out about it.

P – Yes, definitely.

R – Were you stressing about it? When you thought about spring break?

P – Not really, because I knew in January that I was going out West and it would be fairly cold, so no.

R – So, typically it’s the people –

P – They know they’re –

R – going to the beach. It’s having to look good in a bathing suit and to be tan.

P – I never go fake tanning. I don't believe in paying to give myself cancer. I'm also not into the fake thing like the fake nails. As for dying my hair, it's been awhile. I don't do it anymore, but I used to. I just believe that you should be who you are and the hell with all of that fake stuff. I just don't see the need for it.

R – Okay, is there anything else that you didn't write about or you didn't talk about?

P – I don't think so. It's pretty much the fluctuations – what we talked about. That's the main thing, and how I feel good versus bad depending on where I am at the time, and how exercise makes me better. Yes, I pretty much stated everything that I feel.

R – So, we've pretty much covered all the basics then.

P – Yes.

R – Okay.

### **Relationship of body to exercise**

I have exercised faithfully for the past three years

R – Then you talked about in throughout the last three years, you said that you exercised faithfully.

P – Yes, I'm back on the faithful track now. The first few months after I moved down here, I was taking out cookies from the grocery store. I would go over there and whatever, I would gain so it was a yo-yo thing. But I can't do it after a long day of work. That's the last thing I want to do, so I get up early in the morning and it's refreshing to me, usually six days a week for about forty-five minutes a day.

R – So you're pretty faithful to it?

P – Yes, it's not only for the weight loss, but it also elevates my mood and it makes me feel better.

R – So, it just makes you feel better all around.

P – Yes, it really does. I like to get out there. I like the fresh air. I liked it a lot more at home, whereas there's a lot of carbon monoxide that I'm trying to breathe, but I can deal with that.

I started exercising and not eating anything unhealthy

R – And then you said that when you were exercising and eating in a healthy way, that that is a good feeling, that you feel better in many ways.

P – Definitely.

Now that the holidays are over, it's back to the grindstone.

R – Then you noted that now that the holidays are over, it's back to the grindstone you called it.

P – That would be waking up very early in the morning and walking in the rain and the snow, I'm out there. So, I guess you can call me a hardcore walker. I see those other people out there jogging, and I think, "Good for you, way to go." I don't know if they're doing it because they have to for school or whatever, but you get a little wet and dirty sometimes but I get the job done.

R – It's like a job then, going out in the rain.

P – A little bit. Sometimes, like when you wake up in the morning and you don't want to go to work, and when I wake up and it's raining then I really don't want to go out, but I have to. So, I do; my umbrella and Walkman and all.

R – So you're very committed to doing this.

P – Yes.

R – I see what you mean by back to the grindstone.

P – Yes, exactly.

I will wake up at 6 AM to do exercise tapes, then walk for forty-five minutes everyday.

R – You said you get up at six and do exercise tapes and then you walk for forty-five minutes everyday. You've talked quite a bit about how much better you feel when you do that.

P – More energized, too.

R – Well, there is definitely – physical exercise releases endorphins.

P – Yes.

R – How do you feel if you don't do it –

P – The same as with the cookie. I feel guilty.

R – Is that right?

P – Yes, I give myself a couple of days a week, usually the weekends, that is my time to relax. So, that's not bad. But I usually don't miss. I do give myself a few free days just to sleep in and relax which everybody needs and I can realize that.

R – Yes, everyone does need a few days to just relax as you say. Are you able to do that because I know you're saying that you feel guilty when you miss. Are you able to feel okay about that if you say, "I plan to sleep in tomorrow and not go walking?"

P – Oh, yes.

R – So, you don't feel guilty about those days.

P – No.

### **Relationship of body to feelings of guilt**

I lost forty pounds and was 5'7" tall and weighed one hundred and ten pounds.

P – Yes, I actually looked at some pictures and didn't really realize how, I mean, I wasn't deathly skinny but to be that tall and weigh one hundred and ten pounds. Like I stated in there, everyone thought that I was anorexic and I'm like, "No, I'm not, I'm exercising and eating right." Nobody believed me, like my boyfriend's parents and my parents didn't really say anything, and my friends, but I was like, "I don't know what to tell you, but it's just my lifestyle." And nobody would believe me, and it was pretty frustrating. I have had people, like this one girl who was actually bulimic herself, she's like, "If you need anything, you can talk to me, and I know what's going on." And I thought, "No, you really don't." It's really weird.

R – So your experience was then, was because of your appearance and how much you weighed, that people actually thought that you were anorexic, but you really weren't, you had just lost a lot of weight.

P – Oh, no. Never. I lost it in a very short amount of time, like six months, just because I didn't eat any junk, I mean like nothing. That was the guilty part, like if I ate a cookie. I thought, "Oh, my God." So, that's how I lost all the weight by putting no junk into my body and just eating healthy.

R – Let me ask you about that. When you say that you would eat a cookie or whatever junk food, you felt guilty. Can you tell me about that a little bit. What would you feel guilty about?

P – Just like, I wonder if it's going to make me gain weight and, you know, I want another one. Just stuff like that, and when I think about that now, I think, how trivial, it's just a cookie. But there are so many other people like that out there. I would think about like if I ate one, it would be on my mind for awhile, and I would think, "Oh, I shouldn't have eaten that. It's just really strange.

R – So, you would worry that you would eat more and gain weight.

P – Yes.

R – You're saying that now you don't really experience it that way.

P – No, I can go in moderation, not how I used to. Even a few months ago, a whole bag of cookies – eating them until I got sick and I can do that, trust me. I love chocolate, chocolate is my downfall. A few here and there, that's fine.

R – So, you really don't have the same feelings of guilt that you used to have.

P – No, thank God.

R – Now it's just a cookie and you don't have guilt about it.

P – Yes.

R – I wonder what changed that, the fact that you used to eat a cookie and just feel guilty.

P – I think it's this whole thing with seeing my cousin going through this, and personal experiences. As me being a little bit older and realizing that body image is not everything, you know, just experiencing things like that.

### **Relationship of body to perceptions of others**

People started getting concerned about my weight.

R – Then you said that people got concerned about your weight, thinking that you had an eating disorder. So, you had the experience of people telling you that they were worried that you were anorexic or something. So I wonder what that was like for you after you had worked so hard to lose all the weight and then to have people then questioning you instead of saying you look great. They have this reaction of, "Are you sick or do you have an eating disorder. What was that like for you?"

P – It was very frustrating because nobody would believe me. I felt like I did all of this for nothing and everyone thought that I was cheating and taking the short way around everything because I did work really hard, and it's very hard to have the willpower. Especially because I love junk like potato chips, chocolate, give it all to me. I don't care.

But I gave everything up and I worked really hard and no one believed me. I was just really mad and frustrated and there was no way that I could prove that I wasn't. I couldn't have people follow me to the bathroom every time I went to the bathroom. It's not like I went to the bathroom every time I was done eating. And I ate.

R – So that was a frustrating experience.

P – Yes, it was very frustrating.

R – I can imagine.

I've continued to fluctuate between one hundred and fifteen pounds and one hundred and thirty pounds over the past few years.

R – Now since then you have been fluctuating between one hundred and fifteen pounds and one hundred and thirty pounds over the last few years. Doing that fluctuating and going up and down over about fifteen pounds or so, how does that affect how you feel about your body?

P – It's frustrating too because it's like the whole thing that I'll eat really bad like the whole bag of cookies, gain the weight, and then I'll be like, okay, I have to get back in gear. Like I'm in the gear right now. I know its not good to yo-yo like that and that's another thing, too. It's just really hard for me to maintain one certain weight. I would like to just stay at the same but it just seems at points I will lose my willpower and just give in to eating all the junk, and then other times I'm really good at it. It all depends on the season, I guess. In the winter is when I gain the weight with the holidays and starting back to school. Whereas, in the summer time you're more active and things like that.

R – So, it sounds like it's kind of a struggle.

P – It is. I wish I could just stay at one thing all the time but its not happening.

R – Do you notice differences or changes in your life depending on when you're at the lower weight versus the higher weight as far as how people will respond to you? Does it change the way people respond to you?

P – I don't think so. No.

R – Okay, so there are not really any differences then that affect your relationships with people?

P – It's more an internal thing.

R – Internal, as far as how you feel about yourself? Is that what you mean?

P – Yes, exactly.

### **Relationship of body to self-esteem and confidence**

When I am in “my skinny stage” I feel great about myself and tend to flaunt around a bit.

R – Then you talked about your skinny stage. You have it in quotes here. You said, “In my ‘skinny stage,’” I feel great about myself and I tend to flaunt around a bit. I thought that was a very interesting statement and I wanted to ask you about that. First of all, what do you mean by your “skinny stage?”

P – Well, right around one hundred and fifteen to one hundred and twenty pounds. It’s usually in the summer time, like we were in California last summer. Just like the skirts, and I never really wear half shirts. I am just not really comfortable anytime with them but just being more confident walking, more confident you know, things like that.

R – When you’re in your “skinny stage” you walk more confidently.

P – I feel more assertive and everything.

R – Okay. Do you feel freer, would you say?

P – Definitely.

R – So it’s just more freedom of movement.

P – Yes, yes.

R – So, when you talk about flaunting, that’s an interesting word. I like that word.

P – I don’t know if I really used that correctly. I was never one to flaunt myself around. I guess I just meant, like you said, freer, maybe a little less clothing, nothing really or ‘risque’ or anything but –

R – So that definitely goes with being in your skinny stage.

P – Yes, definitely, not as free in the other stage.

R – So when you’re at the higher end of your weight range, then you don’t feel like flaunting.

P – Definitely not. I don’t want to flaunt around that’s for sure.

At this certain stage, I feel like a beached whale.

R – Then you went on to say that at this certain stage “I feel like a beached whale or something.”

P – That is just the whole thing back to where I said, just a distortion type thing. I know it’s not true but I just do not feel confident about myself. I know by no means I am anything like that, but it’s just hard to kind of get over that fact.

R – Okay, it’s hard to get over it.

P – Yes.

R – So at the time you were writing this –

P – I was at the higher end. It was right after Christmas, so after all the fried turkey and ham and pork roast, and all that stuff.

R – That imagery is kind of the opposite of what you’re describing when you’re in your flaunting stage and sort of being free to walk more confidently. This sort of image of a beached whale is just stuck on the beach.

P – I don’t know. I don’t think I worded that right. I didn’t know what else to put. That’s the first thing that came to mind.

R – Which is why I think that actually it reflects exactly how you were feeling. It’s probably exactly the right terminology. It probably is saying how you were feeling at that time.

P – Yes, maybe so.

R – What about now?

P – I’m feeling better. I’m exercising more and I feel a lot healthier. I’m back on the healthy eating track, which is good, so I’m feeling pretty good right now. I know that summer is coming and spring break is coming. We wore layers of clothing anyway, so obviously, it did matter.

R – So there really is a big difference for you in terms of your weight and as far as how you feel about yourself and your body. There is definitely, from the way you described it, it really changes depending on your weight.

P – Definitely.

R – Are there other factors that affect how you feel about your body other than your weight, or are there other things other than your weight, or is it pretty much for you focused on your weight?

P – It is pretty much just the weight. I was a little concerned, like, because I have some scars and stuff. I have been to the dermatologist. Usually, by this time in your life it clears up. My mom actually had to get two dermabrasions where they actually scraped her skin off. That was another thing that I was kind of conscious about that, but other than that, that is about it. My teeth – I would like to get braces. They're really bad. I take good care of them. My parents both have bad teeth. I just got an estimate down at University Dental and they said I needed \$4500 worth of work. So, I went to the dental school and they said it would be half of that even if I needed everything. So, those are minor things. I'm not really as concerned.

R – You're not really as concerned about those other issues as you are about the weight. That really is more of an issue for you.

P – Uh,huh, definitely.

R – I want to make sure I didn't cut you off, and I don't want to dwell on this if you don't want to, but I want to make sure that I gave you a chance to talk about this. When we were just talking, your description of feeling like a, you described it as a beached whale, it looked like it was a little upsetting for you.

P – No, it's just at that stage that I just feel like being in sweatpants, kind of like I am now. I feel better now. I just don't really feel like doing anything. I just want to stay in nice baggy clothes and eat.

R – No, it was just when we were talking, I thought I saw tears in your eyes. If you wanted to talk about it, I didn't want to cut you off.

P – No.

### **Relationship of body to potential pregnancy**

It 's very hard for women these days to feel self-confident about themselves.

R – You commented that it's hard for women to feel confident about themselves. Can you say a little more about that as far as how it's hard to feel confident?

P – I think it's just really hard with the whole media thing. Some people's husbands or boyfriends – “Well, why can't you look more like her or once you get married all of those things that they say. After having babies and things like that, a lot of women are very self-conscious of their bodies.

R – Sure. Do you think about that sometimes, about the future?

P – Oh my gosh, yes. I'm deathly scared to have kids. It's not the whole fact – My mom was a decent weight until after she had my two brothers and me. I think it was her eating habits, too. Your body is never the same once you've had kids and that just really scares the heck out of me.

R – It scares the heck out of you?

P – Oh yes, definitely.

R – Obviously you've thought about this some. Would that scare you enough that it might affect your decision to have kids or not?

P – I don't think so. I'm not sure if I want kids now anyway, but I don't think that I would let that factor influence my choices.

**EDITED SYNTHESIS #6****Jill****Relationship of body to food**

I have always thought that body image relates to food.

R – You started off talking about body image being related to food.

P – Yes.

R – Can you say a little more about how they are related for you?

P – Well, my mom kind of got this started. She was pretty smart about food because she had four babies and she wanted to feed them right so she did a lot of reading about food things. She was always trying to get us to eat right. I mean, when she was younger, she didn't have the stability. Her mom was actually in college and she was not taken care of, and she talks a lot about that she didn't have a lot of food growing up. So I think that is her motive to teach us what to eat and she wants to make sure she has enough for her kids. So basically I ate carrots a lot. She was always trying to watch and she didn't let us have a lot of sugar. She would try to get us to eat fruits and stuff. I know how moms are with vegetables but she always wanted it to seem like it was available. She wanted us to limit content of certain foods. If I was feeling sick one time, she said, "Have you been eating a lot of starch or have you been eating a lot of this." She would explain to me why, if I was sick, that is why I felt that way. She was always incorporating a lot of different food with being connected to different things. So that is kind of where I get it, is from her, and I just always think about what I am eating and the consequences of eating, how it is good for me, how it is bad for me and everything about it.

R – So, that was something that your mom would talk to you about.

P – Yes, that is why I really think about it.

Food makes you fat? I believe it. I can never seem to think about my body image without thinking of food.

R – You have a question here and you said, "Does food make you fat"? You said that you believe that it does and that it is hard for you to think about your body image without thinking of food.

P – My whole thing with me is that carbs contribute to fat, because its like this thing going on with my stomach and I'm wondering why do I look like this. She said its probably because of carbs. I just heard a lot about that kind of thing, and when I write,

that is kind of my writing style to write questions. Too much school, I guess. I think your body image can have a lot to do with what you eat. I know my roommate eats a lot differently than I do and she looks a lot different in structure. I guess this stuff kind of interests me, but her story was, she used to be pretty overweight but then she completely changed her eating habits, and she eats all kinds of different things. Her body really changed. I look at things like that and I think maybe that was because of her eating.

R – Yes, that is interesting. How has that affected you, the fact that your roommate's body has changed, has that affected you at all?

P – No, not really. It kind of contributes to my theory, but I think in some ways I look at her and think that if I did, that maybe that I would have the same results. Then again, I really don't worry because it is a substantial change. Sometimes I think its completely off the wall. It changes. Sometimes I worry about her because she's completely a vegetarian and a lot of the foods that she eats are a lot different and I don't know if she always gets the nutrients she needs. Again, my mom ingraining in me the balance you need.

The reason I hold this belief is because some people deal best with their emotions through food.

R – You talked about people dealing with their emotions through food and that's an interesting idea. What did you mean they are dealing with their emotions through food?

P – I feel certain foods have certain comfort levels. I think especially coming to college in the last few years, we had to eat the cafeteria type food and its just the grease that doesn't make you feel any better. If you had soup or something where you got to go home for the weekend, its like a comfort. You know how they say about comfort food. Sometimes, people get sad and they eat junk like candy, chocolate, Doritos, things like that. I think I've had times in my life where I may have eaten different things. I've always been a huge fan of fried food and fried food reminded me of fun because my grandfather always used to take us out to eat, and when we got to go out to eat it was fun because you could get fried things. We didn't eat fried a lot so it was a really big treat to get fried food. I think I mentioned seventh grade as big with it. It relates to this. This was one of the biggest things that I think about when I think about this time. I used to have dance class on Wednesday and my mom worked up the street and there was the dance center and 7 Eleven right across from it. I don't know if you're familiar with 7 Eleven, but they have subs and all kinds of things. So, I used to walk from my mom's office up the road and I would get off the bus there after school. I would go to 7 Eleven and load up on orange soda, a big bag of these cheddar sour cream chips and this giant tootsie roll. I would spend all this money on junk before dance class. I didn't get to do that very often, so I really enjoyed it when I did, and I went all out. The summer before, my parents decided to divorce and that was one of the first things I did independently. That was a big time. In some ways I associate it more with my parent's divorce because I think my mom kind of did that so that I would feel better.

R – I'm sorry, she did what? What did you do?

P – She signed me up for the dance class and gave me money. I think that was my mom's way and that was her idea to send me to the 7 Eleven. It was something that I went and did all by myself. So, it was independence but I hadn't gotten to do that before. That was a new thing in that time, and so I associate it.

R – When you were first making these independent steps and going to buy your own snacks at the 7 Eleven, how did that affect how you felt about your body, or did it?

P – Back then the reason I did that was because no one was there to say I couldn't get that. Since I was allowed to buy whatever I wanted, I had to have junk food, just like any kid with five dollars in their hand. Looking back on it, I think that in that time I ate a lot of that kind of stuff like high carbohydrate, grease, starch, fat content things. I try to think about my body now, I wonder if some of the decisions I made affected how it is, so I look back.

R – So that's something you wonder about now, if the decisions you made when you were around twelve, if that affected how you feel about your body now.

P – Yes, like in adolescence. I was thinking that since that's the time when your body changes you can make certain decisions and that is how its going to come out. So, maybe that's one of the decisions I made then and that's why.

I say I think I gorged, because I'm not sure if my stomach got like this before age twelve.

R – You went on to talk about the gorging. You said, "I wasn't sure if my stomach got like this before age twelve. I wanted to ask you about that – "like this". Like what?

P – Yes, its like this little pouch thing that goes on and its round.

R – Okay, so its round and you're wondering if your eating habits back around age twelve have affected the shape of your stomach now.

P – Right. I think the whole stomach thing is again on my campaign of carbs and fat. I think my mom always said that that's what causes it. That's where the food comes in. It's all a big chain.

I always had a love for foods with high starch and carbohydrate content. Though I make efforts to limit my intake of such foods presently.

R – Then you went on to talk about how you loved foods that had a lot of starch and carbohydrate but said right now you're trying to limit your intake of those kinds of foods. What is that like for you?

P – I feel a lot better. Normally I try to eat fruit for breakfast and something kind of light for lunch, and then whatever for dinner. Of course, I've had problems with that because I like to go out for dinner. I think I've changed for the better. The last two years I was in the dorms and we had to buy a meal plan so it was burgers and fries, and breakfast, lunch, and dinner it was carbs and fat and lots of starch like breadsticks or ice cream. Now that I do my own shopping, I buy more fruit and I think I eat better. I feel really good on days that I do that.

R – So watching that is a good feeling for you?

P – Yes.

R – Do you feel better about your body then when you do that?

P – A little bit. Maybe I feel a little less guilty because I feel better when I haven't eaten a whole bunch of things. It doesn't bother me to go to McDonalds. Just this morning I went to the pancake house and I don't get overly guilty about it, but I just think it makes me feel better to eat better. I go to sleep with a clear conscience of, okay, I ate healthy today. I did good.

R – Okay, with a clear conscience.

P – Yes.

I ate whatever junk food I could get my hands on then.

R – Then you went back to talking about back then when you were around age twelve of your adolescence. Back then you said you ate whatever junk food you could get your hands on.

P – Yes.

R – Okay, so there has been a shift in your eating habits, then. When you were eating all the junk food back then, it sounds like what you said so far was, back then you felt just fine with that.

P – Yes, it was just kind of that consequence thing. If I have a day where I am eating healthy, I think I have done all I can do. If my stomach doesn't want to what I want it to,

then that's fine. At least I did what I could do. Back then I didn't realize that calories had consequences, so it was fine.

R – So, you didn't have all this guilt like you do now.

P – No.

Her mom didn't feed her properly, so that's probably why her body has programmed itself to defend against starvation by retaining whatever fat it does get. I think the same is true of me.

R – Here you said, and I think you are talking about your mother's mom. You said, "Her mom didn't feed her properly, so that is probably - were you talking about your mother's mother?"

P – Yes.

R – You said, "So that's probably why her body has programmed itself to defend against starvation by retaining whatever fat it does get, I think the same is true with me. So you're thinking that your mom didn't get the food she needed and you're thinking that possibly the same is true for you.

P – Yes, I think I was fed pretty well. I don't remember ever starving but my parents did save a lot and they didn't get the foods that most kids would like to eat. They didn't buy a whole lot of junk food and they bought what they could buy and they bought the basics. They didn't have a lot of money and I think that since I didn't get those fun things and I just got the basics, and when I did get something that wasn't my normal food, then I went overboard on it and I craved it, or things like that. I think that has something to do with it. I don't remember what my mom fed me when I was real young. I think that she just referred to me being a tiny baby. I think that I got fed pretty well but I just didn't have the junk food.

I think I am healthy, and I am a nut about eating the right way.

R – You talked about that you feel you are a pretty healthy person and you said that you are a nut about eating the right way. What do you mean by a nut?

P – Well, my sister and I talked about this. When I first came to school I was amazed to see people get a burger and if they got two sides they would get french fries and mashed potatoes. And my sister and I would joke about that just because we have been taught so much and we know that's not exactly healthy. I'm not really a nut but if I go a couple of days without eating meat or I go a couple of days without eating fruit, I feel all out of whack, and I just need to get something right. Like something is just not right and I want to fix it. So, maybe that is sort of a little anal retentive about my food concerns.

R – You said that you feel out of whack, like something is just not quite right.

P – Yes, I just don't feel quite as energetic. I have to stay energetic because of the schedule that I keep, and I just think if there is something dragging me down, it makes me feel a little sluggish. Sometimes I think it comes from food if I ate certain things.

R – Okay, I see what you mean. So, that will kind of slow you down in terms of energy and that's bad.

P – Yes.

I eat fruits and vegetables and don't keep much junk food in the house.

R – You said that you eat a lot of fruits and vegetables and you don't keep much junk food in the house. Again, do you feel better when you don't have the junk food? Do you feel better about your body then?

P – Yes, I feel like I'm proud of myself because I can limit that. I eat rice cakes and I try to eat better things. Of course, I had a moment two weeks ago where I was incredibly stressed out and I went to the store and bought all of this stuff. So, that completely changed that.

### **Relationship of body to mother**

Was it because she was borderline anorexic?

R – You described your mother as being borderline anorexic. What did you mean by that?

P – It was around the time that I was born and it may have had something to do with my brother, but she told me about it. I don't know very much about it, but I know that she did, I think, have problems with that. She told me this. What triggered her to tell that was that one of the girls I had grown up with in my class died of bulimia, and I went to the funeral and everything. It really bothered my mom. She never knew the girl but she explained the reason she thinks its important to go to this funeral and support – the reason it touches base with her, it hits home with her, is that she kind of dealt with that. So, I wondered again, why I have been taught so much about food is maybe because of some of the things that my mom went through.

R – So she had a period where she was somewhat anorexic then.

P – I think she has thought a lot about body image, too. She always tells me that when she was younger she thought bread made people fat. So, I think she has a lot of things

that can, maybe, you know, me watching her think about her body has really influenced that. It has caused me to think about it too.

R – I was thinking that I am going to ask you to follow up on that. How do you think it has influenced you?

P – I don't know if its made me, I don't want to use the word paranoid, but I think it has really made me aware of, its just raised a huge awareness as to, I look at what I eat and I look at what other people eat and I think food has consequences. So, it has just opened my eyes to a whole perspective to eating food and relating it to body image. Don't get me wrong, I go out and eat when I please and usually within reason eat whatever I want, but I'm not so worried about it that I don't have fun. It's concerning.

R – So, you think that you think about it a lot more than you would otherwise.

P – Yes, and I do it.

### **Relationship of body to cultural expectations**

Isn't that typical of the times?

R – You also mentioned that you thought that was pretty typical for the times. What did you mean by it was typical for the times?

P – It just seems like we are still in a culture where thin is in more. I see it in the media a lot. I think about that and I think that is all you seem to see on TV is thin people and it is just in our media so much that people associate people with being fat. That is kind of why I thought it was typical.

R – Yes, we certainly get inundated with those kind of images.

### **Relationship of body to exercise and physical activity**

Sometimes I think of exercise as well.

R – You said that also in addition to food, sometimes you think about exercise as well. What do you think about exercise in relation to your body?

P – I think it counteracts the food. I think its another thing that can substantially change the body image and usually for the better. I think sometimes food can change it for the worse and exercise can change it for the better. When you do both things, then its in balance.

R – I want to try to get a sense of how much this affects you or if it does. Thinking about food and exercise, how much would you say you think about those two things? A little bit or a lot?

P – I think about exercise a little more than food. Usually if I go out to eat a lot, I think I should exercise a lot more than I am right now because I try to eat right. I try to eat good when I can. If I have a couple of days when I'm not eating healthy, like what I consider healthy, I think I should be exercising more. I always think I should be exercising and I'm trying to train for a marathon and I haven't had the time. So, I think about it a little more.

R – If you eat a little more food than you would like or you eat too many carbs or whatever, or you haven't exercised as much as you feel like you should – how does that affect you?

P – I feel sick sometimes. I feel like my body is completely out of whack. If there are so many carbs, I feel sluggish. I feel like my body is full of something and I want to change it, and usually the ultimate thing that would help is some exercise to get everything back in shape. Sometimes I just have one of those days where I'm feeling fat or if I'm feeling not healthy. Again, what I consider healthy is eating normal and enough sleep and things like that.

### **Relationship of body to stressful events**

Several events happened in my life starting at age twelve, continuing until the present.

R – Then you went on and you talked about adolescence not just being a time when your body changed, but that there were several events that happened in your life starting at twelve, continuing to the present. I think you just talked about some of that. Is there anything else that you want to add to it? You said that there were several events. Is there anything else that you want to mention?

P – I think most of it spun off because of the divorce. There were just so many things going on and it was all associated with it. It was from a simple fight that my parents had had to something big like them getting remarried, or something would happen. We had other things that happened because of that. We sold our house that I grew up in and was very attached to, and when that fell apart it was just a huge change. One year I'm living in this house with my whole family, and the next year I'm living somewhere completely different. I think stress is sometimes good and sometimes not, but it's still stress. This place where I grew up was rural, and when they divorced I went with my mother and we had a smaller townhouse and it was in town. It was up in Lawrence County and so a whole new world opened up as far as opportunities. Especially now that my parents weren't living together. My dad and mom had different opinions of things. My mom wanted us to participate in soccer or things like that. So that was one kind of stress and now, while we were dealing with this my dad moved. His move meant that we sold the

house. There were so many things we had. There were four kids, and my brother had attention deficit disorder and they have had a lot of issues with that. We actually moved my brother to a different school district, and my dad with all kinds of things. So I think that with the things within the family, I thought I needed to escape. So I dated this guy. It was a strange relationship. It was just your high school typical thing, but it was definitely not a good thing. This guy was kind of a liar. It was not exactly productive. So there was a lot of tension because of that.

R – So you had several things going on.

P – Yes.

These events were stressful enough to possibly alter or redirect the hormonal processes involved in adolescent physical changes, and also change my eating habits.

R – You talked about several stressful events and you were wondering if they had been enough to affect the hormonal processes that were involved in the changes that occurred during adolescence, and it also a little bit changed your eating habits. Is that what you were talking about a little bit ago, about the decisions that you made?

P – Yes, that's more from a biology sort of standpoint, I think. I think I learned a little in psychology just about chemicals and I always thought that stress was a chemical thing, and I thought that it can affect something in your body to trigger things. I have heard that. I think that maybe some of the things that happened, then affected my hormonal processes to shape my body the way it is.

R – What is it like for you now? How are you feeling about your body right now? You said, "My body the way it is." Can you say a little about how you feel about that, and where that process led you?

P – Like I said, in the media there are so many people that are just like sticks. They are real thin and all kinds of things like that, and I think there is so much attention and I compare my body to that sometimes. I think I'm short. That's fine, but I think I have gained a little weight just in different places in the last year, and so I think it just comes from being frustrated with not being able to exercise, and I think I could look better if I did. I think I look okay but I would like to change some things and make it better.

R – So you're not entirely content with your appearance.

P – Right.

R – You talk about in the past that you were wondering if stress affected hormones and so on. It sounds to me like the fact that you're thinking along those lines sounds like you're not entirely content with where you are right now.

P – I'm really not.

Sometimes I wonder if I would look different if these events had not taken place.

R – You said, “I wonder if I would look different if these events did not take place”. Different in what way? Different how?

P – My sisters and my mom have a more thin frame. My mom and I are a little bit more similar. She used to be real thin-framed and she kind of grew out a little more. We look kind of the same and we both think it has to do with the carbs. I wonder if I would look more like my sisters if I were more thin-framed.

R – What is that like for you? You said that your sisters and your mom, you described them as having more of a thin frame. What is that like for you?

P – I just wonder why I looked different. I wonder if there is something that since we are family and we should look more alike. I wonder why I look a little bit different and I think maybe it was something I did. Then again, my dad's family is more solid. I joke about them and call them walls. They're more solid and wall-like.

R – It almost sounds like that when you talk about it like, “I wonder if it's something that I did”. It sort of conjures up for me, in some ways I think, it almost sounds like you feel a little guilty in a way. Is there anything like that?

P – I think, “why didn't I eat better.” I think that during that age I ate so bad just to try and deal with everything. I think I just ate really wrong and then again, with all the things going on in that time period, I wonder if there was something that may have been triggered a little bit. My mom offered a suggestion and we talked about this. My mom offered a suggestion that maybe since I was a smaller baby I didn't have much fat on my body. Maybe my body made a change in itself to retain fat the rest of its life. That's what she thought. The reason that I don't look like my sisters is because my body made that decision. Just because, for whatever reason when I was born.

R – What do you think about that theory?

P – I think its possible. I think that at that time in your life you are very sensitive to all kinds of changes and I know that when my mom – maybe there was even something in my mom's body that triggered that because she had quite an amount of stress. She was nineteen and maybe it was just so different for her.

R – You talk about retaining fat. So, when you think about your body now, do you feel fat?

P – I feel a little bit fatter than my sisters. Maybe it's just because I'm not very tall and it doesn't spread out as much. I'm not obese and I'm not really overweight, I just feel a

little bit larger. Not even overweight. So I wouldn't say that I feel fat. I just don't feel skinny. It's more on that level, on the other end of the scale.

At age twelve, my parents went their separate ways due to irreconcilable differences.

R – You went on to talk about when you were twelve and your parents separated. You were the oldest and it was kind of your job to help out with things. What was that like for you? How did that affect you do you think, being in that position?

P – There were times when I would be pretty stressed out about it and a little frustrated, and I think because my mom – she would never admit to expecting that from me, but I feel like there are things that I didn't go do. I stayed in the house a lot and I felt that I never had enough time. It wasn't very easy, but at the same time, it wasn't too bad. But I don't know how it really affected me. Maybe the stress could have trigger some kind of hormonal process, or maybe it was because I ate when I was at home because that's what there was to do.

R – So you're thinking that it may have affected you in that way and it may have kind of made it easier for you to stay home and eat more.

P – Yes, that was something I could do at home that was fun.

R – So it was kind of a tough position to be in at that time.

P –Yes.

This was the first in a chain of stressful events that would take place through the years. Sometimes I felt like I dealt with my problems through food.

R – Then you talked about there being a chain of stressful events that took place over the years and sometimes you felt like you've dealt with those things through food.

Yes, I think I got a lot of pleasure out of food. I would go out to dinner with friends or just be at home all day. I like to cook a little bit. My mom taught me how to cook some things so that when she came home the food would be made. So, I experimented a lot or I cooked a lot and ate a lot because I liked it. I think that is mainly it. That, and I mentioned that my mom bought things for us that she really couldn't buy when we were with my dad because he was more concerned about money. We didn't go out to eat a lot but she saw when her kids were sad, so she tried to cheer us up by doing things like that and that was one of the things that she did that I always liked. I always liked going to the grocery store when I was little too. I have gotten a lot of pleasure out of food.

R – So that has been kind of a positive thing for you in some ways.

P – Yes.

### **Relationship of body to sisters**

My younger sisters don't look like this. My mom has had five children so its understandable that at forty years of age she may not be pencil thin.

R – Then you talked about your sisters having a different body type and you and your sisters not looking the same. Your mom had five kids and you described her as not being pencil thin right now. I know you have touched on that, but how does that affect you, having your sisters, you described their body types being different from yours? Also, your mom is forty years old now and she's not really what you would describe as thin.

P – She looks more like I do.

R – She looks more like you do?

P – Yes, right now.

R – How does that affect you, seeing your mom not being pencil thin?

P – Well, I think they say a girl tends to look like her mother does, and I look at her too, because I remember she used to look a lot different, and I think that there have been things that have happened to her to make her look different. I'm wondering if its not as much of an issue. I just kind of refer to that. I'm a little confused about what its supposed to be. Like are we really supposed to look like our sisters? Is that how we naturally are? But have we changed that? I've seen her both ways and I'm wondering that if maybe my schedule changes, and I'm able to do some things, maybe I will look like that too. Then I'll know how I'm more naturally supposed to look. I'm confused, I know I have control over what does happen, and I'm not wondering what is going to happen, but I wonder if its supposed to be different.

R – You wonder if your body is supposed to look different.

P – Yes, if that's how its naturally supposed to be, but right now its not.

R – When you say supposed to be, do you mean like your sisters?

P – Yes, because they have time to do more things. I think they both have had time to live like they're supposed to. They participate in things. They're very active and all kinds of stuff.

R – So, they live like they're supposed to. When you say that you mean being active, is that what you mean?

P – I think I'm referring to, I think my mom and I are just stressed out, but ideally when we're not stressed out and changing eating habits and dealing with things, that's how we'll look when things get back to some normal kind of time.

### **Relationship of body to guilt**

Since I was at home often I had little more to do than eat. At this point in my life I spent most time at my mother's house, and she bought all of our favorite foods that she could never buy us when we lived with my father. Since I was never allowed to eat like this before, sometimes I think I gorged.

R – Then you talked about that since you were spending a lot of time at home, you had a lot of time to eat and you spent a lot of time at your mother's house. You said that she bought a lot of things that she couldn't buy when you guys were living with your dad. You said that since you were never allowed to eat like that before that sometimes you gorged. How do you think that influenced how you felt about your body, the fact that you had started gorging?

P – I think that contributes to the feeling guilty about that because I think I really overdid it. The main reason why I overdid it was because it was a rare occasion and I never knew the next time that I would get to go out to eat or I would get to be able to have that good food since it was only once in awhile that I was allowed to be my own boss about what I ate or pick some kind of treat. I loved it.

R – So you would feel guilty sometimes when you did that.

P – Not when I did that. It was okay then, but now.

R – At the time you were not experiencing any guilt about it but now looking back you do. Is the guilt about wondering if you affected your body in some way?

P – Anymore I'm just kind of questioning what kind of changes I've influenced. I'm just kind of in that reflective mode and maybe kind of curious because I've been doing a lot of work with science and so it has kind of changed me.

### **Relationship of body to childhood development**

Did this affect my birth?

R – Then you were wondering about whether that affected your birth. So you're asking the question of her being a borderline anorexic, did that affect your birth? How so, how did you think it maybe affected your birth?

P – If she was having those issues when she was pregnant with me and her body was not getting food, and maybe it is an issue with nourishment. I was trying to eat off of the food that she put into her body and if I didn't get enough because her body needed some for her and then I needed some for mine. So, if she didn't put enough in there for both of us or if she was dealing with that, then maybe I formed differently than I should have. She said that I was born really small, so I just think that again it all has to do with very sensitive processes in the developing fetus and that could have been something that affected it. I'm not really sure how. Maybe its just that thing about me retaining whatever I can eat or retaining whatever fat I do get. My body programmed itself as a defense mechanism.

R – So it raises those kinds of questions for you.

P – Yes.

Then you went on to talk about your body programming itself, you said, to defend against starvation. You even said that maybe you even specialized in retaining fat. What do you mean by specialize? That's an interesting word.

P – That was a poor word choice, but not really specializing, but just doing it. Again, that's my writing and the sort of strange tactics that I learned at CMU when addressing an audience.

R – What I think is, that is exactly what you meant. You probably did mean specializing.

P – That's just what its used to doing, so it does.

R – So you think that your body became very good at retaining fat is what you're saying.

P - Yes

### **Relationship of body to potential pregnancy**

But she didn't look like this at my age after she gave birth to me and my brother born prematurely deceased.

R – You talked about your mom not looking the way she does now when she was your age after she gave birth to you and your brother.

P – I have two brothers. One was born about a year after I was and he lived three weeks and I never knew him. So that didn't really affect me as much. I just kind of pointed that out, as maybe that's another reason why my mom doesn't look exactly like she did. She had five kids.

R – Yes, certainly five pregnancies would have an effect on your body somewhat. Is that influenced at all when you think about the future and your feelings about having kids or does that influence you at all?

P – Sometimes, its just basically hard to lose weight. You have to make an effort to lose weight after having a pregnancy sometimes. At least that's what I've heard and I'm thinking, I hope I have time to make that effort because you hear a lot about it. If I really wanted to have kids, I wouldn't not do because of that. Yes, it is something to kind of be-again, I'm young. Old age is something to be afraid of right now, and things like that, and not just one of those everyday uh-oh things.

R – So it wouldn't stop you from having kids, but it sounds like its something that kind of concerns or at least you've thought about.

P – Yes.

### **Relationship of body to boyfriend**

Don't get me wrong. I'm about a size six standing just below the five foot mark. None of my family is very tall.

R – You talked about now that you are about a size six and just under five feet. You pointed out that nobody in your family is very tall. They are little.

P- Yes.

R – How does that affect you? Does that affect how you think about your body? With your height and the fact that the other people in your family are not very tall?

P – Not really. I didn't know that I wasn't very tall until I went to kindegarten and they said, you're short and you're little, which I didn't mind. It was kind of cute.

R – How about when you were a teenager. Did that affect you at all?

P – No, not really. I just knew that I wasn't tall and that was okay. Sometimes it was kind of fun because I got some more attention.

R – So, you would get some attention from being small.

P – Yes, and it was kind of nice. I still do being that my boyfriend is very tall and he jokes that I have high ceilings in my apartment, and I make him change the lightbulbs. And there was a joke once about how many Mary's would it take stacked on top of each other to change the light bulb, and we determined about three. So just funny things like that. It's fun.

R – So it is kind of fun to be a small size and you said you get some attention. So that is kind of a good thing?

P – Yes, I think so.

### **Relationship of body to weight and dieting**

I think I weigh between one hundred and twenty-five and one hundred and thirty-one pounds.

R – You went on to describe your current weight. You said that you think you're between about one hundred and twenty-five and one hundred and thirty-one. What does that mean to you to be at that weight? Can you talk about that a little bit?

P – I think its okay. I just weighed myself this morning and I thought I really haven't gained too much weight in the past two years, so that's kind of positive. A lot of people gain they say the "freshman fifteen", and I stayed away from that I think. I just think that I could weigh a little less. It goes back to being short. I think I weigh too much for the height I am. Maybe not too much but I would like to weigh a little less. Maybe I should say it that way because it's a little less negative. I just think that I would feel more comfortable with maybe one hundred and fifteen.

R – Do you imagine that you would feel differently about your body then?

P – Absolutely, I think that if I drop ten or fifteen pounds I think I would look better.

R – So you think you would be happier with your body then.

P – Yes, absolutely. It's just all a matter of finding the time to do it and I don't have any right now.

### **Relationship of body to feelings about specific parts of body**

I spend a lot of time thinking about my mid-section.

R – Then you go on to say that you spent a lot of time thinking about your mid-section. I know you talked about this a little bit ago. Is there anything you want to add? What do you think about your mid-section.

P – I just think it would be nice if I could stretch that way a little bit, just to balance everything out, just to even things. Most of it is just my stomach. I don't think its terrible. The only issue is my stomach being round. I don't have any other problems.

R – So that's just an aspect of your body that you're not completely content with?

P – Right, I think that's pretty much the only thing.

I hate my stomach.

R – Then you say flat out here, "I hate my stomach".

P – Maybe hate is a strong word. It just really gets on my nerves because its just one of those things. I can't just sit down and eat whatever I want to because its tempermental.

R – So, you feel like if you were happier with your stomach and your mid-section, it sounds like you would feel more freed up to eat kind of what you wanted.

P – Yes, and its not even that annoying. I know I should eat healthy for other reasons but its just kind of, I hate that. Maybe that's too strong of a word. I just think it's that too. I like to look nice in dresses. I don't like it sticking out. I want to look nice and that's just one thing that bothers me.

R – It bothers you.

P – Yes.

I have been struggling with this for the last ten of my twenty years.

R – You go on to talk about, and you use the word, "struggle" – that you have been struggling with this. When you say struggle, can you tell me about the struggle a little bit?

P – Yes, I think its just frustrating a lot of times because it looks so different. I'm not from around here, and people from around here look a lot different, and sometimes I don't feel like I fit in. So, that's one aspect of it, and another is that I look at my sisters and they can look really nice in something. I think I can look nice in things too. Sometimes I get frustrated like if I'm trying on clothes and I see that thing bulge out. I think I do think about it sometimes. I think since I've been thinking about it so many years, its kind of a struggle. It has been on my mind.

R – So, the struggle is when you try different things, like you tried eating a certain way and exercising. The struggle is that you really just wish it would go away or look flatter, or that the roundness would go away.

P – Yes, I know that I can do something about it. Maybe it is just that right now I'm kind of frustrated. I mean it changes and right now I'm frustrated that I don't have time to pay attention to that because I've been pretty busy. It brings on different kinds of things depending on what's going on at the time.

R – So, it sounds like its something that you give a fair amount of thought to.

P – Yes, I think so. Especially now that I'm going to start wearing summer clothes so you can't really hide it with sweaters or anything.

R - Is that what you feel like you want to do? Does it feel more comfortable to hide it? Do you feel like that you want to do that?

P – I think the only way is to exercise. I'm not interested in trying some kind of strange medication or I'm not really interested in those things they sell on TV that you can wear to make yourself look flatter. I'm not interested in that. I want to do it healthy, and I think the only way is to exercise.

But obesity is really not an issue, despite my complaints of baby fat.

R – Then you went on to say that in spite of the fact that you were concerned about what you described as baby fat, that you said that obesity is not an issue and you certainly are not fat. Its just that you had complaints about baby fat. What do you mean by “baby fat”?

P – It's just the basic baby fat that you get on your groin, on your legs or around here. Its just that some people lose it and some people don't. I think I have a little bit left. I guess from what I've heard, its hard to get rid of. So, that's what my main concerns are.

R – So that kind of bothers you that you have what you feel like is baby fat.

P – Yes.

**APPENDIX B**

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

**TITLE:** Adolescent Female Embodiment as a Transformational Experience in the Lives of Women: An Empirical Existential-Phenomenological Investigation

**INVESTIGATOR:** Allyson Havill, MSN, MA  
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**ADVISOR:** Paul Richer, Ph.D.  
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**SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in psychology at Duquesne University.

**PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research study that seeks to investigate the process of transformation that may occur in the lives of women arising from their adolescent experiences of their changing bodies.

You will be asked to provide a written response, which may be one to several pages long, to the following question.

Please think about your adolescence and the physical changes that occurred. Please describe in as much detail as you can, how these changes altered your view of yourself, your relationships with others, and your everyday life during that time. Also, please describe whether you think these changes continue in your life today.

Initials \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

In addition, you will be asked to grant me an interview which will last approximately one to two hours, for the purpose of following up on your response to the above question. The interview will be taped and transcribed. No other requests will be made of you.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:**

There are no known risks or benefits to your participation.

**COMPENSATION:**

You will not be compensated for your participation. Participation in this project will require no monetary cost to you. A stamped envelope will be provided for return of your response to the investigator.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Your anonymity will be ensured. The data you provide may appear in the dissertation. However, your name will not appear in the dissertation.

Your name will be changed to maintain your anonymity. Any other identifying information such as names of places or significant others, will also be changed.

All written materials, consent forms, and audio tapes will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home. All materials will be destroyed at the completion of the research.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:**

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:**

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to

Initials \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (412-396-5074).

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Participant's Signature

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Date

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Researcher's Signature

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Date