An Examination of the Role of Parental Influences on Girl’s Development of Embodiment

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts
Graduate Department of Adult Education and Counseling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

Adolescence is marked with significant changes in how girls feel and act within their bodies, and is considered a special risk period for body image disruptions. Cross sectional quantitative research within this area suggests that parents represent an important contextual and developmental contributor to body image. The present study aimed to address gaps in previous research by investigating parental influences, including both protective and risk factors, on girls’ embodied experiences through utilizing a prospective qualitative design with a diverse sample of twelve girls, ages 9-18, interviewed annually over four years. Results revealed the presence of both protective and risk factors related to embodiment experiences within the parental relationships, including aspects of relational qualities, self-care, evaluative gaze and social location. Results are discussed in relation to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory and to previous research. The implications for future research are also discussed.
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delve into your world and shed light into the protective and risk factors to the spectrum of positive and disrupted embodied experiences.
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Chapter 1
Introduction and Literature Review

Body image is a multifaceted concept (Pruzinsky and Cash, 2002), which has been used interchangeably in the literature with terms such as weight satisfaction, size perception accuracy, body satisfaction or concern, appearance evaluation and body esteem, among others (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). Taking all these facets into account, body image can be conceptualized as encompassing both positive and negative features associated with the internal image or representation, the thoughts and the feelings that we have of our physical appearance and body (Cash, 2002; Thompson et al., 1999). Along the spectrum of body image, Williams, Cash and Santos (2004) identified three distinctive groups: women with a positive outlook towards their bodies; women with “normative body image discontent”; and women with a negative outlook towards their bodies. Women who have a positive relationship with their bodies speak confidently about their physical attributes, accept their bodies as their own, engage in respectful attendance of their body’s needs and protect themselves against the societal negative influences by dismissing the unrealistic thin ideal (Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005).

Being discontent with one’s body and having a negative outlook towards the body are prevalent among women of various ages and can be characterized by four fundamental facets: 1) overemphasizing being slim and lean; 2) being fixated on the attainment of the culturally-established beauty standards; 3) having a persistent and intense fear of being fat; and 4) defining one’s identity based solely upon one’s weight and shape (Levine & Smolak, 2006; Smolak & Levine, 1994, 1996). The literature on body image suggests that the majority of adolescent girls
engage in negative appearance evaluation and feel dissatisfied with features of their physical appearance and aspects of their bodies (Davison, Markey, & Birch 2003; Fear, Bulik, & Sullivan, 1996; Sands & Wardle, 2003; Wardle & Marsland, 1990; Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000). Moreover, longitudinal studies have shown that serious body image and weight dissatisfaction can manifest itself even in five-year old girls with the possibility that these concerns will be maintained and likely worsen as these girls transition to adolescence and adulthood (Davison et al., 2003). Taken as a whole, negative body image results in an overall negative affect and in a desire to lose weight and diet (Stice, 2002). Unfortunately, these behaviours following the negative evaluation of one’s physical appearance have become normative among women (Hill, 1993; Polivy & Herman, 1987). These emerging concerns during adolescence are also seen in adult women populations (Johnson, Cohen, Kasen, & Brook, 2002; Knez, Munjas, Petrovečki, Paučić-Kirinčič, & Peršić, 2006; Maloney, McGuire, Daniels, & Specker, 1989; Rolland, Farnill, & Griffiths, 1997) and can lead to serious psychosocial problems, low self-esteem and problematic eating behaviours, such as eating disorders (Cash, Thériault, & Annis, 2004; Cooley & Toray, 2001; Jacobi, Hayward, de Zwaan, Kraemer, & Agras, 2004; Stice, 2002). Most notably, eating disorders, particularly anorexia nervosa, arise as young women tackle their puberty-induced changes (Walsh & Cameron, 2005).

In a recent prospective longitudinal study, DeLeel, Hughes, Miller, Hipwell and Theodore (2009) found that the prevalence of eating disturbances occurred both at a young age (9 and 10-year olds) and across racial groups. Specifically, their results demonstrated that their Minority group, which included nine and ten-year old African American, Asian, and Hispanic/Latina girls, had a higher prevalence of eating disturbance than their age-matched White peers. However, the two groups did not differ in body image dissatisfaction. This finding
contradicts previous studies highlighting that in comparison with other racial groups, women of African American descent emphasize to a lesser extent the size, weight and shape of their bodies and are less likely to attempt to alter their body through behavioural attempts (Arriaza & Mann, 2001; Crago, Shisslak, & Estes, 1996; Story, French, Resnick, & Blum, 1995). Overall, findings from studies investigating ethnic and racial differences are not well understood (Arriaza & Mann, 2001) and some authors suggest that in adolescents and young adults, these differences are smaller than described in previous research (Gentile, Raghavan, Rajah, & Gates, 2007; Shaw, Ramirez, Trost, Randall, & Stice, 2004).

Given the extensive consequences of body image disturbances on adolescents and young women and the resulting health crisis in the Western culture (Piran, 2001a), it is critically important for researchers to reach a better understanding of the factors involved in the construction of body image attitudes and experiences. The present study will focus predominantly on the influence of parents in the development of body image for pre-pubescent and post-pubertal adolescent girls. However, prior to reviewing the literature on the parental influences for girl’s body image development, it is important to first briefly discuss the developmental theories and influences of the media and peers in order to establish the context within which parents exert their influence.

Numerous theories have been proposed to account for the development of body image and body image dissatisfaction. Among these, the developmental and sociocultural theories have received a significant amount of attention in the past decades. The first has focused primarily on the effects of the timing of pubertal and maturational changes within the female body on the emergence of current and later body image disturbances and eating disorder symptomatology. The latter encompass the external influences of widely-held cultural social ideals, expectations
and experiences on the development of these symptoms. When studying young girls, adolescents and adult women, both theories are important to consider as their influences may intersect to shape the development of body image.

Developmental Theories

The emergence of a girl’s body image representation is influenced by many factors, including developmental components. For young girls, the transition into puberty involves coming to terms with a changing physical appearance (e.g. weight gain, body growth, and acne), the development of secondary sexual characteristics (e.g. the development of breast, the onset of menarche, growth of pubic hair, body growth, and weight gain) and psychological changes (e.g. an increase in self-awareness, development of self-esteem, and the perception of pubertal weight; Ge, Elder, Regnerus, & Cox, 2001). Furthermore, puberty is often accompanied by significant weight gain, which may impede a developing girl’s perceived ability to attain the culturally established beauty ideal. The developmental theories suggest that the onset of these changes has consequences for body image and is a risk factor for girls’ body dissatisfaction. For example, girls who have reached menarche overestimated the size of their thighs (Fabian & Thompson, 1989), legs and buttocks (Silbereisen, Striegel-Moore, Timko, & Rodin, 1988) to a greater extent than their pre-menarche peers. These girls also reported greater levels of eating disturbances and a greater effect of teasing than pre-pubertal girls (Fabian & Thompson, 1989).

Similarly, the timing of puberty and maturation (early, on time, or late) relative to same age peers also has consequences for the development of body image (Blyth, Simmons, & Zakin, 1985; Caspi & Moffitt, 1991; Dubas, Graber, & Petersen, 1991; Duncan, Ritter, Dornbusch, Gross, & Carlsmith, 1985; Petersen & Crockett, 1985; Rierdan & Koff, 1985). As a result of the
physical changes associated with puberty, “self-consciousness about appearance is often more intense for adolescents who possess some remarkable physical characteristic, such as being unusually tall or unusually short, maturing early or late, having an exceptionally large weight, and so forth” (Rosen, 1996, p. 154). For instance, girls who reach puberty earlier than their peers tend to gain more weight and engage in a higher number of negative appearance evaluations using their peers’ pre-pubertal body as a basis for comparison. Thus, they report being less satisfied with their body, especially their weight and physical features, and are at an increased risk for attempting to alter their bodies throughout adolescence (Duncan et al., 1985; Petersen & Crockett, 1985; Statin & Magnusson, 1990; Striegel-Moore, McMahon, Biro, Schreiber, Crawford, & Voorhees, 2001). Girls who fall within the normative age for pubertal changes express positive body image and feelings of attractiveness (Tobin-Richards, Boxer, Peterson, Brooks-Gunn, & Petersen, 1983). However, for girls whose pubertal timing is late, the findings are inconsistent. Some studies suggest that late pubertal development is associated with negative body image (Simmons & Blyth, 1987) and low physical appearance self-concept (Wichstrom, 1998), whereas others indicate the opposite (Blyth et al., 1985; Richards & Larson, 1993).

Several theories have been proposed to explain the consequences of being early or late in pubertal timing (Brooks-Gunn, Petersen, & Eichorn, 1985). First, Heinberg (1996) suggest that early maturation appears to result in more body fat and weight, which consequently places the adolescent girl at higher risk of being teased by her peers and parents (Brooks-Gunn, 1984; Silbereisen & Kracke, 1997). Others (Alsaker, 1995) suggest that deviating from the norm, whether reaching puberty early or late, increases the stress associated with the emergence of adult-like bodies because of the perceived lack of shared experiences with same age peers. Girls, for instance, who reach menarche earlier than their peers acquire breasts and may have gained
additional weight in their hips, thighs and stomach region. While living in these new bodies, these girls may experience difficulties in finding physical similarities with their same age peers, who remain shorter and smaller (Posner, 2006). As a result of the girl’s lack of normative experiences, she is placed in a socially deviant category. Alternatively, Petersen and Taylor (1980) and Peskin and Livson (1972) posit that pubertal timing affects body image development because it signals the termination of a stage. The Stage Termination Hypothesis asserts that early pubertal timing prevents girls from completing prior developmental tasks and forces them into a new pubertal stage involving new social roles and milestones (e.g. romantic relationships, interaction with male peers, engaging in body hair removal) for which the skills required have yet to be learnt. In fact, these girls may be mistakenly viewed by others as possessing advanced social and cognitive adaptive skills based on their pubertal timing as opposed to their development experiences, which can exacerbate their body image difficulties (Caspi, 1995; Caspi & Moffitt, 1991). Finally, pubertal changes place girls at risk of deviating from Western cultural standards of female desirability (Lamb, Jackson, Cassidy, & Priest, 1993). Girls are at risk of feeling “too big and fat” (Ge et al., 2001) as their physical changes (e.g. weight) are devalued by society and its emphasis on thinness.

**Sociocultural Theory**

The sociocultural theory posits that perceived external pressures from diverse sources concerning the appropriate standards of femininity and the ‘ideal’ female body lead to eating disorders and body image disturbances (Thompson et al., 1999). These external pressures are important during adolescence as the conceptualization of the self develops as a cognitive and social construct (Harter, 2006). This process involves powerful socializing influences, which are best understood when multiple sources are accounted for, such as messages received from the
media, interactions with peers and the familial dynamics. As children transition from middle childhood to early adolescence, comparative assessments with others are routinely conducted in order to evaluate the self. For instance, adolescent girls may compare themselves to media images, peers, siblings, or parents in order to establish themselves in the domains of appearance, popularity, peer and parental acceptance, scholastic competence, athleticism, etc. A number of mechanisms, including the internalization of the culture-wide social ideals, expectations and experiences (Cusumano & Thompson, 1997; Stormer & Thompson, 1996) and gender-based social discourses (Piran & Cormier, 2005), can alleviate or exacerbate the consequences of these pressures and can leave adolescent girls vulnerable to damages to their confidence and self-worth. The adverse effects of the sociocultural influences on the development of body image and body image disturbances among Western women have been studied extensively with consistently strong empirical evidence (Stice, 2002). Thus, prior to reviewing the literature on the family influences on girl’s body image development, it is important to first briefly discuss the influences of the media and peers.

**Media influences**

Western women are exposed to an overwhelming amount of information from the proliferating, influential mass media, which portrays messages such as “Everyone can be thin”, “Only thin women’s bodies are beautiful and sexually desirable”, “If you’re thin you will be confident, successful, healthy and happy” and “You can’t and shouldn’t be happy with yourself unless your body looks exactly like the thin ideal” (National Eating Disorder Information Centre, 2008). From a young age, girls consume various forms of mass media, such as watching television shows, videos and reading children’s book (Comstock & Scharrer, 2007; Harris, 2004) for the purposes of entertainment as well as a means to explore arising concerns about their
personal identity as a young female and sexual being (Arnett, 1995; Comstock & Scharrer, 2007). Stemming from these exposures are maladaptive, yet normative, media-driven schemas regarding gender and attractiveness based on assumptions such as 1) women are “naturally” invested and immersed into the development of their “beauty assets”; 2) women must maintain a slender, attractive and youthful image in order to please men and demonstrate a sense of control over their bodies to other women; and 3) women are the object of a masculine gaze (Levine & Harrison, 2004; Smolak & Levine, 1994, 1996; Smolak & Murnen, 2004, 2007). These difficulties are compounded by an increase in Western girls and women’s weight in comparison with the unrealistic thin ideal portrayed in the mass media (Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Sypeck, Gray, & Ahrens, 2004). Further, the media sources, such as television, magazines and fashion runways, have increasingly displayed thinner women (Sypeck et al., 2004). Therefore, women of all ages are exposed on a regular basis to harmful media messages and ideals.

These perceived messages about thinness, especially the anti-fat attitudes, are internalized from an early age (Cramer & Steinwert, 1998). Therefore, they have powerful consequences for the development of young women’s body image disturbances. In particular, the thin ideal portrayed on television and in magazines has consistently been associated with body image difficulties as well as Western women’s drive for thinness and dieting attempts (Dittmar & Howard, 2004; Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001; Taylor, Sharpe, Shisslak, Bryson, Estes, Gray, et al., 1998; Tiggemann, 2005; Wertheim, Paxton, Schutz, & Muir, 1997). For instance, the extent of exposure to appearance-focused television programs is positively correlated with body image disturbances, thin ideal internalization, pursuit of thinness through disordered eating and dieting, endorsement of physically altering surgeries and eating disorder symptomatology (Borzekowski, Robinson, & Killen, 2000; Botta, 2000; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Harrison, 2003; Murnen,
Levine, Groesz, & Smith, 2007; Tiggemann, 2005; Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996). Similarly, positive correlations have also been found for the number of magazines viewed emphasizing thinness (Grabe et al., 2008; Harrison & Cantor, 1997; Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, 2004; Murnen et al., 2007; Thomsen, Weber, & Brown, 2002). Longitudinally, greater overall exposure to appearance-focused television programs and magazines predicted a decrease in appearance satisfaction and an increase in body image difficulties, a higher number of dieting attempts and a stronger negative appearance schema in children, adolescent girls and women (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Field, Camargo, Taylor, Berkey, Roberts, & Colditz, 2001; Field, Cheung, Wolf, Herzog, Gortmaker, & Colditz, 1999; Field, Javaras, Aneja, Kitos, Camargo, Taylor, & Laird, 2008; Harrison & Hefner, 2006; Sinton & Birch, 2006; Tiggemann, 2006). Most notably, the introduction of market-based mass media in countries such as Ukraine and Fiji, where they were previously non-existent, was shortly followed by an increase in the internalization of the thin ideal, body image dissatisfaction, dieting strategies (e.g. self-induced vomiting) and disordered eating (Becker, Burwell, Gilman, Herzog, & Hamburg, 2002; Bilunka & Utermohl, 2002).

Therefore, the evidence strongly suggests that media exposure, especially exposure to the portrayal of a societal ideal body weight and size that most adolescents are incapable of duplicating, is associated with negative body image and disordered eating. Yet, it remains unclear how the media exerts its pressures on girls and women, and whether they can be mediated by positive influences from parents, peers, or media literacy intervention programs.
**Peer influences**

A second major sociocultural influence among Western adolescents and women is peer relationships, also referred to as friendships. Peers and friends include others within the same age group or school grade; alternatively, they can also include others within the same maturational stage. During the adolescent years, girls invest a substantial amount of time into the development and maintenance of their relationship with peers and friends. In fact, the amount of time spent with friends increases from ten percent in young childhood to thirty percent in middle-childhood (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). A further increase is observed in adolescence where children spend up to one-third of their waking hours with their peers (Rubin et al., 2006). Therefore, the transition into adolescence represents a time of learning and adjusting to the social environment outside of the home. Peer relationships also evolve in nature from childhood into early adolescence whereby the sharing of personal thoughts and feelings begins. As such, intimacy, loyalty, conformity and closeness emerge as important features of friendships in order to win approval and esteem from others (Berndt & Perry, 1990; Berndt & Savin-Williams, 1993; Hill, 1980; Rawlins, 1992; Smolak & Levine, 1996). Among friends, loyalty can be seen through displays of support, such as when adolescent girls comment that they will “stick up for their best friend in a fight” and that they “won’t talk about their best friend behind their back”. Further, adolescent girls have a greater tendency than their male peers to describe their friendships as supportive (Berndt & Savin-Williams, 1993; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Jones & Dembo, 1989). Thus in adolescence, girls interact more frequently with each other and provide each other with companionship, instrumental support and self-esteem support (Larson & Richards, 1991). Adolescent girls with more supportive friendships tend to have higher self-esteem (Barrera, Chassin, & Rogosch, 1993; Berndt & Savin-Williams, 1993; Hoffman, Levy-Schiff, & Ushpiz,

Recent research has begun to emphasize peers as an influential force in the development of adolescent girls’ body image (e.g. Jones & Crawford, 2006). Among adolescent girls, conversations are inundated with comments about appearance and physical changes (e.g. development of breast, weight gains, dieting). Since young people ascribe a considerable amount of importance to their friends’ attitudes, thoughts, comments and actions (Coleman, 1980), peer feedback about one’s body can be instrumental in dictating young girls’ body attitudes, eating behaviours (Lieberman, Gauvin, Bukowski, & White, 2001; Wertheim et al., 1997) and decisions to alter their body through behavioural attempts (Clark & Tiggemann, 2006; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2003). In addition, female adolescents’ perception of their peers’ opinions of weight loss and dieting attempts have also been associated with subsequent weight loss attempts (Hutchinson & Rapee, 2007; Levine & Smolak, 1992; Levine, Smolak, & Hayden, 1994; Wertheim et al., 1997) and difficulties with body image (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001; Phares, Steinberg, & Thompson, 2004; Presnell, Bearman, & Stice, 2004). In fact, perceived peer pressure and standards for appearance have been shown to be more powerful than other influences, including those of parents, siblings, male peers and the media (Matsumoto, Kumano, & Sakano, 1999; Stice, 1998). Research suggests that peers are more relevant for social comparison and self-evaluation as they can obtain maximally accurate self-appraisals (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992).

In addition, adolescent girls may be subjected to peer-driven negative experiences, such as appearance-related teasing, peer group exclusions, verbal intimidations and physical violence
from both female and male peers. Estimates suggest that one quarter of adolescent girls report being victims of such peer-driven negative experiences at least a few times in the past year (Neumark-Sztainer, Falkner, Story, Perry, Hannan, & Mulert, 2002). In general, female adolescents categorized as non-normative according to their weight suffer from a higher proportion of interpersonal victimization (Pearce, Boergers, & Prinstein, 2002) and social marginalization (Strauss & Pollack, 2003). In fact, as an adolescent girl’s weight increases so does her risk of being teased about her physical appearance (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002). Such peer victimization can be injurious to the development of the self and female adolescents’ confidence in one’s body. Moreover, detrimental long-term consequences of teasing have been found for the development of body image, self-concept, social relationships (Davison & Birch, 2002; Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, Haines, & Wall, 2006), self-esteem (Egan & Perry, 1998; O’Moore & Kirkham, 2001) and perceived level of intelligence (Björkqvist, Ekman, & Lagerspetz, 1982).

Puberty also entails significant changes in young women’s social interactions and behaviours, including increased interest in the opposite sex and in romantic relationships. Romantic relationships constitute “one of the organizing principles of adolescent peer structure” (Brown, Feiring, & Furman, 1999, p. 5). The majority of adolescent girls value romance and express a desire in dating and romantic relationships (Halpern, King, Oslak, & Udry, 2005; Halpern, Udry, Campbell, & Suchindran, 1999). For example, a quarter of twelve-year olds, one third of thirteen-year olds and three quarters of eighteen-year olds report a special romantic relationship in the past year and a half (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003). Given the culturally driven sexual objectification of women and their bodies, it is no surprise that recent research has demonstrated a link between the emergence of romantic relationships and a women’s weight and
body image (Markey & Markey, 2012). Body image concerns and weight-loss attempts are exacerbated by adolescent boys’ preference for slimmer dating partners (Sobal, Nicolopoulos, & Lee, 1995). Halpern et al. (1999) have shown that adolescent girls with above-average levels of fat are less likely to enter dating or romantic relationships with a male peer. Further, they have shown that even among normal weight girls, a clear pattern of male preference is seen for below-average levels of fat (Halpern et al., 1999). Several studies have demonstrated that being involved in dating or romantic relationships with a physical component is associated with greater body dissatisfaction, weight concerns, more problematic eating attitudes and dieting (Cauffman & Steinberg, 1996; Smolak, Levin, & Gralen, 1993).

Hence, recent research strongly supports a link between the influence of male and female peers on the development of body image and body image dissatisfaction. However, a recent qualitative study by Mafrici (2009) highlighted some protective factors which can serve to promote and increase feelings of confidence and comfort in one’s body within the context of peer relationships. Such factors included an active resistance to peer’s appearance standard, a sense of removal or unawareness of appearance pressure in the peer environment, and the importance of maintaining a sense of individuality in one’s appearance and style of dress. Further developmental research addressing the protective factors that promote healthy eating and positive body image are needed in the domains of media, peer and family influences.

**Family influences**

A third major sociocultural influence among Western women is the familial setting, which can include the parental figures, siblings and/or extended family depending upon the family composition. Familial relationships are defined from the first year of life and are
important to the child’s social and emotional development (Berk, 2000). During early childhood, the goal is to establish a parent-infant attachment with an emphasis on the development of the parent’s responsiveness, warmth, protection and nurturance (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Walls, 1978; Bowlby, 1969). Some authors suggest that the communication of influential beauty ideal messages begins during this stage as parents make decisions regarding their child care practices, such as feeding (Birch, 1990; Klesges, Coates, Brown, Sturgeon-Tillish, Moldenhauer-Klesges, Holzer et al., 1983; Stein & Fairburn, 1989). Beginning in middle childhood, an additional facet to the parent-infant relationship is introduced, that of social support. In this context, social support can be defined as a parent’s display of care, love, esteem and belongingness towards the child (Cobb, 1976) through actions such as advice giving, collaborating on tasks, teaching valuable life lessons and assisting the child in understanding and managing their positive and negative emotional reactions (Barrera, Sandler, & Ramsey, 1981). An increase in social support from both mothers and fathers is observed from middle childhood to early adolescence, with perceived maternal social support rated more positively than paternal (Cauce, Reid, Landesman, & Gonzales, 1990). However, in comparison with fourth graders, seventh graders rated parental support less positively, which decreased further by the time they reached tenth grade (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Although this decrease during adolescence is well documented (Clark-Lempers, Lempers, & Ho, 1991; Lamborn & Steinberg; 1993; Slavin, 1991), a slight recovery in parental social support is observed in college aged-children (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Failure to establish an emotional bond with parents at an early age can result in a negative self-concept, which has been associated with body image dissatisfaction and eating difficulties (Perry, Silvera, Neilands, Rosenvinge, & Hanssen, 2008).
As mentioned above, the transition to adolescence is marked by an increase in time spent with peers, where children spend up to one-third of their waking hours with their peers (Rubin et al., 2006). This represents twice the amount of time that these same adolescents reported spending with their parents (Rubin et al., 2006). As such, it appears that the emphasis placed on parental relationships decreases significantly with increased age. Such a pattern is considered by some researchers as being normal, desirable and an important component to the growth of autonomy and healthy relationships outside of the home (Lamborn & Steinberg, 1993). Nonetheless, the maintenance of positive relationships with parents is encouraged (Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991) in order to receive advice and guidance from them (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Moreover, parents continue to communicate and transmit socially prescribed norms of gender and appearance to their daughters through sex-typed family discourses and behaviours (Haworth-Hoeppner, 2000; Blume & Blume, 2003). For example, adolescents often rely on the same-sex parent to obtain instrumental and self-esteem support (Blyth & Foster-Clark, 1987; East, 1991). In general, adolescent girls with more supportive parental relationships tend to become well-adjusted adults (Maccoby, 1984), have higher self-esteem (Barrera et al., 1993; Berndt & Savin-Williams, 1993; Hoffman et al., 1993; Moran & Eckenrode, 1991), report less symptoms of loneliness and depression (Licitra-Kleckler & Waas, 1993; Moran & Eckenrode, 1991; Parker & Asher, 1993; Slavin & Rainer, 1990) and demonstrate lower overall psychological distress (Dubois et al., 1992).

Although the parents’ presence declines as the child ages, they continue to play a key role in moulding the child’s behavioural, emotional, personal and cognitive selves. Therefore, an adolescent girls’ perception of her body in relation to the gender-typed norms and cultural thin ideal is influenced by the parent-child interactions. An examination of the family influences on
the development of young girls’ body image will focus predominantly on five researched topics: 1) family functioning; 2) the perceived importance of weight and shape; 3) family modeling; and 4) familial teasing and comments.

**Family functioning**

Research has strongly supported the claim that certain family characteristics are risk factors for the development of dysfunctional eating psychopathology (Thompson, Coovert, Richards, Johnson & Cattarin, 1995). Connors (1996), in a review of the influence of family interactions on the development of eating disorders, body dissatisfaction and dieting behaviours, suggested a relationship between family dysfunction and eating disorder symptomatology. First, Connors (1996) described a family social-emotional climate lower in overall family cohesion, characterized by lower levels of empathy, emotional support, commitment, expressiveness, affection and warmth (Bailey, 1991; Beck & Terry, 1985; Humphrey, 1986; Steiger, Liquornik, Chapman, & Hussain, 1991). In addition, associations between problematic family environments and young girls with disordered eating and body dissatisfaction included an overemphasis on obedience, conformity (Bruch, 1982) and a lack of support for autonomy through parental behaviours such as overprotection, over involvement in the adolescents’ life and enmeshment (Blair, Freeman, & Cull, 1995; Bowman, 2000; Evans & Wertheim, 2005; Goldberg, 2002; Meyer & Gillings, 2004; Suldo & Sandberg, 2000). Parents of children with eating disorders have a propensity for disregarding and negating their daughter’s attempts at self-expression (Humphrey, 1986). Family communication and expressiveness was another significant predictor whereby parent-child communications that are regarded as less open (Killian, 1994) and lower in quality (Botta & Dumla, 2002; Shisslak, McKeon, & Crago, 1990) are associated with eating-disordered behaviours. Specifically, Botta and Dumla (2002) suggest that father-daughter open
communication may promote the child’s autonomy and ability to control her eating resulting in lower levels of eating disordered symptomatology. Lastly, Connors (1996) identified that adolescent girls suffering from disordered eating rated higher expectations from their parents to achieve in different types of activities (e.g. in the scholastic domain; Stern, Dixon, Jones, Lake, Nemzer & Sansone, 1989); however, other studies have failed to demonstrate this pattern (e.g. Johnson & Flach, 1985).

Perhaps the most important family characteristic in predicting disordered eating is the level of parent-child conflict. Overt conflict with parental figures has been linked with negative body image and self-directed hostility and deprivation (Humphrey, 1986). The dyad’s ability to resolve conflict, especially the father-daughter dyad, has been identified as a protective factor to the development of body dissatisfaction (Botta & Dumlao, 2002; Frank & Jackson, 1996; McNamara & Loveland, 1990) because unresolved conflict is hypothesized to foster a sense of powerlessness in the adolescent girl, including over her weight. Likewise, conflict and distress within the mother-father marital relationship have been associated with daughters suffering from eating disorder symptomatology. For example, parental dynamics characterized by problems in intimacy and trust have difficulties establishing appropriate boundaries with their daughters (Clopton, Haas, & Kent, 2001; Rowa, Kerig, & Geller, 2001) and establishing age-appropriate autonomy (Vandereycken, 1995) resulting in triangulation (Eme & Danielak, 1995; McDermott, Batik, Roberts, & Gibbon, 2002). Hence, the marital relationship can affect the quality of the parent-child dyad (Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling, 1991), which can in turn result in the child displaying emotional and behavioral difficulties (Crockenberg & Covey, 1991; Cummings & Davies, 1994).
As a result, the extent to which the family unit is deemed functional or dysfunctional can have enduring impacts on the development of an adolescent girl’s body image. Encompassed within the relationships among adolescents girls and their families are important messages about the perceived importance of weight and body shape. Next, we turn to a discussion of the messages which are transmitted from the parents to daughters.

**Perceived importance of weight and body shape**

Numerous socializing agents are involved in the transmission of the cultural values regarding weight, body shape and appearance to emerging girls. Of these, parents appear to be a prevalent agent in conveying to their daughters important values and beliefs of the family unit, such as the perceived social pressures and value in obtaining a thin body shape (Young, Clopton, & Bleckley, 2004). More specifically, a home environment which stresses the importance of physical attractiveness, appearance and thinness and which encourages the pursuit of this socially prescribed ideal body through dieting and exercise may promote in their daughter a critical, and consequently negative, view of the body (Davis, Shuster, Blackmore, & Fox, 2004; Laliberté, Boland, & Leichner, 1999). The detrimental effects on body image satisfaction of these familial standards and values are exacerbated when family acceptance and/or approval is based on the attainment and maintenance of the thin ideal (Laliberté et al., 1999). Through this socialization process, young girls are at a heightened risk of adopting the standard that their identity and worth as women are based primarily on their appearance (Hill & Franklin, 1998; Smolak & Levine, 1996). The internalisation of the weight and body shape familial ideals can have direct effects of the development of body image dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptomatology (Leung, Schwartzman & Steiger, 1996).
Mothers, in particular, have been shown to play an important role in the transmission of weight-related attitudes and opinions to their daughters. Rieves and Cash (1996) suggested that daughters’ appraisal of her mother’s body satisfaction, appearance investment and preoccupation with being overweight predicted the daughter’s own body-image attitudes and experiences. Furthermore, Field, Austin, Striegel-Moore, Taylor, Camargo, Laird and Colditz (2005) have shown that girls who perceive their body weight and shape as an important physical attribute to their mother, regardless of the accuracy of their perception, express a stronger desire to be thin than girls who accurately perceive body weight as being unimportant to their mother. Moreover, mothers who displayed heightened levels of body shame have been associated with daughters with lower body esteem (McKinley, 1999). Although maternal influences have been shown to be more influential than those of fathers (Hill & Pallin, 1995), it cannot be assumed that the gender-stereotyped nature of dieting is transmitted solely through maternal discourse and behaviours. In fact, research into the parental emphasis on weight and body shape rarely includes an examination of the paternal attitudes and behaviours (Hill & Franklin, 1998). However, some studies indeed suggest that fathers also play an important role. For example, Thelen and Cormier (1995) suggested that both parents’ encouragement of weight control were associated with their daughters’ actual weight, desire to be thin and disordered eating behaviours; however, when the daughters’ actual body weight was controlled statistically, only the father’s encouragements towards weight loss were related to disordered eating behaviours. In addition, Dixon, Gill and Adair (2003) reported that father’s attitudes and perception of female physical and thinness was associated with their daughters’ attempts to lose weight.

Parental perceived importance of weight and body shape can also be discerned through their mediation of media influences. Nathanson (2001) suggests that parents can either facilitate
or inhibit the harmful effects of media processing, such as television, on adolescent girls’ body-relate attitudes and behaviours. Such mediation is exerted through parental comments, whether critical or supportive, of the appearance and eating behaviours of television-based characters. For instance, an increase in parental attention to character appearance and attitudes is linked to an increase in attention and comparison between a young girls’ own body and those of the television characters. As a result of this heightened attention and these social comparison to characters portraying aspects of the thin ideal, these girls displayed lower body satisfaction (Nathanson & Botta, 2003). Conversely, parents who subscribe to a critical view of the Western cultural standards of female desirability portrayed in the media by discussing with their daughters the unrealistic expectations placed upon them may allow their daughters to establish their own standards of beauty. However, as Nathanson and Botta (2003) suggest, parents’ attempt to critique, instead of praise, the thin ideal may unintentionally draw attention to the media beauty-standards, resulting in a focus on the characters’ thinness and a worsening in body image.

Hence, a daughter’s body image dissatisfaction and internalization of the thin ideal and standards of beauty are affected by the parents’ view of such standards and their mediation of media influences. In the following section, we consider how parental modelling of these weight-related attitudes and opinions shape adolescent girls’ body image satisfaction and eating disorders symptomatology.

**Family modelling**

One means of transmitting the perceived importance of weight and body shape to children is through the modelling of functional or dysfunctional eating attitudes and behaviours
by influential family members, such as mothers, fathers and siblings. Research findings show that from a young age, children’s eating habits, levels of physical activities and body image are shaped through parental socialization to food and food-related control practices (Golan & Crow, 2004). The study of familial modelling effects has focused predominantly on the role of family member’s dieting behaviours, specifically the influence of the mother on the daughter’s restrictive eating. Adolescent girls who restrict their food intake or attempt to abstain from eating are associated with mothers who themselves demonstrate greater eating disturbances, a history of dieting and who express a desire for their daughters to lose weight (Hill & Franklin, 1998; Pike & Rodin, 1991; Vincent & McCabe, 2000). Further, a positive correlation has been shown between daughters’ desire to be thin and maternal dieting (Strong & Huon, 1998; Wertheim, Martin, Prior, Sanson, & Smart, 2002) and amongst mothers and daughters’ extreme weight loss attempts (Benedikt, Wertheim, & Love, 1998). Further research has demonstrated that adolescent girls’ dieting behaviours are not directly associated with actual reports of mothers’ dieting (Dixon, Adair, & O’Connor, 1996; Keery, Eisenberg, Boutelle, Neumark-Sztainer & Story, 2006), but, in fact, are linked to the daughters’ perceived levels of weight concerns and use of weight control behaviours among their mothers (Keery et al., 2006). Moreover, authors who have obtained a positive relationship amongst mothers’ and daughters’ weight-related concerns and behaviours have revealed insignificant correlations after controlling for the daughters’ body mass index (Fulkerson, McGuire, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, French, & Perry, 2002). These findings suggest that indirect factors, such as observing a parent diet, may be less harmful than other direct factors, such as parental teasing and encouragements to diet, which are discussed in the following section. In terms of the influence of fathers, research has either revealed no association (Wertheim, Mee, & Paxton, 1999) or little association between father’s satisfaction
with their own weight and their child’s weight; however, fathers who engaged in dieting
deviations with their own weight and their child’s weight; however, fathers who engaged in dieting
behaviours were more likely to help their child in their dieting attempts (Striegel-Moore &
Kearney-Cooke, 1994). To date, only one study revealed an association between fathers’ dieting
behaviours and daughters’ tendency to skip meals and to engage in weight loss attempts (Dixon
et al., 1996).

As discussed above, society places an emphasis on being thin and abiding to the
Westernized thin ideal. In certain situations, the weight of one or both parents may deviate from
the socially prescribed standards placing the children at risk of being exposed to the negative
effects of this nonconformity. The modelling of deviant weight has in fact been associated with
increased desire to lose weight, motivation of adolescent girls to engage in dieting (Crisp,
Harding, & McGuinness, 1974) and with higher rates of bulimic anorexia (Garfinkel, Moldofsky,
Additionally, the role of observational learning has been described in terms of the foods
purchased and served by the parents, which transmits to the child the parents’ attitudes towards
food (Wardle, 1995).

Fortunately, there are also protective factors emerging from parental and familial
modelling of eating behaviours. For example, parents who emphasize having meals as a family
on a regular basis and who offer a positive and structured atmosphere during family meals are
associated with lower levels of disordered eating (Fulkerson, Story, Mellin, Leffert, Neumark-
Sztainer & French, 2006; Neumark-Sztainer, Wall, Story, & Fulkerson, 2004). This finding
remained significant even after controlling for parental teasing and comments, such as promoting
dieting among their offspring (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2004). Taken as a whole, research
suggests that maternal and paternal modeling plays a role in body image dissatisfaction and
disordered eating practices. However, attempts to replicate the findings discussed above have often failed. Rodgers and Chabrol (2009) highlight methodological flaws in these studies including small same size and the young age of participants. For example, the average age of the participants in Wertheim et al. (2002) was 12.81. Rodgers and Chabrol (2009) suggest that the modelling effects of parents may be more evident with older adolescent females and young adults as they have been exposed to greater extent to their parents’ eating attitudes and behaviours.

**Family teasing and comments**

The transmission of familial culture, values and standards regarding appearance and eating can also be accomplished directly through evaluative appearance-related comments, criticisms and teasing regarding eating, food, weight and shape (Fairburn, Welch, Doll, Davies, & O’Connor, 1997). As mentioned above, some studies suggest that these direct influences may constitute a greater risk factor for the development of body image dissatisfaction and eating disturbances than other indirect factors, such as observing the modelling behaviours of family members (Dixon et al., 1996; Fulkerson et al., 2002; Keel, Heatherton, Harnden, & Horniq, 1997; Keery et al., 2006; Wertheim et al., 1999). Learning theorists (Bandura & McDonald, 1964) suggest that influential family members, such as parents, can exert pressure by placing contingencies upon their daughters’ eating and appearance-related behaviours by means of establishing rewards for weight loss and/or punishments for weight gain in the form of praise and criticism, respectively (Levine et al., 1994). Regrettably, appearance related teasing occurs frequently in the family setting. For instance, a quarter of young adolescent females reported being teased by at least one parent and a third reported teasing by at least one of their siblings (Keery, Boutelle, van der Berg, & Thompson, 2005). The highest source of teasing appears to
come from siblings, especially older brother, followed by fathers and then mothers (Keery et al., 2005). Some authors suggest that the prevalence of such teasing and comments may be lower than actually reported by young girls; however, they emphasize the girl’s perception of the occurrence of teasing or negative communication as opposed to whether such negative communication actually occurs (Wertheim et al., 1999).

Although brothers and fathers are amongst the highest contributor of appearance related teasing, negative feedback from mothers in the form of comments, encouragements, teasing and criticisms about the daughter’s figure, appearance, need for diet and eating patterns remain the most influential force in determining adolescent girls’ disordered eating behaviours (Benedikt et al., 1998; Keel et al., 1997; MacBrayer, Smith, McCarthy, Demos, & Simmons, 2001; Smolak, Levine, & Schermer, 1999; Vincent & McCabe, 2000; Wertheim et al., 2002). Nonetheless, brothers and fathers are important socializing agents to young female adolescents during this critical and vulnerable developmental period as they represent a model for heterosocial interactions. As such, it is not surprising that teasing from these male models has also been associated with significant negative outcomes. In general, cross-sectional research has demonstrated that comments by family members about a daughter’s weight can lead to an increase in her body dissatisfaction (Ata, Laden, & Lally, 2007; Fulkerson et al., 2002; Hanna & Bond, 2006; Keel et al., 1997; Keery et al., 2006; Schwartz, Phares, Tantleff-Dunn, & Thompson, 1999), dieting (Dixon et al., 1996; Ricciardelli, McCabe, & Banfield, 2000; Wertheim et al., 1999; Wertheim et al., 2002), attempts at restricting calorie intake and weight loss (Benedikt et al., 1998; Keel et al., 1997), disordered eating behaviours (Ata et al., 2007; Dixon et al., 1996; Hanna & Bond, 2006; Young et al., 2004) and eating disorders (Keery et al., 2005). Furthermore, the majority of adolescent females who have engaged in weight loss
attempts reported being told by their parents to do so (Byely, Archibald, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Sadly, such weight-related teasing and encouragements have been associated with weight gains for the recipients of these comments, which then increases for these young girls the discrepancy between their own body weight and the socially prescribed ideal weight (Hanna & Bond, 2006; Keery et al., 2006; Neumark-Sztainer, Wall, Haines, Story, Sherwood, & van den Berg, 2007). Unfortunately, this has been shown to be especially true with overweight adolescent girls where parental encouragement exacerbated their unhealthy weight control behaviours and subsequent weight gain (Neumark-Sztainer, Wall, Story & van den Berg, 2008).

Thus, it appears that both maternal and paternal influences may be relevant to the development of body image concerns and related issues. Overall, there are complex forces involved in young girls’ perception of the appropriateness of their body with family system dynamics, such as functioning, the perceived importance of weight and body shape, modelling, teasing and comments regarding weight and body image, playing a vital role. Our consideration of the family influences concludes with an examination of studies exploring qualitatively how parents are important transmitters of appearance and weight-related values and ideals.

**Evidence from qualitative research**

The research discussed thus far has focused predominantly on quantitative methodologies. Such research has provided indispensable evidence for the role of parents in determining how girls feel within their body. Nonetheless, expending the knowledge obtained through quantitative research by using qualitative studies is crucially important in order to broaden our conception of the parental influences and to understand how language, representations and social organization within the family affects these young girls’ body image.
experiences. Specifically, these few qualitative projects have provided researchers with the opportunity to listen directly to the reflections and tales of young girls as they experience their body within the context of their home. As the voices of these young girls emerge from their narratives, it unveils their thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards their bodies and the important familial and parental influences exerted on them. The remainder of the review will focus on the qualitative studies conducted thus far on the family’s influence on body image and will provide the reader with an important transition to the current study, which is also qualitative in nature.

*Parental pressures to weight watch*

While quantitative studies were demonstrating the effects of sociocultural influences on the body image of adolescent girls, Wertheim, Paxton, Schutz and Muir (1997) approached the investigation of these factors using an innovative methodology: semi-structured interviews. They interviewed thirty fifteen-year old middle-low-socioeconomic Australian born Caucasian girls with respect to their views and reasons for dieting and weight-winning, with an emphasis on noting the perceived sociocultural influence of peers, family members and the media over their weight-related behaviours.

With respect to the influences of parents, half of the girls interviewed reported that their mother engaged in dieting behaviours and was involved in their own dieting attempts. While two mothers pushed their daughters to diet, others supported their daughters in their attempts or provided approval of their daughters’ dieting strategies. A very small number of mothers were opposed to allowing their daughters to engage in weight watching and dieting. Moreover, Wertheim et al. (1997) uncovered a pattern of “joint dieting” where mothers, daughters and female siblings combined efforts in order to maximize their dieting attempts. In addition, the
father’s involvement in dieting and weight discussions was for most girls minimal, highlighting that most fathers were uninterested in or were against their daughters interest in dieting and weight watching practices. Few fathers were described to diet themselves or to draw attention to their daughters’ need to diet.

While Wertheim et al.’s (1997) study sheds important light on the lived experiences of young girls in regards to their dieting and weight watching behaviours, the family influences discussed are narrow in focus and fail to provide the reader with qualitatively different information from the quantitative studies. The small homogeneous sample and the limited focus of the interview questions prevented the exploration of complex parental processes such as those discussed in the following qualitative study by Dr. Mimi Nichter, anthropology professor at the University of Arizona.

What girls and their parents say about dieting

A pioneering longitudinal qualitative study in the field of body image was initiated by Dr. Nichter. With the assistance of a team of researchers (Dr. Mark Nichter, Dr. Cheryl Ritenbaugh and Dr. Nancy Vuckovic), she ventured into the world of female teenagers and their experiences with body image, dieting, smoking and advertising in a large scale study entitled the Teen Lifestyle Project. The project involved two hundred and forty female eight- and ninth-graders. Although the majority of participants were Anglo American (70%), special consideration was given to a small sample of girls from Latino, Asian American, Native-American and African-American backgrounds. Over three years, Dr. Nichter annually conducted a fifteen minute in-depth interview; two twenty minute telephone interviews; an attitudes and behaviours questionnaire regarding body image, dieting and smoking; a six days food record; and measured
the height and weight of each young girl. The individual in-depth and telephone interviews focused on the relation of body image, dieting and smoking to each individual girl as well as to her teen behaviour as a whole. The data collected was continually aggregated and the girls’ narratives were examined for themes. In addition, Dr. Nichter and Dr. Vuckovic conducted focus groups composed of five to six female friends to discuss topics which arose from the individual interviews, such as issues surrounding body weight and its effect on adolescent females. The Teen Lifestyle Project provided researchers, parents, teachers, and counsellors working with teenagers with a substantial amount of information, beyond what had been obtained through quantitative studies, into the actual experiences of female teenagers within their own body and the effect of social influences on the development of the self.

Dr. Nichter shared her salient results and themes extracted from the data collection in a book entitled “Fat Talk: What girls and their parents say about dieting” (Nichter, 2000). Nichter (2000) coined the term “Fat Talk” to label the propensity of females of all ages to disparage their own bodies in the presence of other females by continuously stating that they are “so fat” (Nichter, 2000, p. 46) despite, in most cases, objective evidence contradicting the statement. Such discourse among women was used for the purpose of impression management (Schlenker & Leary, 1985) or with the aim of “fitting in” with members of important social groups, such as peers and parents (Nichter & Vuckovic, 1994). The negative pattern of talk about the self uncovered by Nichter (2000) represented a normative and socially expected expression of discontent with one’s body during social discourses. According to Nichter (2000), “Fat Talk” is initiated with a statement such as “I’m so fat”, to which others can respond empathically by saying “No you’re not” or encouragingly by offering solutions (e.g. dieting options) to the expressed predicament. While she recognizes that young girls spend less time with parents and
more time with peers and the media, she describes how the familial setting remains an important influence in the development and maintenance of “Fat Talk” among the middle school and high school girls.

Among the factors involved, the interviews highlighted the important role of modeling among family members at home. As with the quantitative studies discussed earlier, the majority of the themes discussed by Nichter (2000) involve the mothers, which Phillips (2003) criticized in her review of the book. Nichter (2000) describes how the transmission of “Fat Talk” from one generation to the next is evident from how daughters perceive the mothers’ degrees of worrying and attention to their own body and appearance. Nichter (2000) highlighted how physical appearance of family members can serve as models whereupon the daughter will formulate the beauty standards to which she wishes to abide. For instance, when queried whether they think they will resemble a family member once they have reached young adulthood, half of the young girls responded affirmatively. Nichter (2000) emphasized that engaging in social comparison with family members allowed these young girls to determine whether they were “at risk” for or have inherited the “curse” of becoming fat depending upon the weight of the target of the social comparison (Nichter, 2000, p.93-94). One girl explained that she “actively studied [her] mother, [her] older sister, and other women in [her] family” in order to determine whether she was “destined to diet for life” (Nichter, 2000, p.123). Another participant commented: “When I reached the seventh grade, I cared how I looked. Then I knew from that day on, until the day I die, I’m going to worry about what I eat. Just like my mom, I know I’m always destined to diet in one way or another” (Nichter, 2000, p. 146). Having witnessed the consequences of being overweight or struggling with one’s weight, the social comparison process can result in the engagement in weight altering preventative practices (e.g. dieting, physical activity) with the aim
of avoiding future weight difficulties. Such preventative measures were considered necessary by the teenage girls even when the modelling figures who were partaking in weight altering or maintaining behaviours were perceived by these girls to possess a body figure that is “just right”.

Furthermore, Nichter (2000) discovered that a girl’s desire to attain their mother’s figure was associated with the quality of the relationship to their mother, where a close relationship resulted in a desire to inherit the maternal physical and emotional characteristics and a conflictual relationship lead to negative feelings towards the mother and an adamant refusal to defining themselves as physically similar to their mother. On one hand, the modelling of appearance and weight-related standards by mothers could be mediated by the quality of the relationship where conflict within the mother-daughter dyad resulted in an ability to dismiss the negative messages received from the parental unit. On the other, a positive relationship can result in bonding with mothers as they express similar social values associated with dieting and beauty (Nichter, 2000; Nichter & Vuckovic, 1994). An especially difficult situation for daughters occurs in familial settings where the maternal figure is very attractive or thinner than the daughter herself. In such instances, the maternal comments in regards to the daughters’ weight were often interpreted as threatening and resulted in jealousy, anger, hatred and resentment towards the mother’s figure, appearance and body size. In addition, the introduction of such mother-daughter resentment and possible competitiveness was demonstrated by constant bodily inspection of daughters by maternal figures followed by remarks regarding changes in appearance and weight. For instance, Nichter (2000) describes how a participant suffered daily scrutinizing by her mother with statements such as, “Your stomach’s sticking out a little more than it usually does” (p. 139).
In addition to being the target of social comparisons, family members can also act as allies in the dieting process by divulging the “secrets” of staying beautiful and showing to the daughters how to exercise, maintain and lose weight, and enhance their physical attractiveness. As mentioned in the discussions above, daughters who diet are more likely to have a mother who also engages in dieting behaviours and extreme weight loss attempts (Benedikt et al., 1998; Strong & Huon, 1998; Wertheim et al., 2002). In support of these quantitative studies and of Wertheim et al.’s (1997) “joint dieting” phenomenon, Nichter (2000) described a trend where family members dieted together. For example, in mother-daughter dieting pairs, collaborative dieting was seen as an expression of love, affection and support, which in turn “makes [dieting] more fun”. In other instances, where weight loss was not perceived as necessary, collaborative mother-daughter dieting was seen as an attempt to “gain control over their life” as a preventative measure to future gain weight, which was described to be an empowering process. Some girls reported engaging in supportive family dieting practices whereby multiple women within the family participated in a diet in order to help other female family members to lose weight. In most cases described by Nichter (2000), it was interesting to note that fathers and male siblings, regardless of weight status, were provided with the option to partake in the family dieting venture and often refused. Finally, Nichter (2000) highlighted that dieting within the family settings occurred amongst sister dyads and mother-daughter pairs, but also multi-generationally with daughter-grandmother dieting partners.

One situation in which familial modelling historically occurred were during family meals. Traditionally, the gathering of the family around a meal involved an important discussion of the day’s events, including successes and difficulties in domains such as school and peer relationships. However, Nichter (2000) highlighted a decrease in the overall number of family
means, which further decreased with age, due to the hectic schedules of children and parents. For instance, only forty-five percent of girls surveyed ate dinner with their family four times or more a week. Without eating family meals, daughters lack the necessary information to distinguish what constitutes a healthy meal. In her study, such a decrease in family meals resulted in young girls deciding what they will eat for dinner, which excluded a salad or vegetables in an overwhelming ninety-five percent of the girls. Nichter (2000) pinpointed that lacking proper meal modelling left the young girls feeling disempowered and vulnerable as food consumers.

Although Nichter (2000) described the modelling effects of “Fat Talk” and collaborative dieting within the mother-daughter dyad, the most striking finding that emerged from her data was the profound effect that comments exerted on young girl. Among the most affected were the heavier girls who were more likely to receive parental messages proposing they engage in weight loss strategies than girl with average or low weight, to diet or watch their weight and to fail at their dieting attempts (Nichter, 2000). From her interviews, Nichter (2000) hypothesized that when parental figures witnessed their daughter’s struggling with their weight or an aspect of their appearance, they experienced anxiety which lead them to alter their daughter’s socialization through verbal comments and encouragements in an attempt to help them achieve a lower weight and therefore conform to the culturally dictated standard of beauty. However, Nichter (2000) pointed out that mothers are not always the initiator of weight loss giving advice, comments and feedback. In fact, daughters often instigated the discussion by complaining using statements such as “I’m so fat”. Once the subject of dieting was breached, the communication style and delivery of messages from mothers to daughters affected how young girls embodied and accepted the messages received. From the narratives, gentle encouragements and reminders during their dieting attempt facilitated their weight loss; however, such reinforcement also encouraged
conforming to the Westernized stereotypical standards of beauty as opposed to teaching self-acceptance and positive living within one’s body.

Albeit limited, Nichter (2000) also described the impact of fathers on young girls’ “Fat Talk”. She noted that fathers were less concerned with their own body and appearance than mothers. She suggested that young girls may hold different, yet more lenient, standards for ideal body weight for men than for women such as rating their father’s body more positively than their mothers, despite in some cases the paternal figure presenting with a heavier body mass. Nonetheless, the young girls in Nichter’s study (2000) received important messages from their fathers in regards to weight loss and body image, which differed in delivery format from their maternal counterpart. For instance, the girls’ narratives illustrated the indirect transmission of important body image related messages to the maintenance and stability of social relationships, such as a healthy mother-father relationship. One participant in particular recalled that her father left her mother as a result of her weight gain and vowed that she would not repeat her mother’s mistake in her own romantic relationships. During the pubertal period of physical development, fathers display their awareness of their daughter’s changing body by offering praising looks, joking clever remarks, criticisms and sarcastic comments, such as “When did you start getting boobs?” (Nichter, 2000, p. 140). Such remarks concerning the daughters’ weight in conjunction with the transformation from a girl to a young woman emphasized the Western patriarchy where social values and power relations are dominated by male discourse and behaviour.

Finally, Nichter (2000) highlighted important cultural differences in the prevalence of “Fat Talk”. Specifically, her book asserted that this type of talk occurred more frequently with Caucasian and Latina girls than with their African American counterparts. She described that the latter group emphasized a strength-based approach to body image and appearance, accentuating
their greatest physical attributes instead of attempting to alter their physique in an attempt to conform to the socially prescribed ideals. Nichter (2000) revealed that mothers of African American girls transmitted cultural values which accentuated a women’s ability to confront and reject oppressive negative evaluations of gender and race. In doing so, African American mothers allowed their daughters to display a sense of positive self-affirmation and self-valuing of their body. Moreover, African American girls identified their mothers and grandmothers, and not media figures, as the primary role models influencing their understanding of how to instil self-respect and how to deal with racism and prejudice in order to sustain a positive self-image. Despite Nichter’s (2000) findings, Caldwell, Brownell and Wilfley (1997) reported that African American women from higher income families expressed similar dissatisfaction with their bodies as white women, suggesting that for this population, socioeconomic status, and perhaps not race, mediated the negative effects of sociocultural influences on body image.

Overall, the Teen Lifestyle Project provided researchers with amazing insight into the experiences of adolescent girls in their own bodies in relation to parental figures and the family. However, Nichter’s (2000) project included several limitations. First, Dr. Nichter failed to consider the longitudinal changes in “Fat Talk” and corresponding influences on body image development. Moreover, while she attempted to obtain a diverse sample, the final group was comprised mostly of Caucasian girls from Tuscon, Arizona from grades eight to ten. As such, diversity in ethnicity, geographical location (e.g. urban vs. rural regions), socioeconomic status, family composition (e.g. homosexual parents), and developmental transition period were lacking. Therefore, there were no opportunities to investigate the intersection of the aforementioned variables with the development over time of body image and “Fat Talk”.
Family mediation of cultural ideas about thinness

The same year as Nichter’s (2000) book, Susan Haworth-Hoeppner published an interview-based study examining the intersection of culture and family influences in the etiology of eating disorders. Thirty-two White, American, middle-class women aged between twenty-one and forty-four, were interviewed once using a semi-structure interview composed of open-ended questions. Her sample was composed of twenty-one women suffering from anorexia or bulimia and eleven without a history of eating disorder psychopathology. These women were interviewed on the familial context of eating disorders, including questions on body satisfaction, the origin of body identity, the family relationships, the cultural influences on weight and identity, their trauma history and the perceived differences among women with and without eating disorders. In addition, women suffering from an eating disorder were asked specifically about the development of their difficulties.

Using a grounded theory approach, Haworth-Hoeppner (2000) identified four conceptual categories in the etiology of eating disorders. The first category identified referred to a critical family environment, where a parental figure expressed negative weight or appearance-related comments towards their daughter, such as asking, “Have you gained a little weight?” or telling their daughter, “That doesn’t look good on you...; go upstairs and change your outfit” (Haworth-Hoeppner, 2000, p. 216). Then, she described a pattern of coercive parental control whereby a parental figure manifested their controlling behaviours through actions such as yelling, physical aggression, constant surveillance of their daughter’s behaviour and the use of extreme rules. For instance, Haworth-Hoeppner (2000) describes a controlling family meal situation where the daughter was kept at the table for hours until she ate all of her plate’s content. A third conceptual category involved an unloving parent-child relationship resulting in feeling less accepted,
acknowledged and loved by the parental figures. For instance, women with parents characterized as unloving would recall parental behaviours such as paying less attention to them as children and comments such as “She’s crying, just ignore her, she’s fine” (Haworth-Hoeppner, 2000, p. 216). Finally, the development of eating disorders was associated with families where the central theme of conversations and discussion focused on three weight-related topics. The first of these general topics involved conversations permeated with dieting concerns, whether in relation to the parents or daughters. For example, one participant recounted her parents’ constant dieting attempts with the aid of multiple weight loss programs (e.g. Pritikin diet, Weight Watchers). Second, Haworth-Hoeppner (2000) identified a pattern of family conversations involving criticisms of the daughter’s weight or appearance, such as jokes (e.g. “My father used to make jokes about my body. He would say I had thighs, legs of a piano”, p. 217), weight or appearance-related suggestions and critical remarks (e.g. “My mother would always [say], ‘You don’t have very good legs, look at your legs. I have better legs than you’”). Lastly, she discussed an overall parental attitude prejudicing heavier weight by transmitting ideologies such as “It [is] bad to be fat” (Haworth-Hoeppner, 2000, p. 217).

Haworth-Hoeppner (2000) therefore suggested that parents are mediators to the Westernized culture and standards of beauty by determining how they will interact with their daughters surrounding weight and appearance-related issues. As such, family members can serve to facilitate or inhibit the construction of positive body image. While her study provides qualitative evidence of family functioning characteristics described in the quantitative studies, the sample was homogenous thus impeding on the ability to make inferences to populations differing in age and ethnicity. In addition, the retrospective nature of the interviews conducted with these women ranging from twenty one to forty four years of age required them to recall
their experiences growing up with their families. As such, the interviews relied heavily on the accuracy of the women’s recall, which can be affected by memory biases and the way in which they now filter their memories based on their current beliefs and experiences.

*Interpretation of parental messages concerning the body*

Thus far, the sociocultural influences of agents such as peers, family members and the media have been established as contributors the development of body image. McCabe, Ricciardelli & Ridge (2006), prominent researchers in this field, aimed to understand how the parental dialogues used and messages relayed in regards to body image and appearance are interpreted by young girls. They interviewed forty adolescent girls from grades seven through nine with a specific focus on their body image, body altering methods, the sources of body image messages (e.g. parents, peers and media) as well as their interpretation of the external messages received.

Results revealed a surprising predominance of positive messages from mothers in regards to the daughter’s overall appearance. Most interestingly, these constructive comments regarding clothing, appearance and body altering strategies (e.g. exercise, dieting) resulted in an enhanced experience within the body. Despite assessing and commenting on their daughters’ bodies, these mothers are viewed as honest and encouraging. For instance, Jane remarked that “Because I know mum will be honest, when she says something positive it makes you feel heaps better than a friend telling you something” (McCabe et al., 2006, p. 413). Their study revealed that less than one third of girls were targeted with negative messages from their mothers pertaining to their appearance, weight, diet and clothing. When such messages were received, they were mostly interpreted as supportive as opposed to critical.
Despite an overall lower frequency of appearance-related messages from fathers, a similar trend to mothers was found whereby three quarters of girls reported receiving largely positive comments. The remaining third described receiving negative messages about their bodies and appearance from their fathers often resulting in difficulties processing and interpreting the meaning of such messages. In fact, comments from fathers were either construed to be hurtful or were considered a joke, downplayed or weighed against positive comments. For instance, Michelle describes that her father’s comments as “sometimes… negative, but then other times it is all ‘you look really nice’”.

McCabe et al.’s (2006) study revealed important differences in the way girls process positive and negative weight and appearance-related messages from their mothers and fathers. Most importantly, these authors demonstrated that a large proportion of young teenagers are exposed to a barrage of positive and negative messages concerning their bodies. Further, they highlighted the variability in each girl’s level of resiliency in interpreting the negative messages received. Some adolescents appeared to be able to positively interpret and process potentially negative messages, whereas others may take them seriously and integrate them in their experience of their body. Hence, these authors suggested that depending on the internal dialogue which ensued following a positive or negative comment, a young girl’s self-worth and body image may be disturbed. Although this study offered several important insights into the process of integrating sociocultural messages into the development of the self, it suffered from several limitations. Namely, the homogeneity of this study’s sample hinders it generalizability to other ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, it would be interesting to note how such internal dialogues surrounding parental influences change from pre-puberty to post-puberty where the experience of the self is affected by the developmentally-laden bodily and psychological changes.
The experience of positive body image

The final area of relevant qualitative research has recently emerged from attempts to understand the factors involved in protecting young girls from the sociocultural pressures to conform to the socially prescribed ideals of beauty. Among such studies, Frisén and Holmqvist (2010) sought to understand the ways in which girls with positive body image perceive the effects of sociocultural pressures on their experiences of the body. The study, which was part of an ongoing longitudinal Swedish body image study, sampled a total of fifteen girls with a mean age of 13.93 years who rated themselves at the 97th percentile or above on body-esteem relative to the larger longitudinal sample. Each subject participated in a semi-structured interview focusing on their satisfaction with their appearance, their views on exercise and the influence of their family and friends on their body image.

With regards to the influence from family members on conversations about appearance, Frisén and Holmqvist (2010) identified three distinct themes. Among young girls with positive body image, such conversations occurred frequently with both mothers and fathers. However, the central focus of these talks was on “the body itself as peripheral” (Frisén & Holmqvist, 2010, p. 208), which included an emphasis on the interchangeable and outward aspects of the self, such as the style of clothes they were wearing or the manner in which their hair was styled, as opposed to directing their discussion to aspects of the body itself. Moreover, such external features were addressed with positive comments. While these girls reported that appearance was important to their parents, the emphasis was again on interchangeable and outwards aspects. For instance, a young female teenager with positive body esteem noted that her parents cared about their appearance “by fixing his or her hair in the morning”, or “by putting makeup on” (Frisén &
Holmqvist, 2010, p. 209). In fact, only one girl reported that one of her parents was preoccupied with their body.

The second theme identified by these authors surrounded the “assumption of others liking one’s appearance” (Frisén & Holmqvist, 2010, p. 209). Despite receiving few positive messages about the body itself, girls with positive body esteem claimed that their parents viewed their appearance and body positively. Positive appearance-related feedback, such as expressing to their daughters that they are “beautiful” or “good-looking”, were generously provided by mothers though seldom offered by fathers or siblings. Most importantly, these young girls considered themselves good-looking even when positive appearance-related comments were infrequent or absent within the family setting. Therefore, positive body esteem is maintained under the assumption that parents and family members automatically accept the physical appearance of their offspring.

Lastly, Frisén and Holmqvist (2010) ascertained that these adolescents dealt with negative comments by disregarding their importance. As mentioned above, these young girls predominantly received positive appearance-related feedback; however, in one third of them, negative bodily comments were made in regards to height, weight, physical features and acne. In contrary to girls who have negative body esteem, these adolescents placed little emphasis on negative feedback and often characterized them as jokes or light-hearted comments. Among these adolescent girls recipients of negative comments, most reported being advised by their mothers of the propensity to receive negative appearance related comments and were counselled about the manner in which they should respond (e.g. by disregarding them). In fact, these girls were told by their mothers that they should be satisfied with and have a positive outlook towards their bodies.
Thus, amongst the constant sociocultural pressures experienced by young girls within and outside the family setting, it is important to note the protective factors that foster the development of positive body esteem. This study offered several important insights into how young girls protect themselves and actively resist the pressures to conform to the culturally prescribed ideals of beauty and the pattern of self-derogation demonstrate in young girls with low body esteem or body image dissatisfaction. Future research is needed to continue to uncover contributors to the development of a positive experience with one’s body within the context of girls’ relationships with parents and other family members. Moreover, future studies should expand the scope of body esteem to include a wide range of body experiences and should attempt to compare the experience of young girls from diverse ethno cultural backgrounds and family compositions to understand the variability resisting the pressures exerted by family members.

**Developmental Theory of Embodiment**

Within the context of young girls’ lived experiences and their perception of the world and others, the construct of embodiment allows for an understanding of the development of body image as it occurs within the familial setting and in interaction with family members. Grounded in Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) philosophical writings and phenomenological position, embodiment has been conceptualized as the “experience of engagement of the body with the world” (Allan, 2005, p. 177; Piran & Teall, in press) shaped by three core pathways: “experiences in the physical domain, experiences in the mental domain involving exposure to dominant social labels and expectations and experiences related to social power” (Piran & Teall, in press). This Developmental Theory of Embodiment (Piran, 2000; Piran, 2001b; Piran, Carter, Thompson, & Pajouhandeh, 2002; Piran & Cormier, 2005; Piran & Teall, in press; Piran & Thompson, 2008; Piran, Thompson, Legge, Carter, Nagasawa, & Teall, 2009) is important to this qualitative study.
as it allows to further understand the impact of girls’ social and relational context on their experience of embodiment, ranging from positive experiences of agency and self-care on one end to disrupted embodiment at the other (Piran et al., 2002, 2005, 2009, 2010).

**Rationale and Objectives of the Present Study**

From the existing research, it is evident that the pressures to fit external standards of beauty are ubiquitous and the family setting can play a role in the development of girls’ body experiences throughout puberty. However, with regards to the research specific to family influences, the majority of the studies offered correlational evidence based primarily on retrospective questioning methodologies of the contribution of families and parents to eating disorders and body image dissatisfaction, impeding our ability to ascertain whether family specific factors contribute to the positive or disrupted embodiment, whether positive or disrupted embodiment contributes to family dysfunction, or whether some other factor influences both. In other words, it is difficult to determine whether problematic aspects of the family environment (e.g. lack of cohesion and open expression, high levels of conflict and teasing) are the cause of the eating disorder or body image dissatisfaction or whether the resulting family difficulties stemmed from having a family member with significant mental health concerns. Further, the samples utilized encompassed mostly females who had been admitted to hospital settings for treatment of severe eating disorders and therefore only representing a small proportion of the girls and women affected by the disorder, introducing a significant sampling bias. Likewise, the contribution of the qualitative studies discussed can also be challenged. For instance, Haworth-Hoeppner, 2000 also used a retrospective questioning methodology, which can undermine the accuracy of the recalled information as the questions asked by the research may elicit specific experiences and therefore introduce recall bias. While the remaining qualitative studies (Frisén &
Holmqvist, 2010; Nicther, 2000; Wertheim et al., 1997) testified to the richness and complexity of the family influences, mechanisms and protective factors to the development of young girls’ body image, the samples lacked diversity in terms of socioeconomic status, ethno-cultural and racial background.

Taken as a whole, parental figures can promote, mediate or refute the Western culture dictated appearance and weight standards thus shaping the development of the self and the embodied experiences of young girls. As such, further research on the parental influences on the development of body image and embodiment with a diverse population is needed. Qualitative research, such as those discussed above, allows for substantial breadth and depth of focus into the lived experiences of young girls within the family setting as visible manifestations of bodily changes occur (e.g. breast development, menarche, growth spurts, weight gain) during the transition between pre- and post-puberty. The present research was designed to examine the parental influences on embodiment in a group of young pre and post-pubertal girls from various ethno-cultural, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds thus providing us with the ability to explore the intersections of parental influences, body image experiences and the various demographic variables. The objectives of the present study were to: 1) investigate the role that parental figures play in girls’ body experiences during their pubertal growth and development; 2) establish family factors which serve to foster, as well as hinder, girls’ satisfaction with their bodies; and 3) utilize the life history narrative approach to investigate the impact of social context from a socially critical lens in order to understand the impact of larger societal influences and pressures on parental interactions and behaviors with their daughters. The goal of this study was to inform and help researchers, therapists, health care professionals and parents understand
the lived experiences of girls within the familial context as shaped by interactions with their parents as well as their ethno cultural and social location.

Chapter 2
Methodology

The purpose of this research study was to explore the influence of parental figures on girls’ embodiment experience in order to better understand the familial, social and contextual factors which serve to foster, as well as hinder, girls’ satisfaction with their bodies. To meet the goals of the current study, a life history approach to qualitative inquiry was used to allow for an in-depth investigation into the embodied experiences of young girls within the social context of familial processes. In addition, the study utilized a prospective approach of interviewing girls about four times during a five year period in order to examine the ongoing relationship between the familial and social context of girls and their embodiment experiences. Such methodologies have been shown to be useful in examining the inner experiences of girls and women’s lived experiences in their bodies and in determining how embodied meanings are formed through and in interaction within relationships and the sociocultural context (Mafrici, 2009; Piran et al., 2002; Piran & Teall, in press).

Life History Approach

The life history approach to qualitative inquiry, used primarily by social scientists and anthropologists, offers an opportunity to examine the storied nature of a single person’s life in his or her own words while giving special consideration to the individuality and complexity of the lived experience. Moreover, this methodology honours the influence of the broader context (e.g. cultural, political, familial, and social) within which the narrative unfolds. As such, life
history research “is based on the fundamental assumption about the relationship of the general to the particular, and that the general can best be understood through analysis of the particular” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 13). In conducting a life history inquiry, the researcher allows for a substantial exploration over time of specific memories conceptualized within the life lived by the participant. In addition, consideration is given to the meaning attributed to the recounted memories with an understanding of their experiences within the context of their lives and society at large.

In their quests to explore women’s lived experience and the context in which women are living, feminist researchers are increasingly employing the life history approach. Unlike quantitative research where the literature and previous theories inform the anticipated results, the qualitative research journey can be meandering and indeterminate as the complexity and diversity of women’s experiences are explored within the data analysis process and special consideration is given to the thematic interpretations of the recounted memories. As such, “it is not possible to predict at the outset where the inquiry process will lead as it seldom goes directly back to the places set out in an initial review of literature” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 64).

Situating Oneself as a Researcher

An important aspect of the life history approach to qualitative research is the role of the researcher as an instrument to the analysis of themes. As Eisner (1991) described: “The self is the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it. It is the ability to see and interpret significant aspects. It is this characteristic that provides unique, personal insight into the experience under study” (p. 33). As a result of this personal insight and wisdom brought by the researcher to a qualitative inquiry, an understanding of the self and of the personal relationship to
the topic is necessary in order to adequately attend to and understand the experiences discussed by the participants within their life histories and to gain insight from the emergent themes (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Although the writer did not conduct the interviews with the study participants (see Data Collection section below), the following experiences have shaped my current embodied and lived experiences and my perception of the influences of parents, which in turn may impact the interpretation of the participant’s narratives and the subsequent delineation of themes.

The influence of the family setting has arisen in my own observations and experiences growing up as a teenager worried about my own weight and bodily changes as I developed into a young woman. Reflecting back, I recall comparing myself to immediate and extended family members who were struggling with their weight so as to assess my own potential for height, weight and appearance. My pursuit for thinness and my desire to avoid becoming overweight were continuously reinforced by my family who would comment on which family members my body type most resembled while outlining and emphasizing the accompanied weight risks. For instance, several of my aunts struggled with thyroid problems resulting in weight gains. While my mother was supportive, loving and unbiased in my eating and weight decisions, she nonetheless provided me with tools, such as workout DVDs and healthy meal recipes, which had helped her on previous weight loss attempts and could therefore assist me in achieving my own weight loss goals. My father encouraged me to pursue sports as an aspect of my personal identity and as a means of bonding with him. In terms of my extended family, I distinctively remember that my bi-yearly visits to Quebec always included a comment about my weight or appearance (e.g. “Have you lost weight?”, “Your hair looks great this way”). It was a relief to see that my experiences have been reflected in the quantitative and qualitative studies mentioned above and
in conversations with my female counterparts. My hope is that this research project will allow me to develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences of young girls in their body as they struggle with body image issues. Ultimately, I hope that the positive family factors identified in this endeavour can be utilized in the development of sustainable prevention family-oriented initiatives to encourage healthy family interactions supporting healthy, positive and empowered body experiences.

These experiences with my own family, my observations of the experience of my close friends and colleagues and my hopes to one day be a mother and a parent myself have pushed me to delve into the study of the social processes involved in the child-parent dyad on the experience of embodiment. While some of my experiences were comparable to my peers growing up and to certain girls’ stories that I studied, it became apparent to me throughout the course of this research project that my thoughts, beliefs and perspectives were based on my experiences as a White Canadian-born female from a middle upper class nuclear family and shaped how the meaning of the events in these girls lives could be construed. My supervisor, Dr. Niva Piran, and the graduate students in our research group have played a tremendous role in highlighting the intersection of the emergent themes with elements of social location, such as social class, ethnicity and religion.

Data Collection

Recruitment and selection of participants

Participants were recruited from diverse, urban and suburban areas in Southwestern Ontario and Manitoba. These locations were chosen because of their convenience to the researchers and also because of the opportunity for sampling a diverse population. The girls and
their families were recruited through advertisements posted in their communities. At the time of their first interview, the participants were divided into two cohorts: girls of pre-pubescent age (nine to eleven years old) and girls of post-pubescent age (thirteen to fourteen years old). Parental consent was required for each participant and each girl provided their assent to their participation in each of the interviews within the context of the study.

As part of a larger qualitative study, a total of twenty-seven girls were interviewed up to a total of four times over a four year period. The present study will use the interviews from twelve of the girls selected to represent a diverse group of family composition in terms of their parents (married, divorced, single, dating, remarried parents and step-parents, same-sex relationships), and siblings (wide array of siblings and step-siblings). In addition, the group of participants was comprised of girls from urban and rural communities, and from different social settings with respect to their socioeconomic status and ethno cultural group membership. Diversity is also present with respect to the girls’ developmental stages, including pre-pubescent and post-pubescent ages.

**Participants**

The nature of the life history approach to qualitative research allows the voice of the participants to be represented as they provide an in-depth and personalized account of their lived experience. As such, a brief description of each participant is provided to highlight to the reader the individuality of each girl in terms of their family structure (e.g. nuclear, separated, divorce, number and gender of siblings), social context (e.g. socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and religion), developmental status and physical appearance. Such descriptions are important in the
context of this qualitative study as they supply the reader with an understanding of the context of the emergent themes.

**Alice**

Alice was a single child of Aboriginal descent living with her adopted parents in a mid-size urban center in Central Canada. Little is known about her biological family; however, Alice was aware that she had half-siblings with her biological parents. Her adoptive parents belonged to different ethnic groups: a member of the indigenous community and Jewish. Alice’s parents were both university educated and worked in the health and sales domains. Alice’s family socioeconomic status was middle class. At the time of the first interview, Alice was 10 years old and in grade five. At the time of her second and third interviews, Alice was 10 years old and in grade six and 12 years old and in grade seven, respectively. At her final interview, Alice was 13 years old and in grade eight. At that time, Alice was about 5’9” with a curvy figure. Within her family environment, Alice had received a significant degree of support from her parents. Specifically, she described spending time with her mother every weekend. When not engaged in activities with friends, she spent her evenings at home with her family. In regards to body image, Alice described that she enjoyed being tall; however, it was noted that she engaged in restrictive eating in order to control her weight and reported male-initiated body harassment at school.

**Ashley**

Ashley was a young teenager of African descent living with her mother and younger brother in a mid-size urban center in Central Canada. Ashley had never known her father and he resided in a different city. Her parents were born in two different African countries. Although she had extended family in her hometown, the remaining resided in her mother’s country of
origin, who she had visited on previous occasions. Ashley self-identified as a Christian. Her mother attended university and worked in a government job. Her family’s socioeconomic status was low-middle class. At the time of the first interview, Ashley was 15 years old and in grade ten. At the time of her second interview, Ashley was 16 years old and in grade eleven. In addition to living with her mother and younger sibling, Ashley noted that her grand-mother lived within the family household for several years in order to assist the family. Ashley described that her mother encouraged her to be critical of the messages portrayed in the media, by her peers and through her religion.

**Bronwen**

Bronwen was a young girl of Canadian descent living with her mother, father and younger sibling in a rural-farm area in Central Canada. Her parents, who were from Euro-Canadian heritage, experienced marital discord leading to separation. Her parents maintained a farm as well as engaged in writing and educational jobs. In terms of religion, Bronwen identified with the United Church of Christ. The family travelled to different countries during Bronwen’s childhood. Her family’s socioeconomic status was low to middle class. At the time of the first interview, Bronwen was 12 years old and in grade seven. At the time of her second and third interviews, Bronwen was 13 years old and in grade eight and 15 years old and in grade ten, respectively. Her final interview occurred at the age of 16 when she was in grade eleven. Overall, Bronwen reported a close relationship with her mother and ongoing conflict with her father. She felt disadvantaged in relation to her younger brother.
**Erica**

Erica was a Canadian born teenager of Euro-Canadian parents, living in a rented house with her mother and older brothers in a mid-size urban center in Central Canada. Her parents separated prior to the first interview and her father was with a new partner. The transition to living in a new home with her mother was difficult as they did not have the financial means to accommodate all their needs (e.g. bedrooms). Erica’s parents worked in managerial and construction jobs. Erica did not self-identify as religious. Her family’s socioeconomic status was low social class. At the time of the first interview, Erica was 9 years old and in grade three. At the time of her second and third interview, Erica was 9 years old and in grade four and 11 years old and in grade six, respectively. Her final interview occurred when Erica was 12 years old and in grade seven. In terms of her embodied experience, Erica reported feeling comfortable in the presence of her parents noting that her father purposefully played less physically with her than he did with her male siblings because she was a girl, an aspect of their relationship which she appreciated. However, she noted feeling disadvantaged in comparison to her brothers who, unlike her, had been allowed to engage in dating relationships prior to the age of sixteen.

**Hazel**

Hazel was a young teenager of Indigenous descent living in Central Canada with her mother, step-father, and younger half-siblings. Hazel’s mother and biological father were of Indigenous descent. Her mother married her step-father who was of the Muslim faith. Hazel’s mother and step-father worked in the services field. In terms of religion, Hazel began identifying with, and converted to, the Muslim faith while in elementary school. All her immediate family members adopted the Muslim religion. Hazel incorporated the Muslim practices in her daily life, such as wearing the Hijab and not engaging in prayer during her menstrual cycle. Her family’s
socioeconomic status was of a low social class. At the time of the first interview, Hazel was 16 years old and in grade eleven. At the time of her second and final interview, Hazel was 17 years old and in grade twelve. Hazel reported having a good relationship with her mother, including engaging in exercise and dieting practices with her in order to lose weight. She also reported a good relationship with her step-father.

**Jackie and Madison**

Jackie and Madison were sisters, living in an urban center in Central Canada. Their living conditions changed overtime, living with their mother and her female partner, with their father and his female partner, and finally with their mother and her male partner. Their parents worked in the services domain, and the family’s socioeconomic status was of low social class. Their mother was a member of the Indigenous community. At the time of their first interviews, Jackie was 11 years old and in grade five and Madison was 9 years old and in grade three. At the time of their second interviews, Jackie was 12 years old and in grade six and Madison was 10 years old and in grade four. At the time of their third interviews Jackie was 15 years old and in grade 10 and Madison was 12 years old and in grade six. Jackie lost weight in early puberty related to dieting. At the time of the final interview, Jackie continued to engage in weight loss strategies. While Madison was encouraged by her mother to eat smaller meals she, herself, she was not concerned with her body size and physical appearance.

**Kelly**

Kelly was a young girl of Hispanic descent living in an urban center in Central Canada with her mother and female siblings, as well as her step-father. Neither of her biological parents completed high school. Kelly’s parents and step-father worked in the services and construction
fields. In terms of religion, Kelly did not identify her family as religious. Her family’s socioeconomic status was of low social class. At the time of the first interview, Kelly was 14 years old and going into grade nine. At the time of her second, Kelly was also 14 years old and four months into grade nine. At the time of the third and fourth interviews, Kelly was 17 years old and in grade eleven and 18 years old and in grade twelve, respectively. Kelly describes a close relationship with her mother and her step-father, noting feeling comfortable discussing issues pertaining to her body. However, she described that as a result of living with her mother and her sisters, they engaged in a significant amount of discussion on issues of weight gain, weight loss and dieting, among others.

**Lauren**

Lauren was a young teenager of Canadian descent living with her parents and older brother in a large urban center in Central Canada. Lauren’s parents worked in office jobs. Her parents were of Euro-Canadian descent. Lauren did not self-identify as religious. Her family’s socioeconomic status was middle class. At the time of the first interview, Lauren was 14 years old and in grade nine. At the time of her second and third interview, Lauren was 15 years old and in grade ten and 17 years old and in grade twelve, respectively. Her final interview occurred when Lauren was 18 and in her first year of university. At that time, she lived in a co-ed dormitory on the university campus. In terms of lived experience with her body, Lauren described being able to discuss any topic of choice with her parents (e.g. religion). She also engaged in many physical activities, including horseback riding.
Melissa

Melissa was a Canadian born girl living in a rural city in Central Canada with her mother, father and her female siblings. Her parents were of Euro-Canadian descent. Both of her parents completed university and worked in the health and services fields. Melissa referred to herself as Roman Catholic; however, she noted that her family was not very religious and only attended church at Christmas. Her family’s socioeconomic status was upper middle class. At the time of the first interview, Melissa was 14 years old and had just finished grade eight. At the time of her second, Melissa was also 14 years old and four months into grade nine. At the time of the third and final interview, Melissa was 16 years old and in grade eleven. Melissa reported that she hoped to be like her mother when she grows up and teach her children how to eat healthy. From the interviews, it appeared that Melissa had a close relationship with her father and enjoyed doing mechanic tasks with him.

Roxas

Roxas was a young teenager of Caribbean-Canadian heritage, living with her mother and her male sibling in a mid-size urban center in Central Canada. Roxas’ parents separated when she was a young child, and her father resided in a different city with his partner. She maintained contact with him mainly through phone calls and emails. Her parents were born in the Caribbean. Roxas identified multiple extended family members residing in her current city, including her grandmother, with whom she resided at times. Roxas’ mother worked in different part time jobs in different settings. Her family’s socioeconomic status was of low social class. At the time of the first interview, Roxas was 15 years old and in grade ten. At the time of her second interview, Roxas was 16 years old and in grade eleven. Roxas maintained a good relationship with her
mother and grandmother and noted that she felt supported in her activities and in her decisions regarding clothing, food and her health.

**Sarah**

Sarah was a young teenager of Canadian descent residing in a rural city in Central Canada with her mother, father and younger sibling. Her mother was of Euro-Canadian descent and her father was of central Asian descent. Her mother worked part time in sales and her father had a government job. Due to her father’s employment, the family unit relocated on several occasions. Her father was university educated, while her mother completed high school. Although Sarah was raised in a Catholic household, she reported that she does not support the Catholic beliefs, which prevented her from discussing religion with her father due to his strong religious beliefs. Her family’s socioeconomic status was middle class. At the time of the first interview, Sarah was 14 years old and had just finished grade eight. At the time of her second and third interviews, Sarah was 15 years old and in grade nine and 17 years old and at the end of grade eleven, respectively. The final interview occurred when Sarah was 18 years old and had finished high school. She then resided outside of the family home with roommates, related to some conflicts with her parents. She worked part-time in sales, aiming to save money for university education.

**Interview process**

Each interview was conducted in a quiet and private environment in the participants’ own home. For a small number of occasions when this location was unavailable, the interviews were conducted at a local community centre or in the interviewer’s office. The data collection began for this longitudinal qualitative study began in 2004 and the interviews were conducted by two
graduate female researchers from the University of Toronto working under the supervision of Dr. Niva Piran. Each girl was interviewed yearly by the same person for the duration of the study. At the beginning of each interview, the participants were provided with the opportunity for the researcher to answer any questions that they may have had and written informed consents were obtained from the parents and assent was provided by the girls. At the time of the first interview, participants chose a pseudonym, which was kept for the duration of the study and used in all transcripts, summaries and reports in an effort to protect each girl and her family’s anonymity. Open-ended questions from a semi-structured interview manual were used to guide the inquiry from a life history approach. Key areas of interest included an understanding of the girls’ body and lived experiences within a variety of setting (parental, other familial, peer influences) from their earliest memories during childhood to their most recent adolescent experiences as they occurred within a variety of sociocultural settings (gender, social class, ethno-cultural group membership). The questions were developed to allow for a collaborative exploration of topics as they related to the girls’ lives in order to give greater power and validity to their lived experiences and to allow for greater information and richer insights to be achieved (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

Data Analysis

Following the completion of data collection, all of the interviews were transcribed, cleaned and chunked into meaningful units, which were then imported into the qualitative analysis software QSR-N6 (student version) to assist with the organization and structuring of the codes at each stage of the analysis. The interviews of the twelve girls used for this analysis were read and sections pertaining to familial relationships were identified, specifically, those involving mothers and father as well as other significant maternal and paternal figures (e.g. step-
parents, grandparents, such as in the case of Ashley and Roxas and biological parents). Due to the wealth of information, experiences exclusively related to sibling relationships were excluded from the analysis.

As a qualitative research, the data analysis process was ongoing and flexible. The researcher first began the process by reading all sections pertaining to the parental relationships and gave each meaningful unit of data a label representing a brief description of the event or idea discussed. This phase of analysis demanded that the researcher consider similarities and differences within and across labels and across participants following the constant comparison method of the grounded theoretical approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in order to maintain the accuracy of the emergent themes and categories. An acute awareness of the data was maintained in order to develop hypotheses and notice patterns within the data. Finally, the most prominent themes were identified and classified as either a protective and/or risk factors. In order to make this determination, special attention was paid to the sections in which the participant classified their embodied experienced as negative or positive as they related to their interaction with the parental figures. In addition, the themes were evaluated against the participants overall positive or negative embodied experience to categorize them as a protective or risk factors. Therefore, a theme was considered a protective factor if it was primarily associated with narratives denoting a positive embodied experience, with the promotion a positive body image, or with participants who express an overall satisfaction with the lived experiences. Similarly, a theme was considered a risk factor if it was predominantly linked with narratives of disruptive embodied experiences, with the promotion of a disrupted body image, or with participants with an overall negative embodied perception of their lived experiences.
Chapter 3
Results

Analysis of the interviews revealed protective and risk factors related to embodiment experiences in the lives of these developing girls within the familial environment. Core factors which serve to protect girls’ body image development included: 1) positive relational qualities; 2) a supportive emphasis on self-care; and 3) a critical perspective on social location. The life history narratives also revealed core factors which disrupted the lived embodied experiences, consisting of: 1) negative relational qualities; 2) an evaluative gaze related to appearance; and 3) a disrupted embodiment as a result of social location. Special consideration was given to the influence of socio-cultural variables, such as race, ethnicity, religion and socioeconomic status. These variables are discussed in further details under the umbrella of factors related to social location. Next, each core protective factor, core risk factor and related themes are described in further details with the support of sample quotes, which were selected to illustrate the range of responses obtained from the participants’ narratives.

Core Protective Factors

First core protective factor: Positive relational qualities

The most prominent themes discussed by the girls in this study were those associated with direct parental interactions. The first core factor of positive relational qualities included five themes related to positive lived experiences within their body: 1) feeling comfortable speaking about one’s body experiences with parents; 2) feeling comfortable in the presence of parental figures; 3) feeling supported, understood and heard by parents; 4) feeling protected by parents; 5)
parental encouragement as a contributor to self-confidence and 6) identifying parental figures as role models of desired relational qualities.

**Feeling comfortable speaking about one’s body experiences with parents**

Parents were considered an important source of support for girls as they negotiated the transitional period of their pubertal development and incorporated these changes within their embodied experience. Many of the girls’ narratives revealed feeling comfortable speaking about their lived experiences within their bodies with their parents. These discussions included those related to the development of breast, the onset of menarche, the growth of pubic and body hair, the arising desires to date and engage in sexual intercourse, among others. Mothers, in particular, were found to be helpful in offering advice and compassion as they were perceived by their daughters to also have experienced at some point in their lives the pubertal transition that they were going through.

*How about around your mom? How does she make you feel about your body?...*

Well, I feel comfortable because I know someone who went through the stages and I could talk to someone. (Alice, age 10).

In addition, mothers, as opposed to their paternal counterpart, were seen as the ‘go to’ person to discuss certain body-related issues:

*Is your relationship very similar between you and your dad and you and your mom?* Yeah. Something is, I can't talk to my dad about, like, I don't know, some things, but still it's pretty much the same thing. *Can you think of some topics that you'd only talk to your mom about and not your dad?* Boys. (Chuckles) That would kind of scare my dad. I don't know. Just some things with my friends, some
As girls developed and started engaging in dating and sexual relationships, they may experience difficulties discussing such sensitive topics with their parents. However, feeling safe and connected to a parental figure was highlighted as facilitating these disclosures and provided an environment where the girls explored their feelings, albeit at times negative, towards their bodies in relation to these new activities.

_I think the last time I interviewed you, I'm pretty sure that you hadn't had sex yet, right?... So can you tell me how have things changed in that area?_ Well actually, last time you interviewed me I had done it once but I really was embarrassed and ashamed about it. _How would you describe the feelings that you had in your body after that experience?..._ Because I hadn't told my mom yet because I was embarrassed... I thought of what I was going to say and I said really really fast: “Mom, [name of Kelly’s male partner] and I had sex”... And she was like: “You did it, oh my God”... And she was just so supportive and she didn't turn, didn't look down on me. She said: “That's okay, you had been together for over a year and you know that you didn't want to do it so you're not just, you're not doing anything you don't want to do. And [name of Kelly’s male partner]. I love you so much kid and everything. And don't worry, I'm not going to think bad about you or anything. You're very supportive and I'm so proud of you for not pushing my daughter into anything”. (Kelly, age 17)
Similarly, Kelly felt comfortable discussing and negotiating with her mother with regards to her boyfriend staying over at the family house and in the same room as herself.

_The first time that he slept here, did you negotiate with your mom or how did that conversation happen?_ She was honestly fine with it, like she trusts me and everything. She trusts him, so. _Yeah, yeah. Okay. And does he sleep in the same room with you?_ Yeah. _And is that something that you have to talk with your mom about or is that assumed?_ Well at first she was like: “I don't know”… Then I talked to her and she trusts me. She knows I'm going to be fine and everything. She knows I'm not going to be doing anything and if I was to, she knows I'd be safe and stuff like that. (Kelly, age 17)

In very special circumstances, disclosures of bodily experiences, such as the onset of menarche, were welcomed by parental figures, and other members of their community, with special ceremonies to emphasize the positive connotations associated with the growing female body.

_How old were you when you got your period?_ It was, well, a month ago… _What was your reaction when you realized?_ I was kind of: “Wow, like, this is pretty amazing”… _So who did you tell?_ My mom… so I told her then and she was… kind of like: “Oh my daughter is growing up” kind of thing… It just kind of made me feel special… _Did your mom tell other people?_ Well my neighbour, she had had this idea when I was little that she wondered when I had my period she wanted to have like a ceremony thing… to welcome me into womanhood and whatever, and so, and then our minister, and she’s really nice but she wanted to do that as well. So the three of them took me out for, we went to this really nice
locks… and it was a beautiful place. And so they each talked to me about being a woman and whatever, and then, they each gave me something, and it was really interesting because it was something that had been given to them by another woman… So what did it mean to you to have that ceremony? What was it like or you? It made me feel really special… It was really cool, and like it’s something I would really like to do for others. I think of all, my mom was saying in different cultures people do more for that kind of getting your period, kind of growing up whatever, for girls, but our culture doesn’t really recognize that… Like it made me feel more just loved, like people will always be there for me, so. (Bronwen, age 12)

Through this ceremony, Bronwen felt empowered to integrate the onset of her menstruation into a positive embodied experience as a girl transforming into a woman. She related the importance of this ceremony to her feeling special, loved and supported and noted a desire for others to also experience such a joyful event. In addition, Bronwen testified to the positive connection that she felt in relation to her religion in the presence of her minister and to other cultures with the gift made by an Indigenous woman received from her neighbour.

**Feeling comfortable in the presence of parental figures**

The girls’ narratives also revealed how their relationship with their parents is an important facilitator to feeling comfortable in their presence and to genuinely enjoying their company. Several of the girls spoke about having the opportunity to spend time with their parents in a non-judgmental setting, which allowed them to perceive their lived experience as positive. For instance, Roxas noted that her grandmother, one of her primary maternal figures,
supported her relationship with friends by offering to cook them breakfast every morning prior to going to school.

It was so nice to have [two of my friends] both come over for breakfast. *Every day?* Yeah. Wow! *That’s a really nice tradition.* And then we’d take the bus or ride our bikes to school… *And what does your grandma make you guys?* Well, we have eggs and toast, which are scrambled eggs and toast or soft broiled eggs in a cute little egg cup or pancakes or porridge or cereal or goat cheese. (Roxas, age 15)

Other girls reported engaging in joint endeavours with their mothers or weekly mother-daughter activities.

*So what does your mom do? What's her job? Is she at home? Is she out of the house?* She does many things. She has… well we together have a business… And we just started selling… a whole bunch of stuff. *Isn't that neat? So you guys have a business together.* (Sarah, age 14)

Like, my relationship with my mom's great. Every Saturday we go shopping, we go out for lunch. (Alice, age 12)

Alice proceeded to discuss the contrast between her relationship with her own mother and the relationship of a number of her peers with their maternal figures. Through this comparison, she realized the strength and positive feelings she attached to her relationship with her mother, including feeling loved.
So you find yourself being careful, talk about how much you like your relationship with your mom. Well, I don't talk about it that much, because like when I hear like, oh they're so sad about their moms, I don't want to make them think like, oh Alice has such a good relationship with her mom, and make them all jealous. But I think they just want to be loved more by their parents, because when they talk about what happens, they just sound like they want to be... they want more from them. (Alice, age 12)

Feeling comfortable with one’s parents also entailed being able to speak freely and critically in regards to sensitive or serious topics of discussion.

Sometimes it's like... you could have conversations with your friends that sometimes you don't have with your parents, or just... I don't know. Sometimes your parents can talk about more serious issues like, well the times our conversations at the dinner table turn into about world history and somehow end up going back millions of years. I don't know. That's neat. Nice to have that kind of openness isn't it? We talk a lot about politics too. (Lauren, age 14)

Others highlighted the importance of being able to relax and discuss everyday topics.

What kinds of stuff would you do at home? Well the odd nights [my brother, mother and father] would sit down and play board games and stuff and just sit back, relax, and talk about how our days went. And how did you feel about yourself when you were at home with your parents or with your brother? Very comfortable. (Sarah, age 14)
Some girls mentioned feeling comfortable in the presence of their parents as a result of the perceived treatment they received from their parents.

My mom… really like, she treats me kind of like an adult. Like she treats me like a kid but like but an adult kind of, and I really like that because she really, she really, yeah, treats me like an equal or whatever. That’s neat. I’m curious about that. So can you tell me a little bit about the way she treats you like a kid, and a little a bit about the way she treats you like an adult so I get a sense of, maybe an example of each? Well, like, with a kid like, normally well, sometimes it’s with my brother, like I get in trouble and you know it’s just the normal kid stuff, I guess. But the way she treats me like an adult she’s really like she’s my friend really and she like we always kind of talking to each other, and she gives me different like advice and stuff, and so she really, I feel that she really respects me as well. Oh wow that’s really cool. Yeah! I like the smile as you talk about your mom. There’s this big smile like there’s just a strong feeling of all your warmth and just you know comfort and stuff. That’s great. (Bronwen, age 12)

For a small sample of girls, they enjoyed the company of their parents as they felt free to engage in activities that society at large may consider atypical for their gender.

Where do you work? Umm, well this year, I’m working at my dad’s shop… Umm, and what are you going to be doing at your dad’s shop? Umm, just like type change, oil changes, cleaning up the shop and like. Cool! Just anything he tells me to do. (Laughing) You looking forward to that? Yeah. And now that I got my licence, I can like go on errands and pick up parts and stuff… like drive customers
to work. *And is this stuff you already know how to do, or do you have to learn how to do it?* Yeah. Well, and he’s been training me to. (Melissa, age 16)

**Feeling supported, understood and heard by parents**

An additional aspect mentioned by many of the girls related to a positive embodied experience involved being able to speak to their parents and feeling supported, understood and heard by them. For example, parents gave their daughters the voice needed to discuss their concerns and made them feel important doing so, as described below by Bronwen where she felt like she ‘mattered’.

When I’m with my mom I feel important… And I feel loved, and I feel like I matter. *I like that, I matter. What is it about being with your mom do you think that makes you feel that way?* I don’t know. It’s just I like being with her and she really makes me feel like comfortable and stuff, so I just like we always discuss things and stuff so it’s really, I don’t know I just feel that way when I’m around her. (Bronwen, age 12)

When queried, Bronwen reflected on her experience with her mother to provide advice to other parents:

*If we could give advice to other moms about how to help their daughters feel comfortable and you know feel important and loved like they matter, what advice would you want to give to other moms? Like what kinds of things does your mom do or do you do with her? How does she talk to you or stuff like that?* Yeah I’d say probably listen, just like listen really well, because like one of my friends she has a lot of problems with her mom and I feel really sorry for her but I think they
just don’t connect at all… So I think, I don’t know, I think just to listen to their daughters and do things they love to do together. So like, if they both like doing like I don’t know traveling or something do that together, because I think that really that really helps, and yeah. Also my mom every night like before I go to bed she comes in and like lies with me for I don’t know five or ten minutes, and so we talk, and so I think that really has, that really is good. (Bronwen, age 12)

In addition to feeling ‘listened to’, Bronwen’s advice also highlighted the importance of another protective factor discussed thus far, involving the provision of an environment where the daughter feels comfortable in the presence of her parents. Feeling supported, understood and heard by one’s parents occurred for many girls with everyday topics and sensitive issues. In addition to the examples discussed previously (e.g. Kelly disclosing her first sexual experience to her mother; Bronwen announcing her menarche to her mother), the quotes below serve to demonstrate the lived experience of being heard and understood by parents.

I tell everything to my mom… I give her, like, the daily report of what happened at school… I’m, like, super talkative and stuff. I think I’m working on all the years that I didn’t talk much. But yeah, I tell her all these things… And I just walk around the house following her, talking…. Yeah. I’m kind of one those atypical people because usually you hear about teens who are, like, angsty in their rooms not talking to their parents. Right. And I have my angst, and I have my alone time, but I talk to my parents. Yeah, Good. Well not my dad much because he’s you know, my dad, who talks to their dad? Not very many, I’m finding out. Yeah, but it’s nice to have a good relationship with your mom then. Uh-huh. (Hazel, age 16)
What have you and your parents talked about when it comes to drugs and alcohol? People make mistakes. And like, I told them about the party and, like, how I… She was like: “You’re entitled to, like, one mistake with alcohol. One mistake with drugs”. And stopped. And I said: “Okay”… Yeah. And did it make you, like, did you feel badly about what had happened? Or were you… No… And what made you decide to tell her? Some kids don’t want to tell their parents. Did you feel like she’d understand? Or… Well, I knew she’d, like, understand. (Alice, age 12)

This theme also emerged from girls discussing their personal interests with their parents and feeling supported to pursue whichever activities they selected.

How about sports? Do you play sports now? Umm, I used to be really into cross country… I used to be on the basketball team. So when did that stop? Umm, well, grade six, or grade seven, I went to junior high and they were more into the trying out thing, and I didn't really make it, so I didn't try again. Oh, okay. So, the first time, in grade seven, you didn't make it, and then you didn't try again? Yeah. And then, after my sports, like after I stopped playing sports, I started getting into drama. I've always wanted to do something like either singing lessons, or, like me and my dad were talking about like [name] theatre. (Jackie, age 15)

Many of the girls discussed within a supportive relationship with their parents the difficulties they experienced with their peers, siblings, teachers and other individuals.

Have you ever experienced any harassment or teasing or bullying about your body? No, well act. No wait, I’m lying. (Laughs) I actually once, when I started
wearing a hijab, I did actually take it off so I could go swimming until I like decided like a month later: “Mom, this is hypocritical”. Uh-huh., yeah. But yeah. So I would wear a t-shirt over my bathing suit. I’d wear a t-shirt and some, like, tights, right? So I would be a little more modest and stuff. And I was in the changing room and, uh, these girls were talking about me…. And they were saying, you know: “She must wear that because she’s fat”. Oh. And I was like: “Ouch”. (Laughs) You know? Yeah. And they really, really hurt my feelings, so I actually talked to my mom and then she talked to my instructor who was a woman at the time… So she, I pointed the girls out, she talked to them. (Hazel, age 16)

What about when it was going on, how did that feel? Oh, I was always in tears! [My sister] was always making fun of me. It would really hurt me sometimes and we would get in big fights and my mom would get in the middle of it. It wasn’t very pleasant at times… How did your mom usually deal with it? She’d separate us… Or else sometimes I would just walk away from it all. Did your mom ever talk to you about it? Yeah. She would sit me down and talk to me saying that I was fine how I was, like I was bigger than a lot of the kids but not as big as other kids. She always would say that if it bothered me or if I was really upset by it that she would help me to get rid of it. She would tell me not to worry about [my sister], that she was tiny and there was nothing to her and that I should worry about what she says like to make me feel better. And did it help? Yeah, it made me feel a lot better. (Kelly, age 14)

When I would play, like in shorts, baseball with my sister, people would walk by me a lot and just like, my next door neighbour always walks by me and I was
wearing a (inaudible) when we were playing. We were playing, jackpot was it? Yeah jackpot and then it went right over my head and I wasn't looking at it. I was looking at something else because I had a hard day that day and I forgot what we were playing and then he's like: “Madison you need bigger lenses”. Ohhhh. And I'm like: “No I don't”. And then he kept saying he didn't say that and then I went to tell my mom and then she came out and said: “[Male friend], I'm hoping you're not saying to my daughter that she needs bigger lenses”, and he's like: “No, no, I'm not, I'm not”. (Madison, age 9)

**Feeling protected by parents**

Parents demonstrated to their daughters that they heard their concerns by acting upon them when disclosed, as demonstrated in the section above with the quotes by Hazel and Madison where the parents assisted their daughters in resolving a problematic situation (e.g. teasing). In addition to the two examples above, feeling protected by parents in times of need has been expressed by most girls as an important contributor to living positively within their bodies in multiple settings, including in the community and within the family.

_So when you moved to [South American country], whole new friends, everything would be so different, what kinds of stuff did you like to do in [the South American country]?_ There was nothing that we could do because… if we were walking with a group of people, our parents wouldn't let us out of the house for reasons because there were a lot of bad people on the streets there type thing. So if we were around lots of people and stuff, we couldn't speak, and if we did it would have to be in Spanish type thing, just because they'll nail us. They'll be like: “Oh my gosh. Did
you see them? They don't speak Spanish”, and they'll come up and rob us. *So that's pretty scary.* It was, but it wasn't. It was quite the experience. (Sarah, age 14).

For others, parents displayed their acts of protection in response to the gender of their daughters.

*Are there other ways you notice that he treats you differently because you're a girl?* He’s more gentle with me. (Laughs) *Is he?* Yeah. *In what way it’s like?* And he’s more protective like he’ll play rough with my brothers or stuff like that and then like with me he’s just gentle. (Laughs) *Do you like that?* Yeah. It makes me better. (Erica, age 12)

*Are you excited when you turn 16 to date?* Yes… *Did your brothers have to wait until they were 16?* Do they? I don’t think so. (Laughs) *Why do you think it’s different for you?* I think it’s because like my mom is like not use to like… it’s been a long time since my brothers were my age. *Yeah.* And like she’s more protective and stuff because it’s the one girl that she has. Yeah. (Erica, age 12)

In other instances, protection was offered as a result of the anticipated teasing or consequences due to racial differences.

*Okay, and then umm, did you start wearing the scarf at the same time as your mom? Or...* Uh-huh... I actually started wearing it when I was twelve, like a year after 9/11. My mom and dad actually told me: “Hazel, don't wear it right now”. *Really?* Yeah, my mom and dad were like: “Hazel, you're still little, you don't have to wear it, it's fine”… *So your parents when you started wearing it actually
didn't want you wearing it. Yeah. I mean, I was actually surprised with my dad ‘cause forever he's always been like: “We're going to a Muslim event, wear your scarf”. You know? Right, yeah... Yeah, but when I started wearing the scarf he was like: “Oh, Hazel, you know, just...just wait a little, you...you're fine the way you are”. What do you think his reasons were that he was saying that? I don’t know, maybe he was a bit worried. Because, you know, it was just the year after 9/11 and lots of people were getting like racially discriminated against. Uh-huh. And I guess that he just didn't want that to happen to me. (Hazel, age 17)

Finally, for a small sample of girls who suffered extreme forms of teasing and harassment, the presence and protection of parents during these difficult times helped the girls in restoring a felt sense of security.

Umm, so, it sounds like there’s a lot of gossiping going on at this school? Yeah. Yeah? Is there any other times that jump out at you that this happened? Umm yeah. People wrote on my door once and (inaudible) that I did bad things with them and stuff... Some boys wrote on my on my door outside saying I did things with them, and calling me (inaudible)... Boys from the neighbourhood, or boys from school? Boys from school, and the neighbourhood. Oh, they live around here and they go to your school? Same age as you or older boys? Older, and same age. What? What did they write on your door? That I’m white trash, fat whore – really bad... Oh! I’m sorry to hear that. Did you know who it was that did that? Yeah. We found out... Can you tell me that story? So, your mom, you and your mom came home, and that was written on your front door? Yeah, and then, I’m not really quite sure about the story. I just know I didn’t go to school for, like,
three weeks. Oh, really? (Pause) Wow. ‘Cause there’s also the shooting thing and stuff like that, and the school said that I may be one of the victims that they’re gonna go after. Oh! So my mom kept me home. Wow. So there were some boys at school that were threatening you? People? Yeah. And during the days I did go to school, I had to stay in the office during the lunch and (inaudible) Oh, wow! That must have been scary. Yeah, and it was really boring. (Madison, age 12)

**Parental encouragement as a contributor to self-confidence**

Another significant theme related to positive relational qualities identified by the girls in this study was the effect of parental encouragement on their self-confidence. The girls discussed how such encouragements played a key role in how they viewed their experiences, achievements and how they coped with failures. Specifically, encouragements by parents were discussed frequently within the context of school, talents and physical activities.

*And then, how about around your mom and dad, how do you feel in terms of yourself as a student or as a daughter or any other words that come up for you?*...

They encourage me to play soccer because I love soccer, and they encourage me to keep up my homework. (Alice, age 10).

*When do you feel good about your body? When do you like your body?* When I'm dancing and singing. *When you're dancing and singing, yeah. Okay so tell me what it is that you like about yourself when you're dancing and singing.* Well I like moving around and stuff like that. And then I'm singing, I just, my mom always tells me that I'm a good singer and stuff like that so I just feel really good about myself. (Erica, age 9)
How about any, do you do any swimming or dancing or anything like that? Well, I do have a swimming pool at my dad’s and my dad calls me the best cannonballer ‘cause I make such a big splash. After I run and then do a cannonball and I do little designs while I'm doing the splash. (Madison, age 9)

At times, compliments by mothers contributed to a girl’s self-confidence by emphasizing the attainment of an ‘ideal’ looking body with respect to the culturally dictated standards of beauty.

Do you ever feel sexy? Sometimes. Okay what helps you feel that way? Like when I get compliments? Like the other week I bought my grad dress and I was in the change room. I could hear my mom and the lady talking and saying that it looks so good on her and I heard other people say that it’s a nice colour on her. I would have to come out because there were no mirrors. And they all said it was a great colour. I was like: “Oh okay”. So that kind of external reinforcement... Yeah everyone likes compliments.

Other times, encouragements by fathers enhanced their daughter’s self-confidence by highlighting unconventional qualities against the feminine ‘ideal’.

What’s that feel like? When you check a guy and knock him into the board? Oh! It’s like you release all your aggression, like it is so amazing. The funniest thing happened this year. Ah! Our team won our whole district and we won it all. Sweet! And one of the teams that was going to could have beaten us very easily had the biggest guy in the whole district. Like he was the, by far, the biggest guy. You know my hockey team was afraid of him I’m just like I was actually I still am kind of afraid of him. But [my dad] was just like: “I will pay you if you hit
him”, blah, blah, blah. And my hockey team is like: “Oh yeah Sarah”. So and I was like, like there is always that kind of competition and whenever you see a team walk by you are just like ‘whew’ you know and you kind of stare them down and that’s what me and this guy did a lot ‘cause we’d start like judging each other and calling each other stuff on the ice ‘cause he was. He was defence when I was forward. So I was always at the net and he was always trying to stop me… I’d be like: “No”. And then he would be like: “Yeah, girls don’t play hockey”. I’m like: “You are fat”. And like it’s always like ‘cause he is like: “Oh what a bitch”. I’m like . . . like I would say something really mean right?... What would you say to him? Ah really inappropriate stuff. That’s what hockey is known for I’d have to say. Oh yes so. Anyway, my dad basically kind of paid me to hit him and I hit him twice so hard that he grunted when I hit him. And I made the biggest deal over it. I like hit him, he is like: “Ohhhh”, and I laughed so hard, my whole hockey team cheered it all, they cheered me on. They were like: “Yeah Sarah” and it was the best feeling ever. So I did it again! (Sarah, age 15)

Sarah continued to consider this experience with her father important as she reflected on it during the third interview when queried about her physical activities and her experiences with hockey.

Okay. Tell me about that feeling. What does your body feel like? I love it. I love it ‘cause I love like contact. Uh-huh. What do you love about it? Everything. It’s just the fact that like I think umm a lot of the times it’s like you can take your anger out in like that kind of legal way. Okay. Yeah. And it’s not, you won’t get in like trouble for it and like my dad even paid me, what did he pay me? He paid me
a lot. That’s another thing that brought us together was hockey because he was a trainer and everything... Like people would even pay me for taking the biggest guy on like ‘cause I would. Like I love hitting. Like I’m just out there. Like I love, I love getting completely into it. Yeah, yeah. The biggest guy, he was huge and I took him. I’m so proud. (Sarah, age 17)

Finally, encouragements shaped by the cultural views of the family and the community as transmitted by parents were seen as providing one of the girls’ with an increased self-confidence.

I think I’ve always always had a pretty strong self, like sense of self. But I think as you're going through like the pre-adolescent age, when you're like, especially the transition from elementary school to junior high, it was kind of difficult because you were just thrown into a different environment and things like that. But I always go back to my values and things like that, so I always try and stay in touch with what I believe in. *What helps you do that? What kinds of? What do you attribute that to? Where did you learn that?* Definitely home. I think home has been a really positive environment for me, as well as church and things like that. And I think also the people who I surround myself with, they're always people that are encouraging me to do the right thing and to strive to be the good person that I want to be. (Ashley, age 15)

*Identifying parental figures as role models of desired relational qualities*

The final dimension of positive relational qualities is the transmission from parents to daughters of qualities that are embodied as important to them as women in their sociocultural contexts and during their transition to adulthood. Through their actions, verbal and nonverbal
communications and interactions with others and the worlds, parents offered their daughters the opportunity to evaluate and reflect upon which characteristics they themselves would like to possess in order to reflect a positive way of being with others.

*Are there any adults that you look up to in your life? That you’d like to be like when you grow up...* My parents. *Yeah. You look up to them? Yeah. What is it that you look up to? What they do in their life. And how they do it. How would you describe that? I don't know. Fun! They're fun people?* Yeah. *And you'd like to be like that?* Yeah. (Alice, age 10)

Specific girls from minority background examined the behaviours of their maternal figures and identified within them aspects of strength, resiliency and courage.

*Do you have role models that you look up to?* Well, I really like the real life story of Oprah, like rags to riches type of thing, like how she started off with like nothing and she's so successful and she's really, really happy with her life. Those are the kind of people that I want to be... Also my mother, ‘cause she came from Africa and like she really wanted an education and all odds were against her and she fought them and she was just able to be really, really successful and she's just really happy with her life. And I just want to be like her. I want to be really strong and supportive and caring. (Ashley, age 15)

*Count your blessings. Yeah, exactly. Who taught you those messages?* Well, I learned them off T.V. shows and my mom been telling me stories with them and my mom teaches me them and things like that but the main thing that I mean of count your blessings is like at least you have a warm blanket to sleep with, at least
you have a bed, at least you have a roof over your head, at least you have food to eat but I feel bad for the people who live on the streets sometimes. (Madison, age 10)

Moreover, mothers were often seen as guides to manoeuvring the girl’s cultural identity within a white patriarchal culture. For instance, Bronwen’s experience with menarche with a ceremony discussed in the ‘Feeling comfortable speaking about one’s body experiences with parents’ section above highlighted to her how such celebrations stimulated positive feelings with the onset of her periods. She disclosed the desire to reproduce this appreciation for developing into a woman with other girls, and eventually her own daughters, who are undergoing or will undergo this transition. Another example of how mothers and the community are important to the development of girls within a cultural context is described below.

*Do you have any role models? Who do you look up to?* Umm, for women? My mom obviously. *Yeah.* Because it’s my mom. She’s in my life forever. *Yeah.* So if I didn’t look up to her that would be kind of the short end of the stick here. (Laughing) And actually there is this is this one woman. And, like, I mean I look up to a lot of my mom’s friends. *Uh-huh.* Because they’re all very strong-Muslim women. (Hazel, age 16)

Other girls highlighted stereotypical traits associated with being a woman, such as the unconditional caring for others discussed by Kelly.

*How about in your personal life? Is there any role models that you look up to there?* I look up to my mother. *Can you tell me about that?* Like no matter how much she needs to actually do something for herself, she’s always thinking of her
kids first. She’s a really hard worker, but she doesn’t always get paid for the things she does. She always puts her kids first. She is just a really hard worker and yet she always finds time for us. (Kelly, age 14)

Whereas others appreciated the self-accepting messages received from their parents.

*I'm wondering if you think about the future, what kind of person do you think you'd like to be when you become an adult? Do you ever think about that? I want to be healthy; I don't want to be really skinny or overweight. I want to be active and I want to have a family. I'm going to be like my mom and teach my kids about eating right and I want them to play sports and stuff like that. I'm not going to try and change them or anything, just let them be who they are. (Melissa, age 14)*

As mentioned previously under several headings, the fathers were seldom cited as role models of relational traits. However, Sarah reflected upon one characteristic she had learnt from her father according to his actions in social situations.

*Not all the girls I talk to have that confidence, especially at your age. Where do you think you got that confidence from? My dad. What does he do that gives you that confidence? He's just not afraid of doing anything or saying anything. He's not afraid of anything, almost. Even if he looks stupid in front of a thousand people he'll go up and do whatever he wants to do. (Sarah, age 14)*
Second core protective factor: Supportive emphasis on self-care

Another significant core protective factor identified by the girls in this study was the supportive emphasis on self-care by parental figures. The girls discussed having the opportunity to learn, within a caring and compassionate environment, ways in which they could care for their minds and bodies. This mindful guidance and advice by parental figures to their daughters lead to positive embodied experiences with regards to 1) an emphasis on balanced and healthy eating; 2) physical activity for pleasure and pursuit of health; 3) feeling comfortable to ignore the external standards at home; 4) negotiating new body practices; 5) parents allowing their daughters to voice their opinions with regards to their appearance; and 6) handling the external gaze of others.

Emphasis on balanced and healthy eating

For many parents, discussing food and eating with their daughters could be a sensitive topic as a result of its close association with weight, particularly with the perceived ‘ideal’ weight. Nonetheless, considering the components of a balanced and healthy diet regimen was important to ensure the proper weight gain to support pubertal development and to promote eating habits that could be sustained throughout one’s life. Some of the examples discussed thus far highlighted how food and eating can connect parents and daughters together, such as Alice and her weekly dining-out habits with her mother and Ashley’s grandmother preparing a meal for her and her friends every morning before school (see the ‘Feeling comfortable in the presence of parental figures’ section). In addition to these instances, most parents paid special attention to the specific needs of their daughters according to their body shape, metabolism and developmental stage.
What are your thoughts about weight and body shape, and what have been your experiences of how you feel about that? Well I know at first, like over that summer, it was kind of everyone, I didn't realize that everyone has different types of bodies… because I had a friend, for example, so we'd go to McDonald's and I would order, I don't know, a cheeseburger meal, and she would order like a double Big Mac meal and she would eat all of hers and I'd be like struggling to finish my fries over lunch and then she's like: “Can I eat them?” Oh yeah, go ahead and eat them. I'd be so full. I'd have just a small capacity for a lot of food. And yet I was just putting [the pounds] on after I went to McDonald's and yet she would have like a belly for ten minutes and you'd look back, where did it go, she’s always stick skinny. You know what mom, it's not fair, she eats whatever she wants and whenever she wants and she doesn't gain a pound. She's active, I know she's active a lot, but for long periods of time she doesn't do anything and she still maintains that figure. So that's when I started noticing look at that. And then my mom said to me she said, you know what, some people have different types of bodies. And you're the type of body that if you eat something, your metabolism's really, really slow and it's going to keep that in your system for a really long time. Whereas for other people it goes right through. So you need to realize that and you can't always be comparing yourself to other people. You can only compare yourself to what's healthy for you. So that was a really important lesson for me that summer. And so I was like you know what, I can't judge myself upon other people's standards, I have to know when I'm feeling good and what's healthy for me and things like that. (Ashley, age 15)
Well I was very thin. I used to be like this thin and my mom said you should start getting a little bit fatter because if you grow up and you stay that thin you could be very sick and die. Well I didn't want to die so I started eating more, and now I eat like eggs and some bacon, like tons of bacon, and I mean that sounds (inaudible), and then I, and then I go I'm not full yet, and they go, and [my sister] is like: “I can't finish my breakfast”. And I'm like: “I'll eat it,” so I eat the rest of her breakfast. And my mom is like: “Oh you're still hungry”. I'm like: “Yeah”. And then I got her eggs and still bacon, and then my grandma says: “You guys are, Madison can sure eat” So that's how I got like this much, and then I just ate and like other meals and I got this one (inaudible). *Yeah you need that much food to grow and grow... Yeah you feel good about how you are now?* A: Yeah. My step-sister used to be very big, and now she's like as fat as me, and I'm like (inaudible), like that's good. My mom is like that's great that's great. (Madison, age 9)

Furthermore, an emphasis was placed by parents on the provision of indulgences as an integral part of a nutritional and satisfying diet.

_What does it mean to you to eat healthy?_ I like eating healthy because I want to be fit for soccer and swimming and I'm really good at those. _Good. So you purposely eat in a healthy way so it helps you with your stuff?_ Yeah. _What does that mean eat healthy? What do you think?_ Well, I eat lots of fruit because I have lots of fruit drinks. Except for special occasions, my parents buy pop, like if I'm sick or something. When I have my cousins over, they bought pop. (Alice, age 10)
Eating? Eating is good. I like food. I like lots of food. Yeah, I eat pretty much anything, well, stuff that I like. We went to Dairy Queen yesterday. Dairy Queen is good. And then I ate a lot of burgers and stuff, but I'm not unhealthy or whatever. My mom makes dinner pretty much every night. Like sometimes, let's say once a month, let's say we have pizza, like on a Friday night, or when we're going up to the cottage we just get some sandwiches because it's easier, but otherwise my mom make dinners, like pork chops, potatoes, vegetables and stuff. (Lauren, age 14)

What kinds of messages are there about food in your house? My mom lets us eat as much as we want, but she wants us to eat more healthy stuff. She lets us have treats once in a while. She's always educating us about like the food guide and everything. She says we don't have to worry about how much fat or calories we take in because we're growing and stuff. As long as we're active we can eat whatever we want. So kind of having that balance, being active and eating healthy. (Melissa, age 14)

Parents also educated their daughters with regards to the detrimental aspects of dieting as a means of weight reduction.

So you, like, you see the distinction between healthy eating and dieting? Oh, yeah, dieting is, it’s crap. I mean it’s like, you know yo-yo dieting and stuff? Uh-huh. It’s, like, girls, it’s basically a quick to lose weight, and then it comes back just as quickly so it’s really, there’s no point. Yeah, it messes up your body. For sure. It totally does, and, like, diet foods are disgusting. Aspartame, ewe. I have issues
with diet soda. *Yeah.* I’m like: “Seriously, if I’m going to drink soda it’s going to be the one with the full sugar”… *No that sounds like, I mean, a healthier approach to eating than restricting, or cutting out food groups.* Yeah, yeah. I mean, like, seriously, like the whole cutting out food groups that’s just stupid. *Yeah.* I may not be Arab, but I love carbs as much they do. (Laughs) With every meal, bread is in place… If we could live on it, that’s what we would do. (Hazel, age 16)

*What do you fuss about dieting? Like if you were to go on diets? What would you think about that?* (Slight pause) What do I think about that? I think they’re idiots. (Laughing) *How come? Can you tell me more about that?* Because they’re willing to screw up their eating style… Just to be thinner, and it’s not healthy for them… *Do you know anybody that’s ever gone on a diet?* Well, nanny has, but it wasn’t like an extreme diet. It was more like eating less of the starchy foods… rice, butter, other stuff like that… It wasn’t like a massive diet. (Roxas, age 15)

*And then, I mean, it sounds like in your family the approach was really about healthy eating. Did, did you ever want to or talk about going on a diet?* Oh, like the dieting thing, like everyone in my family is so has always been so against that… And just, like, all, like, they don’t like buying anything low-fat because there’s some sort of, like, the process they make it is bad for you or something… Just, like, oh and the aspartame and stuff, and like, MSG. I’ve heard about it all. (Laughing) *So it sounds like in your family there’s definitely an awareness of, like, taking an anti-dieting approach and more of just healthy eating.* Healthy eating. Yeah, that’s like, healthy eating, being active, is our whatever. *Your*
mantra. Yeah. Yeah. That’s good. I mean, it’s nice that you so it isn’t something that comes into head to diet. Yeah. So, yeah, I was lucky to be brought up that way. (Melissa, age 14)

Additionally, parents modelled the positive aspects of engaging in a healthy and balanced eating in the pursuit of an overall healthy lifestyle.

‘Cause my dad just started working out and I’ve noticed a big change. He's a lot milder, he's not as grumpy, and he sleeps better. Oh Good! Yeah. Yeah. It's like: “Why didn't you start working out years ago, dad?” Exactly. And that’s where for sure I was being... people can incorporate physical activity for those kinds of benefits, right? Without the focus on necessarily the aesthetics of the body but on feeling better, having more energy. (Hazel, age 17)

At times when disrupted eating behaviors were displayed by some girls, reinstilling a passion for food by parents within their daughters provided an avenue whereby a reconnection with one’s body’s needs was re-established.

So it's interesting because the day you decided to stop eating was quite significant for you, so do you remember was it when you moved here that you started eating again? Yeah, more often. And it was because it was the summer I guess and my stepmom is just the most awesome cook in the world. Really? Yeah, you just can't not eat her food. (Laughter). Yeah, so that kinda helped? Yeah, I think she learned to cook, I think from her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law is [European], so she's like amazing, you just don't even know. (Jackie, age 15)
Physical activity encouraged for pleasure and health purposes

Many parents emphasized daily physical activity to their daughters in order for them to be active and healthy, have fun in their physical pursuits and promote confidence in their abilities. The ‘parental encouragement as a contributor to self-confidence’ section of the ‘positive relational qualities’ above emphasized the later and highlighted how praise in the domain of physical activity and sports resulted in increased self-confidence. For instance, it was noted how Alice and Sarah expressed positive embodied experiences when playing soccer and hockey, respectively, as a result of the reinforcements received by parents. In addition, Madison expressed how playing with her father in the pool allowed her to feel comfortable being herself.

Through these three examples and the one mentioned below, parental figures also emphasized having fun while engaging in physical activity.

*How old were you when you went to horse camp?* Horse camp, huh, eight maybe.

*Okay, tell me about that, what was that like?* It was fun. The first year when I went, I went with my brother ‘cause he was younger and he was like okay animals, whatever he like uh and my parents both worked so we had to had to do something in the summer… So, we both went to that because we had to do something in the summer so we went to horse camp and it was with the YMCA.

*Okay. How long was this?* It was about two weeks. *And like was it a sleepover camp or did you come home?* No, you’d go for the day, okay the bus would take you and then you’d get dropped off at the YMCA until five thirty so my parents that’s when they finished work so they’d come and pick us up and it worked out perfectly and that was a lot of fun for me and my brother and actually my cousin… he went too for the first year and then after that it was me. I went on my
own... yeah I went by myself but I still enjoyed it because I like horses and I made friends there so and I did that for a couple of years. Oh neat. Up until about two years ago. (Lauren, age 15)

In addition to highlighting the pleasurable aspects of sports and physical activity, most girls noted that their parents discussed the importance of being active towards the maintenance of their current and future health and demonstrated supportive behaviors, such as engaging in the activity together or provided their daughters with access to sport facilities.

*How do you feel if you think back when you were a kid, how did playing sports and stuff, how did it make you feel about your body?* Well, I think that like my mom has always told me to eat healthy and stay active. So if she's going for a walk she'd say: “Oh, do you want to come for a walk too”... So I think at the back of my mind I was also looking this is really good for me, so I should participate and try hard in it as well. (Ashley, age 15)

*So, is the gym through school or through a community centre?* Ah no, it's Extreme Fitness. Which is a gym; it's not a community centre or anything. The closest thing they have to a community centre is on Sundays you can bring your family for a swim. But you have to be like a paying person. *Ah, okay.* Even to have that privilege. *Okay, and how do you get there? My dad drives me. So do you go in the evenings?* Evenings, yeah. I usually go from about 7:30 until 8:30, an hour is pretty much all I can do really. *Yeah, so before dinner or after dinner?* After dinner. (Jackie, age 15)
For other girls, an emphasis was placed on exercise due to the health concerns associated with their current weight as a result of their family’s history of medical difficulties. For Hazel, an encouraging and educating approach was taken by her mother to ensure that she felt supported throughout her well-being efforts.

*How did it feel when [your doctor] said you needed to lose weight?...* It kind of sucky, I’m like: “Yeah, I am a fat pig”. Awe. “I hate this”. But yeah, my mom actually, she’s like: “You know I’m so glad you’re starting to get active again, Hazel… you really need to get active now, so when you’re older it won’t be so”…

But no, I’m actually kinda, like to get myself kinda psyched up for this, I have a contest with myself. By the end of the month, if I haven’t shaved off at least 10 minutes I’m going to have to go, like, do laps around the school or something. You know? Ah. *Your goal is to kind of get yourself running faster around the-*...

My mom says, when I told her I should probably start looking at what I eat, she’s like: “Oh no. Just start exercising first and then what you eat comes into place afterwards”. (Hazel, age 16)

But I think it's slowly been changing now because I have been working out like every week and I've been feeling slowly just better working out like every week and I've been feeling slowly just better about myself. And I've been eating less junk food. It's too bad. *Uh-huh. Okay. Can you tell me about that motivation? Like what was it that made you say I need to change my eating, I need to work out?* Well mostly it started like...I've been part of the gym for about a year and a half. Mostly 'cause my mom's like: “Hazel, we have...we need to go work out”. She's like: “You don't do enough outside of gym class at school”. And I was like,
yeah I know, okay, fine. But in the end, you know, it's also about blood pressure and diabetes and stuff like that because there is a history of diabetes in my family, especially because I do have aboriginal ancestry and they get diabetes very... *Yeah, yeah.* At a higher rate. It's mostly for health reasons that I started working out. (Hazel, age 17)

For Lauren, engaging in physical exercise with her mother was associated with being supportive of her mother’s weight loss attempts.

*Any changes about your thought for the future or worries about the future?* Well, now I’m in [an exercise program]… *So, you joined [this exercise program] with your mom?* Yeah… She signed up and I was like: “Okay we’ll do for this.” ‘Cause I don’t want her doing, like by yourself it’s not, she wouldn’t be a driven and stuff so I thought I’d do it with her and it’s fun… I guess you see a difference when you have someone with you that’s like with everything so I just figure you know this is, if I’m with her than she might be more like: “Oh maybe I won’t go today”. And I would be like: “Yes, I wanna go today”. ‘Cause that would make her go… *And is that because you’re tired of hearing your mom keep saying she has to lose weight or is because you do think you need to?* Umm, I never am like that, who cares but I guess for helping things and stuff like her doctor says: “Oh, she has to take cholesterol pills so if she stops or she loses a bit of weight then she doesn’t have to take then anymore”. So I said: “Great!” So I’m like: “Okay, we wanna help her to get that.” So that’s definitely motivation you just want your mom healthier and so. (Lauren, age 15)
Daughters feeling comfortable to ignore external standards at home

Most girls commented on their ability to ignore external standards related to clothing, make-up and hair in the presence of their parents. Moreover, there was a general consensus amongst these girls within the home setting revealing a lack of pressure to conform to the ‘ideal’ standards of beauty at all times.

Well I’m self-confident at home, like that’s a place where I just really don’t care what other people think about me. You know I’m kind of, and that’s yeah, just being self-confident is being able to stand up for myself. (Bronwen, age 12)

What would be something that you like wearing at home but you wouldn’t wear to school? I like wearing pyjamas a lot at home. I’m like, I’m wearing more sweats at home. I’m not sure why but I’m more comfortable, I just like, I don’t really care if my hair is messy at home. Sometimes, I feel really gross because it is messy hair. (Laughs) Yeah, there comes a part or eventually it bothers you, just because it doesn’t feel good, right? Yeah. But it sounds like you feel quite comfortable at home. Uh-huh. (Erica, age 12)

Do you find the clothes you wear at home are they different than the clothes you would wear to school? Sometimes, but, like, I don't know, at home I'll just throw on sweats or whatever sometimes, stuff I wouldn't really wear to school. (Madison, age 10)

Would you say that your clothing style changes when you are at home versus when you are at work or versus partying or is it all the same?... When I go home my parents have seen me every which way so I could care less. (Sarah, age 18)
What are your favourite clothes? I actually wear, well… I tend to wear like sweat pants and stuff at home, obviously because it’s so comfortable… When I am at home I just wear sweat pants and… I go around in lot of spandex… (Laughing) How does that make you feel? Okay. Okay. Yeah, I’m comfortable, I like spandex. (Bronwen, age 16)

For one girl, feeling comfortable at home in her clothing was achieved within her father’s definition of conservative-wear.

When I’m with my parents, a) I’m not trying to impress anyone and b) I just don’t really, I don’t care too much; a little bit but like I sometimes if I went outside in like tank tops or something my dad would be like: “No.” I go put a shirt on over that and I’d be like uh… on normal days what I’m wearing today, I’m wearing a sweater and no-one to impress or whatever, I’m just wearing a sweater but if I went to school, I always around my friends. I might have worn something different. (Lauren, age 15)

Parents offering their help in negotiating new body practices

As they transition through puberty, teenage girls are faced with novel situations which may require the assistance of parents in order to negotiate them. For example, pubescent girls experience the growth of hair on their legs and arms, underarms and genital area in the early stages of puberty. This can be perceived as embarrassing for them when wearing skin-revealing clothing such as shorts, t-shirts and bathing suits. Parents assisted their daughters in navigating this transition by helping and teaching their daughters to safely engage in new body practices, such as shaving and waxing, while fostering an acceptance for the female body.
For sure, so do they teach you at like what age are you supposed to start shaving, or like how do they...? Well, usually you know sugaring? Yeah. Yeah, that’s what they usually do, threading. I personally I am a wimp for pain, so I shave. I’m like: “Screw it!” Yeah. I’m not using that. I mean, my mom just does my lips ‘cause I’m hairy, which really sucks. And so, it’s so painful. I hate it. Really? What do you for your lips? Like with sugar... Oh, okay. She knows how to do that. Yeah. Like I hate it so much though. It’s like, I know it’s only, like, 5 minutes of pain – not even, but I can’t help it. (Hazel age 16)

So you said one of the first things you remembered was shaving your legs, do you remember how that started? My mom actually shaved my legs the first time. I was so scared ‘cause I would always see my sisters with nicks and stuff. So I was like: “Oh god, is this going to hurt, what is this going to do?” I was really nervous. After doing it that first time, I realized it wasn’t that bad. (Kelly, age 14)

Oh, okay. Because you didn’t want to show your legs. (Pause) Yeah. Umm, do a lot of girls your age shave? At my school? Yeah. Yeah. Do people. Do people just shave their legs? Umm, I know people who shave their arms too. Oh. Like, their forearms? Or. Yeah. Their arms. Oh, wow... When did you start doing that? I started doing that this year. Yeah? How did you know how to do that? My mom does it for me. Oh, okay... Do you do anything your arms? Yeah. Every once in a while I (inaudible). What do you do to them? I usually wax or shave them. Oh, wow. Your whole forearm? Yeah. Just, like, up here. Oh, wow. But it, it’s, I have a special thing that makes it, doesn’t make it grow long. How’s that? It, like,
Yeah. And what technique do you use to get rid of body hair? I want use like actual like hot wax but I haven't yet. Okay. But other than that absolutely everything. Okay. So what’s absolutely everything? Umm like the gel hair removal. Like me and my mom go through everything. Okay. She…except she’s waxed…she’s used wax strips. Yeah. Umm the gel, the foam, the lotion. Okay. Shaving. (Sarah, age 17)

Other girls expressed needing their parents’ assistance with other bodily practices, such as doing their hair.

Like my mom did everything for me. She woke me up, she put me on the couch, she made me breakfast, she did my hair, and she got my clothes. Right. When did that change? In Grade III, I think. Yeah? And then you started taking... Doing it myself, yeah. But now she, like, helps me sometimes with my hair when I it straightened ‘cause we have a big thick straightener and it scares me sometimes. (Alice, age 12 reflecting on her experiences in Grade 3 and younger)

How do you like to wear your hair? I’ve always had my hair in braids. Uh-huh. Like braids you have right now or different kind of braids? Yeah. Yeah. Umm, do you do your own hair, does mom braid your hair? Well, nanny used to braid my hair. Yeah? When it used to be up here. Okay. Baa! And then when I started riding my bike to school, I told her I wanted Wednesday hair, like Wednesday from the Adam’s family… (Laughing) (Roxas, age 15)
Do you like your hair a certain way? Well, yeah, I fret about my hair a lot. Probably because my hair is not naturally straight or anything and it poufs out now and then. And I get like: “Ah! My hair is awfuuuulll!” So what do you have to do to your hair to get it how you like it? Usually my mom will braid it or straighten it. (Roxas, age 16)

Another transitional aspect of puberty is the growth of breasts and the need for parents to accompany their daughters in order to purchase a bra.

Why do you think you were scared? I don't know. It seemed like such big deal then, but it's not at all. It just seemed like a big deal. Then I went bra shopping and I was so embarrassed. How did your mom respond when you asked her? She's like: “Sure, let's go shopping!” It wasn't a big deal to her but it was such a big deal to me. (Melissa, age 14)

One thing that some girls talk about too is what it was like to get their first bra, and whether that was an exciting thing or a not so nice thing. That was funny. Okay, that was probably one of the funniest times in my life ever. Because it was in [the South American country], so my mom couldn't take me because she couldn't speak Spanish, and my dad had to, and he knows absolutely nothing. So we were talking to Spanish ladies and they're talking to me and my dad's trying to translate and the “Okay”. How did you feel about that? I thought it was funny. (Sarah, age 14)

Finally, one girl mentioned her desire to engage in body modification, such as piercing and tattoos, and mentioned how her parents’ acceptance facilitated the attainment of her desires.
I notice you have lots of earrings. How old were you?... I love earrings. Yeah, it looks like it. How many do you have? I got 5, 4, and 1. Oh wow. So you got your bellybutton done too. Yeah. Me and my mom had them done. Oh, look at that, it's like a frog. That's so cute. My mom's philosophy is everyone should get their bellybuttons pierced when they're 40, type thing. (Sarah, age 14)

My dad promised me in a year and half he's taking me to get my first tattoo and stuff. Wow, do you know what you want? I think I want my name on the small of my back in black or red because they're my favourite colours. Black and red looks so good together. (Sarah, age 14)

Parents allowing their daughters to voice their opinions with regards to their appearance and clothing

When daughters were younger, parents tended to make decisions in regards to the appearance and clothing based on what they considered to be the right style for their daughter as well as her comfort. As the girls in this study grew older, the choice of clothing became increasingly important to them as they gradually became more independent and started forming their identities within the school, familial and community settings. For some girls, voicing their opinions with regards to their appearance and clothing allowed them to be comfortable in their bodies during physical activities.

And then when you started kindergarten, did what you like to wear change at all?

Well, I didn't like to wear dresses as much just 'cause we'd be running around and I'd be a lot more active, so it was more cumbersome, but things like pants and shorts, those were a little bit better for playing outside. Yeah. We've heard that a
A lot of girls say the same thing, that dresses were annoying because they couldn't play as much at recess. So when you were kind of getting into school, it sounds like you kind of had a little bit of say in what you wore or did you tell your mom I don't like wearing dresses or. Well, it would come up. Like we'd pick out clothes the night before and so she'd say okay, well this is what I laid out for you. Do you want to wear it? I'd be like okay, well I know tomorrow we have gym class, so I'd rather wear this than this, so it wasn't a big deal or anything, if I didn't want to wear something in particular or even if we were shopping and I didn't like something, or I liked something in particular. She'd always take that into account when she was buying and picking out clothes for me. So you felt like you had some choice and some say in the matter. (Ashley, age 15)

For other girls, parents allowed their daughters to voice their opinions with regards to the style of clothing they wished to wear or to purchase according to what their peers were wearing.

What other ways would you describe how you feel around your mom? I could actually ask her if I could wear these things. Like, when I'm dressing up or something, I could ask her if I could wear a skirt and stuff like that. She says sure. So I feel I can ask her if I can wear something. (Lauren, age 14)

Okay. Do you remember any point in the school being frustrated that you didn't want to wear some things, or that you wished you could wear certain things? That was probably around Grade 6 when the people were already going shopping with their older sisters and things like that and they'd come and say oh I bought this. I'd
go that's really cute, I wish I could buy that. But my mom was really understanding of things like that too. So if she knew I was interested in something, she'd say okay we can go shopping, we can buy this as well, so.

(Ashley, age 15)

Some girls expressed specific ideas, supported by their parents, with regards to clothing that contrasted from the general cultural expectations of feminine, fashionable or typical clothing.

You know, I know I’m not that old, but when I look at it now, little girls are more sexed up than they used to be… These little girls are wearing itty bitty miniskirts and, like, tube tops. I saw a two-year old with a bikini. Oh. Okay? And I was like: “You poor, poor child!” Yeah. Yeah. I felt so bad for her because, like, I mean, she doesn’t realize she’s just having fun in her, like water diaper, and you know in the pool. Yeah. But I’m like: “What kind of parent dresses a”... Like one piece I can understand ‘cause that’s normal. Exactly. But with a bikini for a two year old? Yeah. It almost made me cry. (Hazel, age 16)

When I was little, I didn't care if it matched or not. I would just to school like that and then come home and my mom would be like: “Did you wear that to school?”.

But things have to match. I don't know. I'm just like a little more accepting of flares and stuff like shorter shorts a little bit. Still, I wear things baggy, that's how I like them. Comfortable. (Lauren, age 14)

Finally, a small sample of girls expressed themselves through designing their own original garments or by having their maternal figures assist them with this process.
I made my own clothes and stuff… Wow! You made your own clothes what was that about’ I don’t know. Is that something you wanted to do? Yeah it was my mom’s idea I think, and then I decided to. Is that ever neat. Yeah. (Bronwen, age 12)

Can you tell me umm, do you remember what you liked to wear when you were in day care? I remember wearing a bunch of clothes my grandmother made, made for me. Yeah? Yeah. Were they clothes that you liked to wear or you didn’t like to wear? As long as it wasn’t a skirt, I’m pretty sure I liked to wear it. (Roxas, 15)

Parents reaching their daughters on how to handle external evaluative gaze

The ‘evaluative gaze’ is an attitudinal component of body image based upon an observer’s judgments about one’s physical appearance grounded in the ‘ideal’ standards of beauty (Moon, 2010). This evaluative external gaze permeates the lives of girls as they develop and experience bodily changes and can affect their judgments, thoughts and behaviors towards themselves and others (Liebermann, 2000). Parents can play an important role in shaping their daughter’s concept of the self by educating them about these gazes and their powerful influences. Throughout the themes discussed thus far, the reader can see how parents within this study have communicated with their daughters important messages against this external evaluative gaze and the pressures placed upon their daughters to give in to the unrealistic demands dictated by peers and the media. For instance, Hazel and Madison’s mothers, in previously mentioned examples, taught their daughters to stand up for themselves in the face of evaluation from others with regards to cultural judgments (see the ‘Feeling supported, understood and heard by parents’ section). In addition, Ashley’s mother discussed with her daughter the detrimental effects of
comparing herself and her body’s metabolism and nutritional needs to her peers in the ‘Emphasis on balanced and healthy eating’ section. The example below demonstrated how Alice’s mother educated her daughter with regards to the attention she was receiving from older boys concerning the development of female bodily features at the age of eleven.

Yeah. And so, when did you first start feeling like you look older than you are? How old were you? Umm… I was 11. I was coming out of the delivfor my mom. Uh-huh. And these guys drove by and honked at me. Oh. Okay. And then it was kind of, like: “Why did they do that?” And my mom says: “‘Cause they probably thought you’re older than you looked”. Oh... Or like when I, like, see, like, when I walk into a room, and I see older guys, they all just look at me. They look, at me. (Alice, 13 reflecting on when she was eleven)

At times, the girls evaluated themselves against the cultural ideals of beauty and the parental figures provided reassurance and an appreciation for the individuality and beauty of their daughter.

So how old were you when you started wearing make-up? That was when I moved here in grade 6... Yeah. The school I went to wouldn't allow you, and I'm like: “How can I be myself? So it sounds like that felt important for you for a way of being yourself. Yeah, I mean you are yourself. Was that your decision? Were you the first in your grade to start wearing it? Had other people started? I don't really pay... I don't even think I gave that any thought. Fair enough. Just started when you felt like it. Yeah. I'm like: “Oh, I feel ugly today”. Okay, can you say more about that? I don't know, I just have days where I feel really, really gross, even
when my mom tells me I'm not. She's like: “No, these are one of the better looking days you have”. (Sarah, age 14)

For some girls, consideration of the external gaze was accomplished within the cultural standards of the family of origin of their parents.

What you're wearing reflects who you are, like what kinda messages you're putting out. I never really thought about that… Like did you come home and talk with your mom about it, all those discussions? I did and like I thought it was… ‘Cause my mom is like, she's kinda raised in a different society, so what she thinks would be more provocative other people wouldn't think or vice versa. Like for an example, like for her showing the top wouldn't think big of a deal. Oh okay. So but whereas if you were wearing a mini mini skirt and you had all this leg, it'd be like: “What are you thinking?”, whereas here if you're wearing a really low cut skirt then it's more noticeable than wearing really short shorts? Oh okay. Like per se in some situations, so like for her some things I'd wear and she'd think they're totally appropriate, and then other things I would wear she wouldn't think it was appropriate. Okay. And then there was kinda a difference in that. (Ashley, age 16)

Well, did you ever notice at school that it just seems unfair like something is okay for boys to do but not okay for girls to do? Or there's pressure on girls to do something but not on boys? Well, nanny and I had made this joke about this once. We were [in a department store] and I don't know what happened but we somehow got on the trail of this and how umm: “Why is it that girls always dress up and put on a whole bunch of crap and makeup on to look good for the guys?”
Like if you really think about it in the animals, it's the guys who have to impress the girls. So shouldn't it be the guys who are dressing up for us and we just not do anything. Why? (Roxas, age 16)

*What kinds of things do you hear your mom or your nanny say... about the appearance of other women?* Oh, nanny's with me with the modelling thing. *Yeah, she agrees with you?* Yeah, we had to do an umm, article thingy, where you read an article and have a summary and elaborate some other crap for the issues class. And we had found one that said, that umm, researchers are finding it's good to be like 10 pounds over your ideal weight because it is good for you to have that extra amount of weight, and you're like: “What the hell?” And then the day after they had, like, a response to it, saying: “What the hell is going on? First they say no, not to have that extra weight and now they're telling us to”… *So what do you think about it? Did you agree or disagree with it?* I found it strange. But I used it and nanny helped me with it. (Roxas, age 16)

**Third core protective factor: Critical perspective on social location**

An individual’s social location can be conceptualized according to the group to which they belong and this group’s location within the historical context of the society at large (McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008). In addition, one’s social location within a specific context can refer to one’s cultural and ethnic beliefs in addition to considering facets of race, age, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion, geographic location, class identities and abilities or disabilities (Moodley & Walcott, 2010). The girl’s identity is heavily influenced by intersectionality of their parental influences with the social roles, power and privileges conferred
to them by society as they are exposed to different types of social organization and experience prejudice and societal oppression. The social location of the participants lead to positive embodied experiences with regards to four themes: 1) differential treatment by parents in comparison with sibling due to gender; 2) differential treatment by parents in comparison with sibling due to age; 3) a positive connection to one’s culture; and 4) a positive connection to one’s religion.

**Differential treatment in comparison with sibling due to gender**

Within the family, a daughter’s social location can serve to protect and foster a positive lived experience within the body. For instance, Erica’s example reported earlier in the ‘feeling protected by parents’ section demonstrating her appreciation of the differential physical treatment received by her father in comparison with her male siblings whereby her father did not engage in rough play with her as a result of her gender.

**Differential treatment in comparison with sibling due to age**

In the same way, the girls in this study seldom discussed experiencing positive embodiment in relation to their age, older or younger, within the family constellation. One passage discussed the privileged position of being the eldest as a right to undergoing an aboriginal tradition.

Yeah, and you're supposed to bring something that you've had for a long time and you're supposed to burn it over a fire and it shows the spirits that you are becoming a woman and like, cause you're giving the spirit something of yours. *Do you know what you're going to bring?* Yeah, I have this baby blanket, it has Mickey Mouse on it and it's folded in my closet, I've had it since I was a baby,
and no one is allowed to touch it now. I'm going to bring that 'cause it's really special. My mom did it too with her baby blanket. So that's the reason I'm doing it. Oh, that's nice. That's a nice tradition, something nice to pass on to your children. Yeah, but it's only the oldest daughter that's supposed to do it. Like my mom was the eldest. My sister's not going to be able to do it. Because it's part of the religion that it's only the oldest daughter. Umm, but when I have a daughter I'm going to do it for her. Cool, I like that. (Jackie, age 15)

**Positive connection to one's culture**

For the purposes of discussing the results of this study, the term culture was used generally to encompass aspects of social location including race, sexual orientation, geographic location, class identities and abilities or disabilities and excluding religion, which will be discussed separately below. We have discussed thus far examples in which the girls have been empowered in their bodies as a result of the cultural influences transmitted by their parents. For instance, Bronwen positively reflected on how her mother and members of her cultural community reunited in her honour to celebrate the onset of her menarche (see the ‘Feeling comfortable speaking about one’s body experiences with parents’ section). Similarly, we have considered Jackie’s experience in the section above where she experienced a connection to her culture as the eldest daughter. Jackie further elaborated on this cultural connection in the quotes below.

My mom said that when I turn 16 she's going to bring me to do what the girls do. Which is they go to a shaman, which is a medicine woman or man, and there's like herbal things that they do and they get a little package, like a little leather
and the shaman tells you, umm, what things, like everybody has their own things that they have to put in the bag. And you talk to them for a while, and they tell you like this is for you. Like my mom has amethyst and ferns in hers, cause she's a peacekeepers apparently, and that's the things for peacekeepers. And so you go and talk to the shaman and they give you your little leather bag and then they tie it on a dream catcher. Oh, fantastic. And you're supposed to hang it somewhere… Cool. So your mom got that when she turned 16? Wow, that's an awesome tradition, I really like that... That's cool, that's something to look forward to, is that your next birthday then? Yeah… She says she's going to take me up to [name of place] where her grandmother lives; she's a shaman… and she knows all sorts of things. And apparently we're going on a four hour hike to pick up things. And I bet you anything there's no little ferns left in that bag in my mom's it's all gone and decayed! (Laughter) Well, it sounds like it has a lot of meaning to her, that's really nice. I'm sure it will for you, too. That's great... That's all so very interesting. Umm, and I'm glad to hear that you feel such good strong connection, it sounds like your mom has worked hard to give you guys that cultural identity. (Jackie, age 15)

Many of the other girls reported a similar connection to their culture and cultural traditions.

Are you friends with any other girls who is Aboriginal? No. Well, there's this one named [female name], she goes to another school. And how did you meet her? Our moms introduced us at [an indigenous national event]. She always takes me, but we missed it this year. Oh, did you? Do you like going to things like that? Yeah, ‘cause I get to skip school! Yeah? So, what kinds of things happen on that
day? Well, we get to go to a pancake breakfast, and then some people if you want, you can walk to the Forks, but me and my mom drive there, it's easier. And then there's activities there, like, umm, necklace beading and stuff like that. It's pretty fun. (Alice, age 10)

I think I've always always had a pretty strong self, like sense of self. But I think as you're going through like the pre-adolescent age, when you're like, especially the transition from elementary school to junior high, it was kind of difficult because you were just thrown into a different environment and things like that. But I always go back to my values and things like that, so I always try and stay in touch with what I believe in. What helps you do that? What kinds of? What do you attribute that to? Where did you learn that? Definitely home. I think home has been a really positive environment for me, as well as church and things like that. And I think also the people who I surround myself with, they're always people that are encouraging me to do the right thing and to strive to be the good person that I want to be. (Ashley, age 15)

So if somebody were to ask you, like you had identified yourself as Métis, is that okay if I use that? Yeah. Okay, so we have a bunch of questions here and some of them will apply strongly to you while others might not, so we'll just do the best that we can. So do you think being Métis allows you to do things that your friends from other background can't do? Yeah! Can you tell me about that? Well, every year, my mom brings us to a pow wow. Oh cool! Which is a Native get together from all the tribes that live in Canada, like people come from British Columbia. Wow, really? That's so cool. It's actually held in downtown [city name]. Okay,
cool. So ever since you were a kid? Yeah, I remember the first time I ever went to one and my mom got me this little wishing stone, it was a hand painted stone, and I thought it was the most amazing thing ever. It had a turtle on it, and apparently if you wish on it at night, your wish will come true...sooner or later! (Laughter)

Oh cool! And it also apparently wears off bad dreams. (Jackie, age 15)

A cultural understanding and appreciation was also important in internalizing the evaluative external gaze while being cognizant of the cultural variability in defining the standards of beauty. For instance, Ashley previously discussed her mother’s cultural biases towards provocative clothing and appropriate areas of skin to display in public (exposing the cleavage versus showing the thighs).

[My mom] appreciated what they were trying to do and she appreciates the messages they try to bring us, but then for her she thinks it's really important for you to internalize them and be critical of them and then to come up with your own thing, 'cause like my religion isn't supposed to be about what other people are telling you to do, it's supposed to be about you and your relationship. Good, yeah yeah. Was that something growing up that your mom would talk with you about or do you feel a strong connection to your culture through your mom and her friends or anything like that? Well, at a younger age, like I was really closely connected with my mom’s friend’s kids, like we're still best friends right now… So you know that those friends are for real and things like that. So I've known them since they were born and things like that. So through them that's my real sense of community and my own culture. (Ashley, age 16)
Finally, allowing for a consideration of the contributions of the minority culture (e.g., Métis, Aboriginal, African American) within the context of the White dominant culture allowed for a positive integration of one’s culture of origin within their connected embodied experience.

*Does being black prevent you from doing things that your friends from other backgrounds can do?* Well, I just think like ethnic practices and things like that. But like, I think to a certain degree you have to like, as umm, like as trying to be multicultural these things that I try to retain from my culture and things that I adapt to as well. *Uh-huh, sure.* So I think like even like things like thanksgiving, it's a huge deal here, whereas in [an African country], it's like, what's that, turkey? Okay, big deal. (Laughs) *Yeah.* So I think that like as in my family, my mom tries to incorporate us because like basically we are Canadian, this is what we've been brought up with, but things that are important to her as well. *Sure, so she kind of, it's important for her to teach you guys about your heritage, but then also learn about things in Canada that might not be the same?* Exactly, like we'll still have thanksgiving dinner and things like that, even though it's not a big deal to her, but it might be a big deal to us. (Ashley, age 16)

Well, I don't think she has changed a lot of her view I just think that she has kind of taken a different perspective on things, so, like for body image and health like it is a bigger deal here, like everyone is trying to get into alternative medicines and things like that and it's just trying like health and being like young and things like that is a huge deal here, per se, it's not a big deal there, for real in Africa if you get gray hair or like, it's a positive thing, because you're getting older like you've lived that long, you have a lot of wisdom, and it gives you respect whereas
here it's a negative thing to have gray hair and people are trying to fight ageing whereas there people are embracing ageing, it's a positive thing to be getting old, so... When things are very different, so I don't think like, here it's not a big deal it's like: “Oh Mom, you have a gray hair coming in!” and she doesn't think it's that big of a deal she's like ah, ah, ah, whereas the people here will be like: “Oh no!” Like stressing and dyeing hair and things like that. So I think she understands both perspectives and… she doesn't think it's a big deal to be getting older and I don't think it's a big deal either. So, I try to embrace that. (Ashley, age 16)

So when, if somebody would ask you what your ethnicity is, how do you answer that? Or what your background is?... I’ll be like: “I’m Russian-Ukrainian Aboriginal, English, Jewish and stuff like that.” Oh, okay. That’s a good way of doing it. And do you feel good about that? Yeah... So, you’ mix your biologic parents’ background with your adopted parents’ background? Yeah.

Positive connection to one’s religion

Similar to the cultural features discussed above, experiences within one’s religion could also be internalized as positive or disruptive. For a small sample of girls, religion was identified as an important protective factor promoting a sense of resilience in their body during their developmental transition from childhood to womanhood. Identification with their personal faith and religious affiliation within a familial setting provided some of the girls with a strengthened connection with their body, families and faith. For example, Ashley discussed how her strong sense of self evolved from her values rooted in her religious beliefs communicated by her family and community (see the ‘Parental encouragement as a contributor to self-confidence’ section).
By the same token, Hazel reviewed in several quotes the positive impact of the religion of Islam on her embodied experience.

*Yeah.* And religion – what religion is your family? Islam. *Uh-huh.* And how would you describe your, like, your, umm – what is the name? Is it strict Islam or?... How would you describe it? I’m not sure – we’re pretty liberal. *Yeah.* I mean, you know, we follow the practices, but Islam is a very flexible religion. *Yeah.* So, you know, I mean. My dad has issues with me talking to boys, but what dad doesn’t really? (Laughing) Well, really we’re very flexible about lots of things. (Hazel, age 16)

And I was like, I actually noticed that a lot of my friends in Islamic school were ashamed that they had [their periods]. *Really?* You know, it was kind of this stigma thing. I don’t even care if my male teachers know, it’s like: “You know what goes on. You have a wife”. *Yeah.* Like my teacher when he first asked: “Hey guys, you know, it’s time for prayer”. I was like: “I can’t”. And he’s like, and then, ‘cause he was told about it. he was like: “Oh. Okay”. But yeah, so then I come home and I’m like, my mom is sleeping, you know, tired. And I come in and knock on the door, and I’m like: “Hey Mom”. And she’s like: “Hi. School over already?”... And so I was like: “Guess what mom. I started my period”. And she said: “What!” She actually was more, had more reaction than I did. She said: “You could’ve come home earlier! I would’ve taken you home early!” *Awe.* I was like: “Really? Darn it. Darn, I could have skipped out on a day of school”. It was actually so funny. The only person I didn’t know how to tell was my Dad. *Really?* Yeah, ‘cause you know praying and stuff is really important and so my Dad’s
like: “Hazel, did you pray Salat-ul Dhuhr?” Which is the afternoon prayer. *Uh huh.* And I was like: “Uh, no I didn’t”. And so he starts walking upstairs and my mom goes whisper to him and he’s like: “Okay. Ahem. You don’t have to hide it, it’s fine. If you can’t pray, just tell me”. (Hazel, age 16)

*Do you ever feel like being Muslim interferes or interrupts or makes it difficult to exercise or do certain forms of exercise?* Uh-huh, no not really. ‘Cause we go to that girl’s gym. And because there are no boys there, we always take off our scarves anyways. *Oh, great.* Yeah, so it's pretty nice. (Hazel, age 17)

There's a saying in my religion: "There's no compulsion in religion". You know. *Ahhh* ‘Cause you can't force someone to become a Muslim just like you know how like some religions are like "join our religion or you're going to hell!"

*Exactly, yeah.* ‘Cause that's not the way we want to be seen, ‘cause you know, it's pretty flexible our religion, so it's good. (Hazel, age 17)

**Core Risk Factors**

**First core risk factor: Negative relational qualities**

Similar to the core protective factors discussed above, the most prominent domain of core risk factors associated with a disrupted embodied experience involved negative relational experiences with parental figures. Seven relational factors were discussed by the girls in this study related to a disconnected lived experiences within their body, including 1) feeling uncomfortable speaking about one’s body experiences with parents; 2) the experience of conflict and disagreements with parents; 3) being forced to comply with, or being silenced by, parents; 4) feeling unsupported by parents in the pursuit of their own interests; 5) feeling neglected or
detached from parental figures; 6) identifying parental figures as negative role models of desired relational qualities; and 7) the impact of familial changes on relational experiences with parents.

**Feeling uncomfortable speaking about one’s body experience with parents**

As mentioned previously, the developmental transition from childhood into womanhood is accompanied by novel changes, experiences and interests related to the body. Both parents and daughters experienced some distress during this transitional period as they attempted to understand and react appropriately to the emerging transformations. At times, a girl’s ability to discuss arising concerns with her parents was restricted by her parent’s comfort level with addressing and seriously discussing such topics.

*How old were you when [your father] started making comments about makeup or fair skin do you think?... In the last year or two I think. He’s really uncomfortable with me becoming, like, a teenager or whatever, because he doesn’t know how to deal with me, but it makes me mad because I’m just the same, really. Like I might be changing, like I might get mad at him or something, but I’m still the same, and it really hurts me because I feel that he likes my brother more than me, and so that really hurts my feelings. (Bronwen, age 12)*

That's another thing about sheltered Muslim households. I find that they stay, not younger longer, but sort of innocent but not quite. ‘Cause they learn things from their friends that aren't... couldn't be true, you know? *Oh, okay.* So that's why I think that Muslim parents should be more open about stuff like that with their kids, because they could be learning from their friends who have completely wrong information... about sex and stuff... *And then you said you're kinda*
worried thinking about sex and stuff. What do you...tell me about that? Mostly the hurt (Laughs)...Where'd you hear about that?... I dunno. ‘Cause it's not my mom per se, but it's hard to talk about sex in Muslim families because it's not shameful, but it's one of those things that's very taboo. Just like, you know homosexuality. You know, that kinda thing? Right. It's a very shy topic. (Hazel, age 17)

Some of the adolescent girls in this study acknowledged feeling uncomfortable and embarrassed when considering approaching their parents or when breaching the topic of their adolescent bodies, needs and urges within the parental relationship.

If you had a question about something that’s happening with your body, or your body changes, who would you ask?... Friends... ‘cause, like, it’s kind of hard to talk to your mom after, like, a while... it’s hard to talk to her now because she makes sounds so ‘Ewe Gooey’ and stuff like that. What other examples are there that you like to talk to with friends but not your mom? Umm boys, with boys, people, places, sex, and stuff. (Alice, age 12)

Do you feel comfortable sharing with me which topics in general it’s not comfortable talking about... Just stuff like I did try drugs a while ago and, but that’s like not anymore you know, I totally dropped that. Okay. I don’t know I just couldn’t stand keeping it from my mom, my dad but my mom like I can’t stand it and also like the whole like issue on sex and stuff like that. Yeah, yeah, so those are the two that’s really hard to talk to her about. Oh yeah... (Sarah, age 15)

And so you have five piercings in one ear and four in the other? I guess that’s more now? Yeah five and five and I did have my web pierced like... Oh yeah your
tongue is it? Yeah here right under my tongue? And I took it out… I think it was because I was starting to get sick and I found out I had mono and I didn’t want the doctor going down my throat and my mom being like: “What the hell”? Your mom didn’t know you had it pierced? Nooooo. (Sarah, age 15)

What are the messages about sex that you get from parents? Don’t do it, abstinence is the answer. And do you talk openly with your parents about sex or is it kind of off limits for you? I don’t really want to. My mom will sometimes try and bring it up, not that I’d want to… Right, so it’s not a topic that you like talking about with? Not really. (Lauren, age 15)

Fathers, in particular, were associated with a heightened level of discomfort as some girls envisioned that their father would be unable to understand the changes associated with their developing female bodies and shifts in interests.

How did you feel about your body once you got your period?... It was horrible – I hated it so much… And then I got it, like, the night before I left for, like, a [city name] on my big [sport] trip… And I went just with my dad, so it was like…it just felt awkward. And I was just, like, I felt so horrible and gross... ‘Cause like, you’re just like in a hotel room together, it’s just like, I don’t know… Did you worry? Like: “Oh my god! What if he sees them in the garbage?” (Melissa, age 16)

‘Cause I mean I think it's hard for [my dad], like just being in that kind of relationship and stuff like that. But he doesn't know how to be a good father to me… Well like becoming a teenager… I think everyone treats teenagers like they
are nothing I think, and I think that is so stupid because that's the time when you really need identity. Like you need people to give you like an identity for who you are, but they kinda like: “Oh, you are a teenager umm or whatever”. I think that is so stupid. (Bronwen, age 13)

*So tell me more about drinking to pass out...* Well, I mean not drinking to like pass out but like I mean between the girls like it’s just, you know, we just have fun I guess. *Okay. Have things like drinking changed in the last two years?* Umm yes, because like it’s not something I hide from my parents. Well, like my dad more than anything because my mom is like: “Okay, you guys can bring your booze. Just don’t get drunk during the day and don’t tell your father, okay?” That type of thing. (Sarah, age 17)

*Experience of conflict and disagreements with parents*

When considering the dynamics of parent-daughter interactions, it is inevitable that conflicts, disagreements and problem solving occurred as parents and their daughters negotiated arising issues and concerns. In some instances, conflicts and disagreements did not affect the quality of the parent-child relationship or the embodied experience of the daughter during the transition from childhood into adolescent. However, conflictual issues had a significant detrimental impact of the lived experiences when the disagreement included a reduced degree of perceived support from parents, an increase in hostility or resentment towards the parents or derogation of the daughter by the parents.

So, it ended up that I was an hour late for work, which I feel horrible about… like the [sport facility] is very chill about stuff… But, [the owner] had called my mom
and my mom was flipping out. So, like it turned into a huge conflict thing. And the other thing, so, we had this big argument about it, and... because I felt horrible, and I totally take responsibility for the fact that I screwed up... But, [my mom] said to me: “This is the third time since you got your license that there have been panic times where I don’t know where you are”. And I understand... That it’s important to know where your kid is... because my mom thought that I was probably in an accident or something and that was totally wrong of me, but, ...so, it just feels like—it feels like she is really...she doesn’t know what to do with me. (Bronwen, age 16)

So when you first moved out here, umm, you and your mom and your sister, were you guys still living in the same house, like after your mom's partner left? No, [mother’s female partner] sold the house after. So we were, we moved into an apartment as soon as they broke up. How was that for you?... Well, I was kind of happy about it because [mother’s female partner] was always pretty hard on me. She wasn't hard on my sister; she was mostly hard on me... I was just constantly getting in trouble for things that Madison and I did together... She umm kind of verbally, like always calling me names and stuff... But she was always really good at hiding it from my mom, and that's why they didn't break up until they did. It was because it was always like, oh yeah, they're such good kids and everything, but as soon as my mom left for work, it's like, umm, yeah. Okay, so really stressful. (Jackie, age 15)

I have to talk about math. Oh, okay. And that was the test you had today. Yeah. Okay. My parents were like, well, your priorities maybe need a little reworking.
Umm. Which clearly included soccer, baseball and MSN… So there's a little bit of an argument about that… And then I got kind of upset because I was like, well I'm trying to study for a math test right now and you guys are trying to talk to me about my priorities. Like I really don't need that right now. Uh-huh. So like a bigger fight and then that lasted like the whole night and so I didn't really get much studying done. Okay. So I also blame that for why I didn't get a good mark on this math test. (Lauren, age 17)

And does it matter what your skin colour is? No? Well, it might to parents. Really? Like if your parents doesn’t like a black guy and you’re going out with a black guy. Really? And you’re in trouble. Have you seen that happen before? Did somebody get into trouble for that? I didn’t, but, the person who I’m going out with is black, right? But he’s really nice to me. So my dad found out, and he doesn’t like that guy. Really? Yeah, he’s kind of racist. But I got mad at him. I’m like: “It doesn’t matter (inaudible)”. Yeah! For sure... The inside is what counts; skin colour doesn’t matter... What’d your dad say to that? Like: “Whatever!” (Madison, age 12)

So what do you think changed? Like what do you think happened in the last six months? I don’t know. All I have is really gone, a lot more distant with my family, like well my dad… like I tried doing dishes with him last night and it ended up in this huge fight, and last night my mom is just like: “Okay Sarah either you are going to have to eat at a different table or [father name], you are going to have to eat at a different table” Wow. That bad? Yeah, like we can’t stand each other. Like we are so immature like when we fight we will just say whatever is on
the top of our head because we are so much alike we react the exact same…
‘Cause that’s what happened last night… We start raging on each other and he is like: “Shut up and do the dishes”… Like if he says one rude comment to me I’m on him like and he we do the same thing to each other like all the time. My mom is so fed up. *So what kind of comment from him might set you off or get under your skin?* Ahhh just something, something, really, really immature like he will be like: “Talk to the hand”… Like stupid stuff. (Sarah, age 15)

Sarah continued to experience a conflictual relationship with her father throughout her third interview and described the resulting consequence to her lived experienced in the presence of her father.

*What would your body say about how it’s feeling when you’re in the room with your dad?* Just I…I don’t know if I’d call it uncomfortable but it’s kind of like I just don’t want to be there. *Okay, yeah.* ‘Cause I know that like it’s all we do is argue. *Okay.* All we do is argue. (Sarah, age 17)

Interestingly for one girl, a disrupted embodied experience resulting from parental conflict resulted in a disconnection from parents while also reinforcing a connection with peers as similar experiences were shared.

I got so mad at my dad once ‘cause he got mad at me for, like, he thought I was late for school. Like it was me who snuck out of my house at 10, but it was really my brother. *Oh.* Yeah. And so he kept yelling at me, he’s like: “You’re not going to go out with your friends on Friday to see that [title] movie”. And I was like: “I didn’t do it”. I was like scr. You know, we got into a huge fight. *Awe.* And then,
you know, he finds out it was really my brother, so he’s like: “Sorry, Hazel. I thought it was you”. I was like: “You made me cry, and all you can say is sorry, I thought it was you?” Oh, I got so mad. So I ranted about him, like, all day to my friends. And they’re like: “It’s okay, Hazel”. And then they gave me their bad parent stories and then everything was better. (Hazel, age 16)

For many girls, parental conflicts arising from situations that undermined their daughters’ pursuit for autonomy were associated with a negative experience within the body and at times, with feelings of resentment towards the parental figure involved.

Yeah, so how old are you now? I’m sixteen. Sixteen, very cool. And if I remember correctly, you just got your G1?... G2... G2 is where you can drive by yourself. What was that like? It’s absolutely tremendous. I love it so much… I feel kind of stupid because I’m always just like, I have my license, I’m free but, it’s not perfect because that, since I got my license, that’s when me and mom started fighting a lot to bike to work. Which, we have an electric bike. Okay. But I don’t want to bike to work… So, and it’s just something that I know I’m totally biased and I’m going to make her sound very like, you know, the whatever—the evil mom kind of thing, and she is not, but that has been a problem. And also her—she needs to know where I’m all the time… And there have been times when she has been totally freaked because she doesn’t know where I’m. (Bronwen, age 16)

How did you, did your, did you talk to your mom? Like I want to go out with this boy... Yes. Yeah? Every time. I asked a lot. (Laughs) Tell me about that. Like a boy would ask you out and then you’d tell your mom? Yeah (Laughs) a lot…
Same answer… No… Not allowed. (Laughs) And what would you say?… I’d say, Mooooom, everybody keeps, everybody’s allowed to, every girl, every boy but me… Then when somebody I want to go out with asks me, I have to say no…. And what does your mom say? She says wait ‘til your 16… I shouldn’t wait until I’m 16. ‘Cause my brother [male name] is 15 and he’s been dating for a year… It’s not fair. Did you say that to your mom? Yes. And what did she say?… She thinks it’s different ‘cause I’m a girl… It’s not different…Should be able to trust me… And do you try to convince them otherwise? Yes… Well mostly just my mom… I don’t really like to talk about it with my dad because of, me and my friend [male name]… because he’s a boy my dad thinks that he’s always, he likes me. Oh. And so he always tells [male name] that he has a gun… and he says that to watch out and all that (Laughs). Really? Does that frustrate you? Yes. And [male name] is scared of my dad now (Laughs). (Erica, age 11)

Do you remember how your parents reacted to you around that age? What were there...?... They pretty much do whatever, except when it was picture day or something then my mom would dress me up… What did that feel like when picture day came along? I would like cry and I would fight with her. What do you think being dressed up meant to you at that age? I don’t know. It was kind of like she was trying to change me into someone else. ’Cause she wouldn’t let me be what I was like all the time. (Melissa, age 14)
**Being forced to comply with, or being silenced by, parents**

While interacting with parents, certain situations required the parent-daughter dyad to evaluate and negotiate what course of action should be taken. Such decision points occurred with regards to an array of developmental transitions and, at times, allowed the daughters to learn the skills necessary to negotiate life events while empowering themselves through their lived experience. Undoubtedly, certain situations were approached in different ways by both parents and daughters depending on their perspectives and desired outcomes. In those instances, many girls discussed feeling obligated to comply with their parents’ perspective without being able to voice their opinion or reasoning. For instance, the example of Erica in the section above in regards to dating casted doubt on whether her opinion and arguments were heard or given any consideration by her parents. Similar examples were described with regards to the girls’ ability to pursue educational options and passions.

We, the thing that we argue about the most or is the most tension in our family is probably, like, my education. Cause I'm in this program and it's really, really intense and sometimes I'm not having a lot of fun in it and I just don't think, like, I feel like I'm not in control of my life and things like that. And then, it's just like, even things like what courses I want to go into, I think I wanna do this, and she's like: “No, you should that”. And then, so usually I end up having to do all of them! I do my interests plus, like, things that she wants me to do and then I just have this huge work load and then it just sucks because I have no spare time.

(Ashley, age 16)
So me and four others went to [school name]. Wow! How did you decide which one to go to? I was forced. Okay.... For what, for what reasons? I don’t know. She didn’t really have, my mom just made me go there. She didn’t really have a good reason. Awe! That’s why it was hard ‘cause she was like: “I want you to go there, so you’re going there”. (Laughing) And did you.... Were you upset about that? Yeah. (Melissa, age 16)

Are you still doing some of your photography? Oh yeah, I really like photography… But the thing that's starting to bother me a little bit is that [my sister and her husband] keep asking me to take their pictures. I don't mind it, but I like to do my own thing at my own time. I really like landscape… I always have my mom saying: “Have you done this? Have you done that?” So I feel pressure to always be doing it and work on it. It's a little annoying, I like to do my own thing, no pressure no rushing. My mom is always like: “Have you worked on the pictures yet? You should work on the pictures”. She doesn't mean to do it, she just does. (Kelly, age 18)

Are there any activities that you used to do when you were younger that you wish you were still doing now? Hockey with the guys. Yeah. I guess that’s about it I think. I miss hockey with the guys. Uh-huh. For sure and that’s definitely something I’d kick my parents for. Yeah. ‘Cause I loved that. It really didn’t feel like it was your choice. No, well, it wasn’t. I’d still be playing no doubt about it. I’d still be playing. (Sarah, age 17)
Similarly, many girls highlighted disrupted embodied experiences in the domain of physical appearance (e.g. hair, clothing and makeup), developmental changes (e.g. menstruation) and ability to voice their opinion as a result of the forced compliance or silencing by their parents.

_Tell me about when you started wearing make-up._ Makeup?... Probably in grade eight, yeah, grade eight and I just wear like eyeliner and. _Do you remember when you made that decision, like?_ I don’t, I really don’t. Umm my mom you know she’s just like you know: “Oh, once you start wearing make-up you won’t stop”. And I’m like: “Okay, what a weirdo”. And I remember… it because the end of grade eight was again you’re graduating… my mom said: “Okay, I’m gonna put makeup on you”. And I remember saying: “Oh they’re coming at me with the mascara”. And I was like I couldn’t hold my eyes open, it was terrible. It took them like an hour to get the stuff on me because I kept blinking and going like that backing away and even though I tried not I feel like oh it was so bad. (Lauren, age 15)

My period… That was really scary… And I was really embarrassed to talk about it. I wouldn’t tell my friends or anything. And then I went to a sleepover at my friend’s house, and my mom would come over and start talking away about it, and I was just like: “Oh no!” It was really embarrassing, it was a tough time. (Kelly, age 14 reflecting on the onset of her menstruation)

_Are there things you wish you could wear but it’s not cool to wear that or?…_ There’s always things I wish I could wear but my parents won’t let me. Like, all my other friends. Like they have different clothing than I do. (Alice, age 12)
So how about grade three, do you remember what you thought about your body in grade three? That grade, I hated my hair; hated it cause my dad chopped it all off. I had like this much hair and I hated it and I’ve always wanted to grow my hair…

How come your dad cut your hair? I don’t know. Well this is what he says; he thought that my mom liked it that way and my mom thought that he liked that way so none of them really liked it. Was there anything else about having short hair you didn’t like? Umm, I found that I couldn’t put it up in a pony tails or do it like do my hair in any way that like [my female friend] could… [Female friend] had this, she had beautiful blonde hair and she always had it in this beautiful either a French braid at the top of and then long braid at the bottom or just a long braid and it was always so beautiful. (Jackie, age 12 reflecting on her childhood)

And then, do you remember what you liked to wear when you were in Junior Kindergarten? I remember (Laughter) a lot of what I had to wear ‘cause my mom dressed me till grade one and she made me wear dresses and I hated it. Tell me about that. I hated it; we had a jungle gym right so you’re playing tag and then you know you’d be running up the stairs and stuff and it was tag and then you know you’d be running up the stairs and stuff and it was a pain cause you’re wearing a dress and it’s difficult to run in and I used to fight with my mom in the morning no, I’m not wearing it, I’m not wearing it. (Lauren, age 15 reflecting on her childhood)

Just ‘cause of the Canadian culture, too. It’s more open than, you know. Especially like when I go to peoples’ houses I really have to… my mom's always kicking me like: “Shhh, Hazel you're saying something stupid again”. (Laughs)
You know? ‘Cause ‘foot in mouth syndrome’... that's what I have. It's like a reflex with my mom. I'm saying like: “Hi”. And she'll be like: “Shhh”. It's like: “MOM!”... I'm like: “I didn't say anything bad this time”... Oh, it's so awful.

(Hazel, age 17)

A striking example of forced compliance was revealed by Sarah in the domain of eating and control over her food intake. She described her mother’s forced compliance to a dietary plan in order to support her brother and father who needed to lose weight.

My whole family went on a diet. Me and my mom just had to do it for my brother and my dad's sake because they eat in large portions and my mom couldn't handle it. She's just like: “Sarah, we've got to do something, and I want them to go on the [name] diet”. And I'm like “Okay”, and she's like: “But I need you to also”. I'm like: “Argghhh”… Okay, how were you feeling about yourself at the time? Were you wanting to lose weight or not really thinking about it? Yeah...

(Sarah, age 15 reflecting on when she was in grade 6)

Her negative feelings towards the diet were discussed further when she revealed that neither her nor her mother perceived themselves as needing to engage in this weight loss attempt.

And you first started paying attention to your body a bit more when your whole family went on the [name] Diet? Oh yeah, that was terrible… What was that like? Well my family, let’s face it, needed it. But when things like, the [name] Diet, if you are off it, you just gain everything all back. You know so there is really no point… and we like no point in basically starving yourself. So were you on the [name] Diet as well? Like were you expected to take part in this? Yeah, yeah,
because my mom… she brought me a sign she is like: “Okay Sarah I know you and me don’t need it, like we could use it, you know but it’s not something we need but if your brother and your father because they are the ones that are like quite a bit bigger… you know so do it with them”. So it was kind of kind of support your dad and your brother and that? Yeah, yeah basically yeah (Sarah, age 15)

Finally, Jackie and Madison revealed a need to comply with respect to her mother’s female partner during and after their relationship, such as being restricted to engage in desired activities and fearing going home.

So did you guys stay in the house for a little while then? I think a couple of weeks at the most it was… That must have been pretty disruptive. How did you handle all that? Well, I didn't really, well, I don't know. It was just like, I kind of looked forward to doing new things without [mother’s female partner] being there. Like being able to actually live my life and hang out with friends and stuff. ‘Cause with her we weren't allowed out after four on a school night, and you couldn't be out without a parent, like we couldn't even go to the park down the street on our own. Like we were really boxed in to our little area. (Jackie, age 15, reflecting on when she was in grade 8)

And did you stay living in the house for a while after [your mom and her female partner] broke up? Yeah, we lived in, umm, top floor and she lived in the main floor… What was that like for you? It was kind of weird because I wasn’t allowed and was scared to go home. Like, after school, so I’d go to my friend’s house.
Yeah. What were you scared of? My mom told me not to go home if she was there... And to wait for her to come pick me up... That must have been hard for you. Yeah. (Madison, age 12)

**Feeling unsupported by parents in the pursuit of their own interests**

Another significant theme related to disrupted embodied experiences identified by the girls in this study was feeling unsupported by parents in the pursuit of their interests. The girls discussed how parental discouragements hindered their ability to pursue activities in the domains of school, sports and activities.

*Do you know where you need to go for school to do what you want to do?* I mean, I don’t want to leave [my city]. I’m such a homebody; I don’t want to leave... I mean I actually looked into some [discipline], like, there’s this one in [city in another province]... And I was like: “Oh, man, that would be so much fun”. My mom was like: “You know you can’t go without me”. Awe. I was like: “Umm okay. We’re going to have to cut the cord sometime, Mom”. (Hazel, 16)

*How did you make the decision or how long have you known what you wanted to do?* Oh man, I wanted to be an artist like professional until 9th Grade when someone crushed my dreams and said you can't make a living off art. Awe. It might have been Dad, I dunno. And uh, then afterwards, I decided I was going to be a journalist. Oh cool! And my dad also said you can't make money off that: “Journalism is not a good job, you know, opportunity for you!”... My dad is so weird. He puts a lot of emphasis, it's very cultural his emphasis, on math and science. (Hazel, age 17)
Yeah, it's a stressful time waiting to hear from universities. And my Dad's like the biggest worrier on the planet so he worried that like, obviously I've gotten into to school… you know, he just freaks out about it, so. He worries more than I do and then he gets me stressed out and then two of us are stressing out and then, it's just not good things. *This university* is kinda their first choice because of your brother [attends that university]? Uh-Huh… Yeah. Which is part of like, part of me, I know it's terrible, but like part of me is like I don't want to go there just because they want me to. (Lauren, age 17)

I used to play hockey so a lot guys I know play hockey. *Yeah, yeah. And do you still play hockey?* I do. Not with the guys. Like my parents after I got to…after I finish [certain level] my parents are like: “Oh, the guys are too big”… and so they made me drop out of the guy’s hockey and like I don’t even know why because I could probably take all the…like I broke a guy’s leg even. Like I know, like I know where I stand on the ice. (Sarah, age 17)

**Do you find the labels frustrating? Or do you just ignore them? Or, like, do you feel pressured from them?** I guess I just ignore them. I don’t really…. I guess I used to sort of feel pressured by them and sort of, like, I’d always want to be outside, catching bugs, you know? Like that thing? *Yeah.* And then my mom would be like: “No, wear this dress”. (Chuckle) “Go play with this little girl”… It’s like: “No, I want to play with [male name]!” (Laughing) *Why do you think your mom wanted you to, like, be more girly?* ‘Cause that was, like, what. That was what was expected and accepted, you know? Like: “You’re a girl, this is what you do”. You’re taught that from such a young age. Like: “You’re a girl, go play
with the Barbies”. You know? Like they set that up, like, from when you’re like one years old, like. Yeah. Absolutely. It’s all set up. (Melissa, age 16 reflecting on childhood)

One girl reported constantly feeling unsupported by one of her parents, which affected her confidence in her abilities and her attitude when tackling new projects.

Yeah, and actually like with my dad I can’t explain it, but when I’m with him I’m not as self-confident… I just kind of don’t feel as like whenever I want to take on a project or whatever, I find that he’s the one who is like: “Oh you should be careful about that kind of thing”… So that’s really hurt me kind of thing, like I really wanted to give to a charity… when I was younger so I really wanted to do that. But he’s… he was the one that kind of like, is like: “Oh I don’t know”…that kind of thing, and so I think that has really kind of hurt me… I think I have to kind of work with myself to be able to take on projects like that, because he’s kind of changed that for me so. It sounds like he has a bit more hesitancy around those projects? Yeah. You’re kind of hearing dad’s voice in the back of your head saying: “Oh be careful”. Yeah... I’m an attacker for projects, like I can just do projects, but with him I guess it’s just like I have to figure out what… is it my dad speaking or is it like my gut feeling. (Bronwen, age 12)

**Feeling neglected or detached from parental figures**

As seen in the previous examples discussed above, several communicative components are important when considering the interaction between parents and their daughters. Specifically, it is vital to first consider what is being said by the parents and subsequently to identify the
resulting affective reaction within the daughter. Many girls in this study discussed feeling neglected, detached and isolated from their parental figures following a specific interaction or situation, which resulted in disrupted embodied experiences as they felt unworthy of their parents’ love and attention. As expected, dynamics often changed within the family setting, such as the birth of a younger sibling or the blending of two families, which was described as taking away the attention from some of the girls interviewed.

Okay. Do you remember what that was like? Was that weird for you? It was pretty weird for me, because it was just me and my mom for a really long time. And then it was like: “Oh you're going to have a brother”. Like we were really, really close and always together… Like after he was born he had really bad asthma so it was really bad as well… And that's when my grandma moved in with us a bit, to help out. But that was really hard on me, cause I just felt like almost like neglected because like I don't know, just ‘cause I had another member of the family, actually two that I'd never had before. It was really different for me. You were having to share your mom in a way you didn't know before. Exactly… (Ashley, age 15)

And how has it been living with your dad? Do you find your relationship with him is better or worse? It was worse at the beginning, and then it kind of went down, and then now that, well, at the beginning, I guess I kind of rebelled against him because he had not spent a lot of time with me. Because there are so many siblings here and it's like we're all competing for time… And I guess I felt like I wasn't getting any, so I kind of rebelled for a little bit. And I did some things I regret…. Do you mind telling us about those paths, what happened? Well, when I
first started rebelling, I started smoking, which I still do, but, well, I started smoking, and there was this one, well, I started skipping school a lot, like every day my dad would get a call saying I hadn't been at school, for like fifteen days or something. And umm, finally I skipped this one time, and my principal sent the cops after me. *Oh, wow.* And that's when I got a reality check, ‘cause I didn't get arrested, but I literally got the handcuffs put on me and dragged back to the school. (Jackie, age 15)

A feeling of neglect and detachment also arose when Bronwen perceived her father as lacking a connection with her due the differential treatment she received from him in comparison with her younger male sibling.

*What is it about your dad that kind of leaves you feeling, can you maybe some examples of situations where you were like feeling a bit inadequate, or that you weren’t meeting his high expectation, or that you had to be to responsible?...* I think it might have been last year or whatever, but there was this pair of boots that I really wanted to get… and my dad went to a cattle show or whatever, and he brought a pair back for my brother, and that really like that really I was really really upset about that, because like [my brother’s name] like he has had like five pairs of these boots whereas I have never had a pair… so I think like that's what matters is the fact that you kind of it’s the feeling that it’s left me with, but I don’t know, it’s just… I just feel kind of I’m not connected with him… (Bronwen, age 12)
Many girls were adept at perceiving instances of sexism within their household with respect to societal prescribed ideals about women and their duties as housewife, which lead them to feeling detached from their paternal figure.

It’s just so sexist, affecting so much like that’s just one thing that makes me really mad. Where did you learn that from, like about sexism and about (inaudible) to be a housewife be separate’ Some kids you know have an idea about that pretty early and other kids don’t. Well I don’t know… I got it from books kind of thing, like the girl always goes and cleans and whatever, but I hate that, and I just find that so awful. And you know even in my family like when my mom is away I’m the one that does everything except cook, and so I just actually the other day like my mom is away for the weekend I just, I was, you know, cleaning and everything and dad is like, well: “It’s so much easier when you do that kind of thing Bronwen”. I’m like: “Oh yeah, I did everything” (Bronwen, age 12)

Well, like my mom’s been gone for whole entire week and it’s more like: “Sarah, make dinner, Sarah, make dinner”. I’m like, you know, it’s just… [My dad] sits, watches TV, does his own thing and everyone else is expected to do things for him… Yeah. Yeah. I mean one of the things we’re kind of exploring is how, you know, girls and teenagers and young women feel about themselves in different settings and I wonder in your relationship with your dad how it makes you feel about yourself. Umm, I’m also wondering how it makes you feel about…or how you feel about body when you’re with him… Umm well, mainly he’s, he’s, he is the biggest self-esteem like opposite of booster. Like he, he’s the one to lower pretty much anyone’s self-esteem. (Sarah, age 17)
As a result of the enduring feelings of neglect and detachment from her father, Bronwen experienced difficulties feeling sorrow and sadness as a result of her father’s encounter with cancer.

*Is [your dad] okay?* Yeah, he had [type] cancer so he’s still not full power again. It’s like he can’t lift. *What was that like for you?* It was scary. It was but I think it was kind of a different scary than most people would think, like: ‘Oh your dad is having cancer I feel so sorry for you. It must be really hard for you’… but it was kind of hard for me personally because… like just having him sick means that I had to do a lot more work and everything was just harder, but like I think if I was really close to my dad it would be very different, because I’d be like: “Oh my God, my dad has cancer”. (Bronwen, age 12)

For other girls, feeling neglected occurred as a result of their physical and emotional needs being inappropriately attended to by parental figures.

Like the other…like I had pink eye last week. *Oh, wow…* I was like: “Dad, I think I have pink eye”. He’s like: “Shut up, Sarah, you’re a hypochondriac”… That type of thing and I was like: “Dad, I seriously have pink eye”. He’s like: “Well… you did it to yourself”… Like he’s just, just disregard father completely… And then I go to the doctor and she’s like: “Yeah, you definitely have pink eye”. (Sarah, age 17)

*And you also said that sex would be a tough thing to talk with your mom about?* Yeah… I did happen to have sex not that long ago and I remember my mom saying that: “No, she wouldn’t put me on the pill because I’m too young”. *So at*
your age how much power do you feel that you have to make decisions about what kind of birth control you want to be using or like visiting your doctor on your own or something like that? I can’t even visit my doctor because I don’t trust her one bit. I just don’t like her so therefore I’m not telling her anything. Like I told my mom I’m like I don’t like her and that’s that. And my mom said: “Well too bad… there are no family doctors around here”. I’m like: “I’m not comfortable with her I don’t like her… I can’t trust her”. (Sarah, age 15)

I have really really bad seasonal depression but it was to the point where I wanted to end my life it was so, I was like going crazy. And my parents were leaving that night and I thought this is it, I can’t handle this. And so anyways I just broke out with a really bad anxiety attack where I was flat on my bed and I couldn’t really breathe and just going crazy. So my mom came in and they were just about to leave so they called [a female friend] and said: “Get over here, we don’t want her here alone”. Wow that sounds like a really rough time. (Sarah, age 18)

With my parents if I were to have a really bad anxiety attack they would get mad just because they get frustrated that they can’t figure it out or help me or do anything. So they get frustrated and my dad when I couldn’t get out of bed my dad just grabbed me by my ankles and threw me off the bed and yelled: “Stop this now”. And honestly I couldn’t do anything about it; I could not do a thing… My parents just don’t know how to handle it. (Sarah, age 18)

For Sarah, such feelings of neglect and detachment from both her parents lead her to distance herself from them.
This is a weird question but if you... when you’re at home with your dad, if your body could speak what would your body say? Get the hell away from me. Okay.

We, we have a hard time staying in the same room. (Sarah, age 17)

**Identifying parental figures as negative role models of desired relational qualities**

Another dimension of negative relational qualities is the negative transmission from parents to daughters of qualities or behaviors that the daughters considered undesirable to them as women in their sociocultural contexts. When these young girls examined their parents’ relational skills, they determined which qualities they did not wish to adopt in terms of relationship dynamics, communication skills and problem solving abilities in order to avoid a disruptive embodied experience as they grow up.

Did you meet [your biological father]? Uh-uh. No? But you just... Stories you heard or yeah? I don’t like him. Do you wanna talk about that?... It’s kinda like... he was [in his thirties] and she was [mid-teens] like she was like his babysitter... she babysat his [child]. Oh... Tell me about how that makes you feel?

It’s kinda disturbing... Does it make you feel something about you? Well, I mean, not really. Just kinda makes me feel like kinda weird. (Alice, age 13 reflecting on her biological parents)

Well, my dad is having an affair type thing with a woman in [another country]. They email like twice a day and I’m not, my mom told me, so my dad doesn’t know that I know, which is really like... and it’s scary, first of all, because I don’t want my parents to cheat on each other. That’s disgusting. And no matter how
crappy their marriage is, to me it’s something, you are living together and that’s just what you do. And I’m angry about that. (Bronwen, age 16)

It’s…like I feel guilty because I feel like I have a secret…and it’s just…and I’m trying to not—trying to not let everyone else know the fact that my dad is a big jerk and at the same time… it makes me scared for the future too, like I know it sounds really weird, but, that’s one of my hugest fears in life, is either get a divorce or have my spouse cheat on me… which is clearly what has happened with my parents and it just… I want to get married, I want to, whatever, but I’m like: “That’s scary, because you are putting your trust in someone”… *It has a big impact?* Yeah. And even seeing others, like my, my grandparents, even seeing their relationship, they are still together… But, I would not want to be in their relationship… Granny is a big bitch to Grandpa… So, I don’t want to be in that type of relationship either. (Bronwen, age 16)

*What have you learned from, like, about relationships from seeing your parents? What have you learned about the way they interact that you like or don’t like? That you would want in a relationship, or not want?* I don’t. It seems like my dad will just do, like, whatever. Like no matter what, if he thinks it’s wrong, or like, my mom runs the show it seems like. *Really?* And I don’t really like that sometimes because I agree with my dad more. (Laughs)… It gets ridiculous sometimes… [My mom is] like: “No”. And my dad is just like: “Whatever. Whatever your mom says goes”. I’m like: “Whatever, you don’t fight for anything”… My dad wants to avoid conflict sort of. So he just, like, just goes with the flow. Like whatever … it’s not worth the fight… ‘Cause, like, my mom will
fight. Like, if she wants her way, she’ll fight if my dad disagrees. And sounds like neither of those roles is ideal?... Yeah. (Melissa, age 16)

For one girl, her experience of her mother as involved with a female partner affected her negatively as she feared that others would also label her as ‘lesbian’, a label to which she ascribes ambivalent emotions.

So do you remember that being hard on you or was it easy for you to accept? No, it was hard. I used to tell all my friends that [mother’s female partner] was my babysitter, and she heard me one time, and she got really mad at me. Yeah, it is hard, I mean anything that's not the same as everybody else tends to be hard for people to get used to. So when do you think you got comfortable with it? Probably four or five years after, that's how long it took. And I still don't tell people today that my mom was a lesbian, only my closest friends know. Really? What do you think people would think? What worries you? They'd think I was. There's this kid at my school who's dad is gay and they say that he is now. I think it's wrong. (Jackie, age 15, reflecting on when she was in grade six)

How do you feel about it now? Like if your mom still was in a lesbian relationship? Oh, I'd probably still, well, I get kind of mad about that kind of thing, like I'm not, homophobic or anything, but when it comes to your parents, well, you think, like it's good to have a guy in the house. Like it's always been good for me. Like, you know, having women in the house didn't really help me too much. (Jackie, age 15)
**Impact of familial changes on relational experiences with parents**

The final dimension of negative relational qualities is the impact of familial changes on young girls. Unfortunately, an increasingly normative experience within the North American culture is for families and parental relationships to experience difficulties and break-downs. Such instability within the household often resulted in the need for family transitions, including separation, divorce, and relocation of the family, among others. These in turn could be associated with significant losses in relationships and the need for major adjustments in the household, family stability and neighborhood. All affected daughters experienced such transitions differently with many girls disclosing a disrupted lived experience as a result of their perception of their family transitions. Changes in the family relationships and dynamics were discussed as resulting in feelings of detachment and distress towards losing the known family dynamics.

My dad left when we were three. *What do you remember about that time?* About my parents’ divorce? All I remember is that my mom and my dad sat [my siblings] and I down, and I sat on my dad’s knee, but that’s all I really have left. I don’t really remember anything. One time my grandma told me that I had thought my dad was dead because I didn’t see him anymore. I was crying, and my grandma asked me what was wrong and I said that my dad is dead… *That’s a lot to deal with, a heavy thing for a kid to carry around. So did you not see your dad for a while after he left?* No, we didn’t. (Kelly, age 14)

My dad and my step-mom split up. That was really difficult. It was hard, I mean I had gotten really close with their family… For me, it was a lot harder, it took me awhile to get used to it. For my other [older siblings], it didn’t matter to them,
they didn’t really spend time with my dad anyway, they had stopped going to see him. (Kelly, age 14)

*Okay and did you guys go with your mom?* No. I stayed with my mom for a little bit. We were just, I stayed with my dad for a little bit and we were just visiting my mom at the time and then… a person came and said: “Which one would you like to live with more, your mom or your dad”. And I couldn't find out who I wanted. I liked, I was like going like this for a while like going I'm not sure. *Yeah, that's a hard decision.* (Madison, age 10)

*Are you still doing figure skating?* No. No? *When did you stop doing that?* When my mom and [mother’s female partner] broke up. *Oh, okay. Umm, was that something more* [mother’s female partner] *had you guys doing it?* Yeah…. *Do you miss her? (Pause) Yeah?* I looked up at [the medal] and I remembered her. (Madison, age 12)

*And how often do you see your dad?* Oh, almost never really. I only saw him for more like the first time when I was ten. *Oh, okay. ‘Cause I was three when my parents split and then I saw my dad when I was ten, then he came for my Grade 6 grad, so I guess I must have been 11 or 12 then. Uh-huh.* Then I think that was the last time I’ve seen him. (Roxas, age 15)

Bronwen expressed an understanding of the dysfunctions within her familial setting, acknowledging the disloyal acts committed by her father while cheating. Having this awareness, she explained her disrupted lived experience with regards to her parents’ marriage and her outlook on future relationships of her own.
It's weird because like I don't know some families like to think: “Oh my” and “They are like such amazing family and everything works out well”. But I mean inside it's still kinda like it, doesn't work out as well as you think… It's kinda hard to explain but… I think my parents should split up. That's my personal feeling…

(Bronwen, age 13)

I know I sound like a real, I don’t know, really judgmental, but I seriously think my parents should have split up before, before I was born, so… it’s one of those things where it’s just…whatever…. It sounds like you are very ready for this, like you see it as a natural kind of thing. (Bronwen, age 16)

Several girls also discussed the disrupted embodied experience following moving homes when their parents separated or when stepfamilies formed.

Yeah. Is this house different from your old house? Yeah. Uh-huh. What was your old house like? It was more fun because my whole family was there. (Erica, age 9)

So, last summer is when you moved here? Yeah. And what was that like for you? Pretty scary, because the first night we had to sleep on the floor ‘cause no beds and stuff or TV or nothing. And no computer… What other thoughts did you have at that time? Was it hard to leave your old house? Yeah, ‘cause at that point I knew I wasn’t going to spend as much time with my dad. Yeah, how did that feel? Umm, pretty sad. (Erica, age 9)
I think the last time I interviewed you was at the house in [city name]. Yeah. Yeah, so tell me about the changes, as there have been lots of changes for you. Yes. I now live with four siblings. So, instead of just the one, it's kind of been a hard adjustment… Okay, so when did you decide to move, because you live with your Dad now and his partner and is it her four kids from before? I decided when my mom and her partner broke up… Can you tell us how you made that decision of who you were going to live with? Umm, I kind of got tired of just my sister. Because we always had to share rooms and stuff. But then as soon as I moved here, not even like six months after I moved here, my sister moved in. So we're sharing a room once again. (Jackie, age 15)

Wow. So that was a pretty big change for you guys when you moved to this house. It wasn’t just that you moved houses, but that there were new people added to your family. So what was that like, having new people in your family? Well, with having a guy in the house, it was kind of uncomfortable a little bit. (Kelly, age 14)

In addition to having to relocate, parental separation and divorce often required the daughters to make decisions in regards to which parent they chose to reside with. Earlier examples in this section with Madison and Jackie highlighted the transition from the maternal household to the paternal household (and vice versa) as a result of a lack of space, new parental relationship and being told by a social worker to choose where they wanted to reside. In addition, Bronwen emphasized the complexity of her parent’s separation and the need to make a decision with regards to living arrangements and sharing the time with both parental figures.
And your living arrangements are changing. Uh-Huh. So, do you want to, can you tell me a little bit about that? Yeah. Umm, bas, it's kind of up in the air right now, but... Umm... My dad is going to... stay, you know, in the place I grew up in and everything... And so my mom's going to come here... And your dad's... stay [in the house]. It's going to be close-by still. Uh-Huh.... Yeah. So, I like that, like, I think it would be really hard to have parents who live, you know, hours and hours away from each other... And I think the living arrangements will be up to me and my brother... So, umm, I don't know what we'll do yet, but I think it will, you know, once we actually get settled, you know, or my mom actually lives here then we, we'll figure it out more. (Bronwen, age 15)

As seen with several girls, disrupted embodied experiences occurred during both the parental relationship break-down and when new relationships formed between one of the parents and a new individual.

So in grade seven, what was going on in grade seven? We met my Dad’s new girlfriend. And they were already talking about him moving in with them. I was really upset about that. I mean they’re a nice family, but I didn’t know them very well. And my Dad just told us so suddenly after we just met her. He told us at dinner one night that they were thinking of moving in together. And I asked when, and he said probably in the next couple of months. My eyes just welled up with tears, and I just walked off and locked myself in the bathroom. I was really mad then... So when it was happening and you were upset, can you tell me what your worries were at that time? I was worried that my Dad was going to get closer to the boys than us... I worried that he would forget about us and I was scared that
everything was going to change. And I was still really upset and hurt that him and my stepmom split up, I mean I was still getting over that and then suddenly he’s in a new relationship. (Kelly, age 14 reflecting on when she was in grade 7)

Finally, in addition to Jackie’s negative experience with her mother’s female partner (see the ‘Experience of conflict and disagreements with parents’ section) where she was ‘hard on her’, Jackie also reflected on the changes she observed in her mother when she entered a new relationship.

*So for you, how do you feel about your mom that she is now with a man?* She's actually been a lot more feminine lately. And I like that in her ‘cause I missed that, I missed the feminine side to her, she used to be the best woman to be around. But then she kinda changed. I guess you know how they always say that there's a man and a woman in a gay relationship. I felt like my mom was taking the guy's place and [mother’s female partner] was the evil stepmother. *Awe, yeah? And what did that make you feel about your mom?* I missed my mom, like it was just kinda weird. *Umm, so you didn’t feel like it was her?* Yeah, I just felt like she was just kind of not there. (Jackie, age 15 reflecting on grade 8)

**Second core risk factor: Evaluative external gaze related to appearance**

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a “gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself” (Foucault, 1977, p. 155).
As Foucault (1977) highlighted, a gaze, even subtle, can have powerful, and often crippling and oppressive, effects on women as they engage in continuous bodily self-surveillance. Within the context of the family, daughters can feel as an object of the ‘gaze’ or evaluation of their parents and they can learn from their parents to be observers and evaluators of their own bodies and objects of their own gaze. As such, the second core risk factor of the evaluative external gaze was comprised of five themes related to the explicit and implicit evaluation of girls’ bodies and appearance by the external perpetrators (e.g. their parental figures). As the internalization of the external evaluative gaze is continuously reinforced by others, the lived experiences of some girls became disrupted and resulted in attempts to modify their appearance or in fear of the consequences of failing to conform to the socially defined appearance expectations. The five themes include: 1) direct evaluative comments or conversations from parents towards their daughters; 2) evaluative comparisons by daughters against parental figures; 3) observation of evaluative comments by parents with regards to their own bodies; 4) exposure to evaluative comments regarding the ideal standards to beauty; and 5) the contribution of the evaluative gaze to embodied fear.

*Direct evaluative comments or conversations from parents towards daughters*

Mothers and fathers encompassed an important dimension of the evaluative gaze, given that they often shaped their daughter’s opinions on their appearances and bodies. Almost all the girls interviewed referenced being evaluated by the parents within the familial environment. At times, parents undermined their daughter’s ability to make independent decisions with regards to their food intake, health choices and appearance by demonstrating policing behaviors towards their daughters’ actions.
[My mom] always urges me to be healthy because she says that's like one of the most important things. So, how does it make you feel about your body to hear your mom saying those things? Well, sometimes it can be encouraging, but sometimes it's just like annoying, 'cause it's like you want to have a cookie she's like: “That's not healthy for you!” I'm like: “Well, I just want to have this cookie, I don't care! [I] just want to eat it anyways!” So, I think there is times like that when it can just be annoying, ‘cause you're like: “Nope, I don't care, I just want to eat it”… I'm just shut off and I'm like: “No, I just want to eat chocolate, I just want to have chocolate today”… Sometimes it can be hurtful ‘cause it's like: “Okay, I just, like, it's my decision, it's my life, if I want to do this, I should be able to do this”. But in a sense, that's just like rebellion, but it's hard. (Ashley, age 16)

Any memory... when you remember feeling yucky about yourself and had to do with something to do with your body. One time when my sister dyed my hair… When we did it my mom was out and then she came back, and she's like: “What did you do to your hair!” So how do you remember feeling that day? Well we went to the store and we bought the kit and then we told my mom that we were going to dye my hair, and she's like: “Oh I wouldn't do it, you better not do it, it's gonna look bad, don't do it”. And then we did it when she was gone. She came back and she's like: “I told you it's going to look bad”. (Melissa, age 14)

Many girls reported subtle comments and teasing by the parental figures with regards to their bodies. Although such instances were seen as humorous, an underlying discomfort and disrupted lived experience was expressed by the girls involved.
Have you noticed any changes like since you've been taking [the pill that makes your hunger less sharp], like in your body? Less hungry, and I actually have even been losing a bit of my stomach which is good for me because I've always had this like weird like shaped stomach, it's always been weird. Even when I was skinny it was like this weird shaped stomach… I also get told I have a square bum. (Laughs). My mom's like: “You've got your dad's bum” and I'm like: “Really? That's nice to know”. (Laughter). Like I really needed to know I have my dad's butt! (Laughter). (Jackie, age 15)

Can you tell me how come you don't like your legs showing? Because my mom, when I was little, said I looked like an ape, so I still have my hairy legs. (Madison, age 9)

So how do you think you noticed the hair on your arms did people make fun of your or? Well my mom had told me this story about when I was little that I looked like an ape when I was born. (Laughter). She was like: “Is this a monkey or is this my child”. So umm that's how I learned about my hairy arms and then one morning I took off my shirt and I was about to put on my shorts and I looked at my arms and I'm like: “I am hairy”. And I just put on my long sleeves shirts and I'm like: “Okay, now I can't see my hair, I am hiding and good”. (Laughter) So that made you kind of self-conscious to notice, yeah? Yeah. (Madison, age 10)

Does your mom ever make comments to you about your body? Nanny bugs me about my tummy sometimes. She's like: “Your tummy has too much fat on it. It should be smaller. You know why? Because then you'll look more fit and more
healthy”. *Oh really? And what do you say?* I'm like: “Well, I could suck it in and then it will look like that”. And she's like: “It should always look like that!”

(Roxas, age 16)

At time, the evaluative external perpetrator objectified their daughter’s experience by using labels (e.g. tomboy, weird and lesbian) to which the girls expressed feelings of resistance as a result of the associated societal meanings.

*Have you ever been called tomboy before?* Yeah… I was six… ‘Cause I was playing with cars and my mom called me a tomboy… I’m like: “No I’m not”.

(Madison, age 12 reflecting on her childhood)

I'm the only girl who wears a tie every day! (Laughter). *Yeah, and that's awesome.* My grandma's like: “You're weird”. And I'm like: “You know what, thanks for the compliment”. That's why like if someone tries to insult me, I'm just like: 'Thanks for the compliment”. (Roxas, age 16)

[My dad] was talking to my old assistant coach on my hockey team and he just like joked around like, like stuff like: “Oh yeah, there is my daughter. She is probably a lesbian”. Like he will say stuff like that… (Sarah, age 15)

Other girls mentioned extreme forms of the external evaluative gaze which resulted in feelings of inadequacy within their own body as the parents demonstrated inflexible appearance-related feminine standards regarding hair and makeup.

I used to hate my hair, it would be there, it would be annoying and I was like: “Ah!” And my mom would be like: “Come on let’s brush your hair”. And I
remember whenever we’d go places my mom would make me … “Oh, let me like brush your hair”. You know what I mean? And I’d be like: “Ah!” and sit there… for however long it takes. (Lauren, age 15)

Sometimes my mom won't like the way my hair is and she'll comment on it. And I'll be like: “Really and truly, I'm gonna wear my hair how I want to wear it”. Like: “No”. (Some laughter). *What would be an example of how your hair would be that she doesn't like?* Umm, well just like with my bangs. My mom's not really crazy on my bangs… Umm, or, straightening my hair. I used to straighten my hair a lot and my mom would be like: “That damages your hair”, which I know it does, but its hair, it’s not a big deal to me. And like she'll be like: “It’s better when it’s just left curly”… Growing up, I always had curly hair so to straighten it it’s kinda like a change which is something I kinda like. So I do that from time to time. And my mom will be like: “I don't know why you do that”… “It’s fine when it’s curly”, and I'm like: “Oh, whatever!” (Lauren, age 18)

*I remember we talked about that last week and that you feel a bit more insecure with your dad, and he’s maybe a bit more critical, and that affects a little bit how you feel about yourself. Does it also affect how you feel about your body?* Well I don’t know because... I look like my dad, I guess. But, what really bothers me is that his sister had fair skin too, but it was always the thing where she would wear makeup… So it irritates me that he would tell me that I should wear makeup or something because my skin is fair… because I have fair skin, like that really irritates me. (Bronwen, age 12)
Evaluative external male gaze (e.g. fathers) with regards to weight and bodily changes resulted in highly poignant moments for many of the girls as they experienced both societal and familial pressures to maintain an acceptable weight and appearance, which disrupted their experience of themselves as comfortable within the body.

*Do family members make comments about how you look?...* Umm... My dad has [said] some stuff like: “Yeah, you were always a chunky kid”. Which, like, who wants to hear that? *And how does that make you feel?* Horrible. I feel like I am being judged like and I feel... like I feel way prettier when I am around other people. Like I don’t feel like I am very attractive around my family, which sounds bad, but I don’t feel like my family brings out the best in me. Especially not my dad just because I feel like he doesn’t care about me at all. And I think that kind of leaves me with something where I feel like, I don’t know, leaves me kind of always feeling slightly inadequate... and that scares me too because I don’t wanna grow up and have a family and be like, not comfortable with them. *What would you like say to your dad when he makes those comments about you?* Awe: “Grow up you asshole”. (Laughs) And I feel like, I feel like he thinks that I am ugly and I kind feel like: “Dad come on, I am not”... I always kind of thought the role of a dad was to think that their kids were perfect or whatever. (Bronwen, age 16)

*You said that something has changed in the last six months and you had been in some situations where you feel that you were losing a little bit of respect for yourself...* Yeah, I think the lack of respect kind of started with my dad for sure, like just at some point that we say you know: “Sarah stop eating. Why are you eating so much?” He is like triple my size and he is telling me to stop eating and I
just don’t get it… Yeah. So how does it feel for you when he comments on how much you are eating? Umm, I don’t let it get to me and I just eat more ‘cause I get really depressed over that. Yeah, yeah. So if I eat more it’s his fault… Whenever we have a fight I just eat. It’s like whenever anything gets me I eat. And it sucks. Yeah. Does he make any other comments, like about your body or about weight or shape or anything? Umm, no normally that’s like my mom, like whenever me and my mom are talking, oh she will go: “Oh, look how fat I am”. And I will go: “So, check my handles!” Like we like totally go nuts with that… Okay. “My God I gained two pounds”. You know like type of thing. (Sarah, age 15)

I want my legs waxed ‘cause then you don’t have to worry about shaving them every day. Right. And my dad tries to get me to shave them like because he got me a shaver, like a razor and but it in my stocking and I was like (inaudible) and I gave it to my step sister. How come he wants you to shave them? I don’t know. He’s just weird (Jackie, age 12)

Do you feel differently about your body when you’re on your dad than when you’re on your mom? Kind of, like my dad is usually protective of me and like he doesn’t like it when, like, he tries to scare boys away (both laugh) and like… sometimes he’d just be like: “Oh, lose some weight”… ‘Cause he’s trying to like make me feel like guys don’t like me ‘cause he doesn’t want guys around and stuff like that… I remember one time he told me I have a unibrow because he doesn’t want guys to be around me… What did you feel when he said that? I just told him to stop talking. I was like: “Dad” (raise of tone)... Any other comments about your body he’s made in that the same kind of way? He told me I think I had
moustache once. *How did that made you feel?* I’m really mad. *Yeah... Sometimes dads don’t think when they say things, okay?* Yeah. They don’t realize that, that maybe hurting more than joking. (Erica, age 12)

My dad has said stuff before, like, because he gets his BMI one day, it was the randomest thing...he gets his BMI and he is like: “So I’m classified as overweight”... So he made a comment, like: “You are about pretty much the same as me, body wise”. I was like: “No I’m not”. I am like in the lower range of the BMI, like he is overweight, like: “Ahhhhhhh”. He compares himself to me which is like, like I mean that’s true that I have his genes or whatever, but like...he’ll make comments about how skinny my mom is and I’m kind of like: “Hello”. Like so I really feel like other people appreciate my looks more than my family do. (Bronwen, age 16)

In one instance where the daughter was an object of her own gaze, she perceived her mother’s comment as unsupportive.

*If your body could have spoken when you were trying on these swim suits that weren’t fitting the way you wanted, what would it have said?* It was probably really pissed... I was really just pissed... *Pissed at who or at what?* The bathing suit and the company. *Nice. Can you give me some examples of the thoughts you might have had?* I was pretty much just swearing in my head. I was like: “Please fit, please fit, please fit”. I put it on. I was like: “Mom, I can make it work”. And she’s like: “I’m sorry, honey”. *Right. “Mom, I can make it work”.* (Sarah, age 17)
Evaluative comparisons by daughters with parental figures

Most of the girls interviewed engaged in evaluations of their bodies against the Western ideals of beauty and femininity as sanctioned by their parents by actively engaging in physical comparisons with their paternal figures. As a result of these negative evaluations and the appearance and body pressures, the girls engaged in an objectifying gaze of their body and reported feelings of inferiority, imperfection, envy and shame. Predominantly, comparisons and evaluations focused on aspects of their maternal figure’s body size, weight and shape.

Let’s just jump from there to talking about appearance, and looks in the family and I’m wondering... when you think back to growing up your family, has anyone you know...were there conversations about how your mom looks, either by your mom or by other people in the family? They make comments about how thin my mom is... She is like she is an inch taller than me, but she is ten pounds lighter than me... How does it make you feel about your body, when you hear people make comments about your mom’s body. Like it makes me feel really uncomfortable actually because I am kind of like... I have been jealous of my mom in the past because she is the one who looks like a runner, and that kind of stuff, whereas I’m there one who actually runs... I do like my body, you know, but when your mom’s thinner than you are it sometimes...you know. (Bronwen, age 16)

What would your ideal weight be? For me, for rowing it would be like 130. And you are how much now? I am 144. Okay. So it’s 15 pounds less. I think 120 would be way too low, I would not want to do that at all, but you see my mom is 133, I
think, and she has a nice body, like I like her because she is not too thin, but like she is, it’s weird, because she is curvy in a muscular kind of way even though she doesn’t work out... I think that I could possibly be at 130 pounds because I see her and she is only three pounds more than that and she has got a nice body. (Bronwen, age 16)

So, do you ever hear, well, have either of you parents ever lost weight, did you ever watch your parents change their bodies in any way? No, my mom ever since the brain injury has lost tons of weight, like, just ‘cause she can't gain it. It's part of her brain injury it's like, she doesn't try to do it. She's actually trying to gain weight, but she's, ‘cause she's like really skinny, but it's not even her fault... Oh wow. Did you notice a difference in her? Just in her memory and her weight, like that was the only thing that changed... Are you worried about her now? Or is she okay now? She's okay now. She was a double 0 before, and now she's a size 5. Okay, yeah. So how did you feel when you saw her getting that thin? I was worried.... Umm, I always say stuff to her, even today, I'm like: “Mom, go eat some McDonalds” (Jackie, age 15)

Have your sisters gone on diets or your mom? My mom is on a diet right now. She’s trying to lose weight, so she’s been eating healthier and trying to exercise. But she had surgery a while ago... So she can’t do as much as she would like. (Kelly, age 14)

My mom doesn’t like the way she looks. Like she had five girls, she used to be really tiny. But then after having five kids, and then my dad leaving when we
were three, umm, she never really had any time for herself. She was always taking care of us... So she never really had time for herself. And now she does, and she’s trying harder to work on herself... it’s hard for her. (Kelly, age 14)

*Do you worry about your mom like her weight?* I do worry because she I mean likes she’s overweight but she is a beautiful woman. I just worry for her health like so that she is around for all of us when we have kids besides that I think she is great. Just for her health. *When you would hear your mom talking about her own body, what did it make you feel about your own body?* It just made me nervous about having kids. She said: “Don’t do what I did? You know? “Take care of yourself” (Kelly, age 18)

Oh now [my mom] always complains about: “Ugh, I'm gaining so much weight!” And like we actually tried... we went to [a fitness centre] for like a year... So I was like: “Okay well, let's like join a gym”. ‘Cause she can't do it by herself, like she just won't go. So I was like: “I'll do it with you”... But yeah, we actually, like two Christmases ago, [my dad, my brother and I] bought my mom... But, yeah definitely, she's always like: “Ah, I'm overweight”. *Do you think it affects you at all? Like in any ways of like worrying?* Yeah! It’s just like after I have kids, I'm gonna look like that!... Like, she told me it was after she had my brother and I. (Lauren, age 18)

I did eat like a bowl like this big with some cereal and I see it was pretty fattening so that's why I didn't wanna eat too much of it. *Oh?... Okay, how did you know it was fattening?* If you look on the back, it will say how much calories, how much
fat there is in it... *Right and how did you learn to do that?* ‘Cause my mom looks at them so whenever she's there she just looks at them and goes: “Oh that's pretty fattening”. And then she puts it away. (Madison, age 10)

*What kinds of things do you remember thinking?* Umm, just, like, my, my boobs, but: “Oh, God, please don’t make them too big!” (Laughing) I really didn’t want to have too big, like my mom’s. I don’t want like that, like I was just like: “Please”. (Laughing) *Oh, what were you worried about?* I don’t know. I just didn’t want to have, like, huge... And just like the fact that you have no control.

Yeah. It’s like: “Oh my Gosh”. (Laughs) So scary. (Melissa, age 16)

Evaluative comparisons against the maternal figure often allowed for the daughter to learn body altering strategies through means other than eating healthy and being active.

*How did you hear about [the pill that makes your hunger less sharp]*? Umm, my mom used to take them. She said that they didn't, they made you hungry but only like near the times you're supposed to eat, so you're not eating through the whole day... So it kind of just helps me so that I don't eat again till dinner. Like I don't eat at lunch, I eat when I get home from school... *And do you eat breakfast?* Yeah, almost every day... *So did you know that your mom was taking it and you asked her for it?* Well, no, she didn't use them anymore... *How many do you take a day?* A day? One. *Okay. How long have you been taking it?* A month... *And have you noticed any changes like since you've been taking them, like in your body?* Less hungry, and I actually have even been losing a bit of my stomach which is good for me because I've always had this like weird like shaped stomach, it's always
been weird. Even when I was skinny it was like this weird shaped stomach.

(Jackie, age 15)

A second focus of the evaluative comparisons was on maternal body hair, makeup and clothing.

I feel like if I don’t have any make-up on, I’m not pretty and I feel like other people will think that too. So it’s kind of like I’m hiding something from people. Like, you know, I don’t really want everyone to see me without make-up because they are going to realize that I’m not that pretty. Where do you think you have learned that though?... How did you come to believe that it’s the make-up that makes someone pretty? I don’t know because my mom doesn’t wear make-up, whatsoever, has never in her entire life, as far as I know. (Bronwen, age 16)

How did you learn how to take care of your hair, what meant looking good? Looking good was like no bumps or frizzes or static and stuff like that, and then I just, usually I think I’d learned it from my mom because her hair is always perfect, always looks good.... Does your mom work hard to have her hair look like nice; does she take a long time? Yeah, in the morning it usually takes like an hour. (Laughs) And she goes like expensive places to get it done and a lot. Yeah. See you probably learn from that like it’s good to have nice hair. Yeah. Do you feel like you have the same hair as your mom?... Well, hers is like blonde with dirty blonde like streaks. Mine is just like dark brown, like my natural colors is dark, dark brown. (Erica, age 12)

Do you ever think about how you might look in the future as you kind of go from a teenager to a woman? Well, everyone tells me that I'm going to end up looking
like my mom, so I already know what I'm going to look like. And how does that feel? Ewe... Not what you want?... Like if you weren't going to look like your mom, what would you want to look like? I'm going to be way cooler than my mom. (Chuckles) What does way cooler mean? No, I don't know. I don't know. Everyone says my mom's cool... It's frustrating when guys that are your friends have the ‘hots’ for your mom, and they tell you about it. What's it like for you to hear that? I'm just like: “I'm going to look like her one day?” No, I don't know. I'm just like “Wow, you're not cool”. (Sarah, age 14)

In one instance, where the daughter was adopted, her perception of her own body in comparison with her adoptive family resulted in a disrupted view of how others will perceive her physical attributes (e.g. height).

So how do you think that being adopted affects your body image? Or does it? No. Although some people umm, like, my mom is five foot something, but like, I'm probably going to grow up to be like five foot ten, so they're thinking I'm going to be different than my parents... Does that feel okay, or does it feel weird for you? It feels weird, ‘cause people are going to say: “How come your parents are that size and you're this size?” How do you think you'll answer that? I don't know. (Alice, age 10)

Observation of evaluative comments by parents with regards to their own body

Similar to the previous section where daughters engaged in comparisons to their mothers in order to establish a standard for their own appearance and weight, girls also often observed how their parental figures reacted to and commented on their own bodies. Many girls
remembered their mothers commenting on problematic aspects of their bodies, eating habits, level of physical activities and weight.

*In what ways does she comment about her own body?* Well, I just think, like, she thinks it's really important to be healthy, so when, she kinda does it in the same way, like, when she's like, she always refers it back to herself. So, she's like: “Okay, these days I'm trying to eat a lot of vegetables, it would be a good idea for you to eat a lot of vegetables too” or “I hope you don't mind if we're going to have like a salad for dinner because I'm trying to be healthy so it's gonna come back and reflect with you too”. (Ashley, age 16)

*Do you ever hear your mommy comment about her body?* Umm… It’s usually just like: “I feel like I need to go exercise again”. Because she used to go to the gym a lot… *Umm, how do you think she’s feeling when she says that?* Umm, I just think maybe she feels like… It’s like, a thing that she needs to do… Like needs to feel like healthy. *How does it make you feel about your body when you hear mom say that?* Sometimes… just think of it, sometimes like maybe I should go exercise some more. (Erica, 12)

*What does your mom feel about her own body?* She doesn’t like her body, I don’t know what, if she thinks she’s too thin or what. *What does she say or do that makes you think she doesn’t like her body?...* She’ll say: “Really, I am feeling very fat”. And I’m like: “Mom come on, you’re ten pounds lighter than me, just, shut up”. You know? *How does it make you feel about your own body when your mom says, after eating: “Oh, I’m so full”* Oh, it makes me feel horribly
disgustingly fatter than her. (Laughs). Like what is her problem, like in a serious… But I mean no one likes to have people who are thinner than them make a comment about their own body, right? What would you like to say to your mom when you hear her say these things? I just don’t, I’d say: “Mom, come on, like you are clearly not fat”… Like I find it interesting that she, that she will make comments about her body when I am jealous of her body, you know but umm… And I guess the other thing too is like probably if I could have her body, like I mean, as much as I like mine, I would kind of like to have hers because that way I could, like, she still has curves and she still has a butt, but she is also, she weighs less. (Bronwen, age 16)

Do you know why [your grandmother] went on [a diet]? I know she’s overweight… What do you think it was good she went on it or do you wish she wouldn’t? Yes, nothing really changed. Yeah. When you said your grandma’s overweight, what is it that tells you that she’s overweight? Like do you worry about it or do you say that’s her body size, no big deal? Well, I worry about it a little because her legs are, her knees are half good… Yeah. So her knees are bad and you see that probably in relation to her weight? Yeah. (Roxas, age 15)

Whenever me and my mom are talking, oh she will go: “Oh look how fat I am”. And I will go: “So check my handles”. Like we like totally go nuts with that… “My God I gained two pounds”. You know, like, type of thing. (Sarah, age 15)

Okay what about your mom commenting on her own body? Did your mom like or not like her body? No she still makes comments like: “I am bigger than last
summer. Jesus I am never going to fit into that bathing suit”. Like that’s my mother. Okay. How does your mom feel when she is saying that stuff. Umm probably pretty bad because she knows she hasn’t reached her goal kind of thing. I know she has goals with her weight. (Sarah, age 18)

Only one girl recalled hearing comments being made with regards to her father appearance and weight, which highlighted the differential weight emphasis by gender within the household. In this example, the perpetrator of the evaluative remarks towards the paternal weight was Sarah’s mother.

*Does your dad ever make comments about his body or his shape?* No usually its anyone else except my dad. (Laughter). Like we make fun of him because he looks like Buddha. He has a big huge belly. *So what kinds of things do you say about your dad?* Well we all made bets as to when he was going to die last time because I swear to god my mom would go on a rant saying: “Do you know the last time I slept with your father was? Look at him!” And my dad he is just like a heart attack waiting to happen… Yeah but she just tries to get to his head because his health is at risk… She is not happy with the way he looks because he is not satisfying her but it is also a huge heath concern for my mom because she’s got needs I don’t know. (Sarah, age 18)

Finally, for one girl, evaluative comments were made between parents in reference to different appearance and intellectual based attributes as indicators of important aspects in defining the self.
Like will your mom tease [your dad]? Oh definitely, it definitely goes both ways. Well he always teases my mom about her weight a little bit, and then she'll always tease him about like his intellectual capacity… Like my dad's not exactly the most well-read type guy, so it kinda works out. (Lauren, age 18)

**Exposure to evaluative comments regarding the ideal standards to beauty**

The fourth theme related to evaluative external gaze is the representation of parental attitudes and beliefs in regards to the ideal standards of beauty and appearances of women in general. Some girls commented on the disruptive impact on their lived experience of such negative evaluative comments.

For [my dad], it’s like if there’s an overweight person, he doesn’t want to like, if there’s an overweight person that’s like really big, like really big, he would mention something and then I just kinda want him to stop talking because it really makes me mad. Yeah. And like it’s, I don’t like it all. Does it make you feel anything about your body, like you worry about, what if I was overweight, what would my dad say? Well, yeah. I kinda think that like if I was big like that, would he like comment on it and say something like that… With your dad, you feel like there’s some pressure for you? Yeah. Yeah. Do you ever tell him that you don’t like it when he says those things? No, but just kinda like rolling my eyes and maybe leave in the room. (Erica, age 12)

Does it make you aware of your body when you’re reading magazines that are showing pictures of women’s bodies? I would never buy them but my sister and my mom would buy them. So it doesn't necessarily make you say I wish I could
dress like that or I wish that's what my legs looked like. It just makes me think I wish I had the excuse to wear pretty dresses like that all the time. (Kelly, age 18)

In addition to evaluative comments of women with regards to appearance and beauty discussed above, Jackie’s father expressed strong beliefs against strong-willed women.

Yeah, my dad is always worried that my stepmom is going to turn feminist! (Laughs). And what does he mean by that do you think? She's just such a strong-willed woman, that like, he thinks like, well, you know, I guess he's just scared that she's going to the same thing that my mom did, like turn lesbian on him. So I don't know, he gets really worried about that kind of stuff... Okay, yeah, so do you associate that strong-willed feminist with lesbian? He does, I don't. Cause my mom's partner was a strong-willed woman, that's what he sees. Okay, so he makes that connection. (Jackie, age 15)

**Contribution of the evaluative gaze to embodied fear**

As many of the girls described striving to attain the ideal standards of beauty, their observations of the progression of their parental figures’ body as they aged resulted in an increase fear in their ability to comply with the established beauty norms as they grow up and become women. Specific fears, such as gaining weight and developing stretch marks were aroused when comparing themselves to the transformed post-partum body of their maternal counterpart.

My mom's always telling me, my mom used to be a skinny little pick and then she had [her first child] and she was able to lose weight, then she had [her second child], then she was able to lose the weight, then she had [her third child] and she
wasn't quite able to get all of it off and then once she had me and [my sister] that just did it. Then when my dad left it was so hard and everything... So [we] were always getting takeout and she put on a lot of weight. So just seeing that is making me like: “I'm not going to do that”... I'm going to make sure, so I've seen what happens now, that's what I have the advantage of being the youngest. I can see these kinds of things and I know what not to really do. So yeah, I know what I have to do to lose the weight. It's just a matter of actually doing it. (Kelly, age 17)

What are your worries then about your body in the future, so kind of in five years or many years into the future? There is a [sport] teacher... has stretch marks all over her stomach and she was showing them to me and then she is like, yeah, that’s what having kids does to you. And I’m like…okay, I know that, like I know that everyone has it, but my mom doesn’t have stretch marks which I can’t understand… like I thought all ladies got stretch marks but anyway I don’t know. I don’t want to get stretch marks… Do you think that that will have an impact on your choices in life and whether or not to have kids...or to that extent?... Right now I am just like I don’t want to have kids because of that, umm, I know it’s horrible… And I can handle being pregnant, it’s just the after affects, (laughs) you know? (Bronwen, age 16)

How do you feel about your body for the future? Do you have any worries? Umm, no. Not really. Umm, of course I worry like when I get older and gonna have a kid, I don't want stretch marks, but that's about it, I don't think anybody does. (Jackie, age 15)
Do you ever think about how your body will change as you get older? Umm, sometimes, yeah. ‘Cause when I look at old pictures of my mom and she was pretty skinny... as a teenager. And now, well, she’s not as skinny, but that’s ‘cause, you know, like what? Four births? I mean, you can’t blame this woman. Yeah! Yeah. They’re all C-sections too. We were... So anyways, my mom says as I grow I’ll lose fat and baby fat and stuff and my boobs will grow. (Hazel, age 16)

For many girls, they feared that their bodies would eventually betray them through illnesses and health problems (e.g. cholesterol, weight gains) in the similar ways as their parent’s body had ‘failed’ them.

What are your hopes for your body as you get older? Do you see your body changing? Do you think it'll stay the same?... One of my gym teachers, what she said, it really had a profound effect on me. She was like if you look at other people in your family, say your parents, if you look at their body type and you were similar to what they were like when they were your age, look at them. That's a really good picture of what you might be when you grow up. And I was like, oh, oh, ‘cause my mom has a lot of health problems related to her weight. So it was just kind of like, and that's why she's so, she's always really been pushing me towards being really healthy and things like that, ‘cause she knows the consequences of that and she's like: “I'm a living example of what can happen if you don't take care of your body”. And so she's like: “I really, really, really want you to do the best you can”. (Ashley, age 15)
And do you feel a close relationship with your mom? Oh yeah. She's like, I don't know, like my dad's okay to have around. But lately he's been really agitated, because he found out he has diabetes and he has high cholesterol, so he's been really agitated about everything because his health and everything he's been really worried about everything. (Jackie, age 15)

So what are you hoping [the pill that makes your hunger less sharp] will help you do? Just kinda lose the stomach mostly... Okay, so are you feeling like you do need to lose weight? Is that how you are feeling right now? Umm, just a little bit, I want to get down to at least 150, cause that's a healthy weight. That's the beginning of the normal BMI. You know, I don't want to be too overweight. Cause my dad has diabetes now, so I've got to be careful. Okay. It's more, it's not a body image kinda thing that I want to lose weight for, it's kinda I want to stay healthy so I don't get diabetes. Ah, okay. 'Cause apparently it's hereditary, I could catch it even if I overload on sugar a little bit. (Jackie, age 15)

So are there some things that you don’t like and don’t care about and others that you don’t like and do care about and you actively try and change. Umm weight has always been an issue and I don’t like it. I try and then I don’t. My family gets big veins in their legs like my mom and grandmother. So that has always been a fear my sisters and I have... I cross my legs a lot and I am trying not to do that anymore but I notice I am getting one on my leg here. So I am trying to do whatever I can do. (Kelly, age 18)
At times, parents instilled fear in their daughters as a result of discussing a hereditary feared outcome without further explanation.

And that does like my mom always tells me to be careful but I really drink ‘cause like I have like alcoholism in my background family. Oh. So, it was like I’d be careful with that too. Okay. Yeah. How do you feel about that? It’s kinda weird. Uh-huh. But I really know what it is. Umm. Alcoholism? Yeah. Umm, it’s like when people have problems with drinking, like, umm, they can’t control their drinking. Oh? Yeah. And then they have effects like the rest of their areas in their life and, umm yeah. Like, they’re not able to control how much they drink and what they do when they’re drinking. Umm. (Alice, age 13)

**Third core risk factor: Disrupted embodiment as a result of social location**

Disrupted lived experiences discussed by many of the girls demonstrated aspects of intersectionality with their inherited social roles, power and privileges conferred to them within the family setting and by society at large. The girls’ social location led to disrupted embodied experiences with regards to five themes: 1) differential treatment by parents in comparison with a sibling due to gender; 2) differential treatment by parents in comparison with a sibling due to age; 3) socially disadvantaged due to the family’s socioeconomic status; 4) a disrupted connection to one’s culture; and 5) a disrupted connection to one’s religion.

**Differential treatment by parents in comparison with a sibling due to gender**

A girl’s position within the family setting can serve to hinder the fostering of positive and connected lived experiences within the body. For instance, Erica’s gender prevented her from engaging in dating relationships before the age of sixteen despite the fact that her brothers were
not presented with the same restriction (see the ‘Experience of conflict and disagreements with parents’ section). A second striking example discussed above by Bronwen demonstrated how her father’s relationships with her and her brother differed significantly as seen when he catered to her brother’s request for a pair of boots while also disregarding Bronwen’s similar wish (see the ‘Feeling neglected or detached from parental figures’ section). Bronwen further discussed her disconnection with her father as a result of having a male sibling and noted a reciprocal differential relationship between her and her father in relation to her brother.

It was kind of a shift from me being the only kind of centre of attention to my brother being the centre of attention, and me being kind of one of the people who gives attention you know, but I can’t remember feeling jealous. I don’t think I was jealous, I think he was like so cute and I always, like I loved him so much that I wasn’t jealous of him, because you know I’ve read books where older sisters or older brothers are jealous of their younger sibling. But, I think things kind of changed for me then because you know, like I’m not sure what happened there but I think it could have been that my dad was kind of, things could have changed with my dad or something, because he had a boy or whatever. (Bronwen, age 12)

I don’t know how to say it in a word but like I feel like he likes my brother better, like he always gets me in trouble… I feel that he feels that I’m like supposed to be this responsible person, and yet he always gets me in trouble. So I don’t know how to say that in a word… *It sounds like with your dad you tend to feel maybe a little bit more inadequate and part of it is that you wonder if he almost likes your brother better, and he expects you to be so responsible and then he kind of gets*
you in trouble sometimes if you don’t live up to what sounds like would high expectations be fair to say. Yeah. (Bronwen, age 12)

The thing is too that [my dad] totally thinks my brother is perfect, which is really frustrating… they spend hours together every… and my brother honestly thinks my dad can’t do anything wrong… Like last night… there were three people in line for the shower, actually four including me. And so my brother’s friend took a shower and then I was like, okay I am just gonna use the bathroom for a couple of minutes and, whatever, and [my brother] was just knocking on the door, like being such a pain. And then as soon as I was done, my dad came in like, my dad went into the bathroom and my brother went up… knocked on the door and he is like: “Who is it?” And dad said: “It’s me.” And my brother said: “Okay that’s fine” Very different dynamics. Yeah I mean, look, I know I’m painting the picture of my dad being a total jerk, I was just about say: “He is not”. But he kinda is, I can’t make excuses for him (Bronwen, age 16)

Another girl mentioned how the paternal evaluative gaze differed between herself and her male siblings.

Does your dad make comments about your brothers’ bodies? No… Just on you?

Yeah. Why do you think that is? Probably, I think because I’m just younger… But also maybe because I’m a girl. (Laughs). Yeah. Yeah. Uh-uh. So he treats you a bit differently? Uh-uh. (Erica, age 12)

Household roles were also perceived to be ascribed differently by parents as a result of their children’s gender.
When my mom goes away it’s me who has to clean the house, like he makes the meals but I just refuse to make meals, but it’s me who kind of says: “Okay, you know what, you have to clean the kitchen or whatever”. It’s kind of me that kind of takes responsibility [my dad and brother] are up sitting on the couch watching television, and I feel that that’s there, and I really really like I don’t want that to happen in a relationship for myself because it feels that that’s just not the position to be in. I’m also aware that it’s normally it happens where the oldest child would marry like the youngest child or middle child or whatever, but I don’t, like, I don’t want the extent that my parents relationship has. (Bronwen, age 12)

Finally, health matters were emphasized in a different way depending on the gender of the child.

_Does your mom warn your brother the same way about food and weight as she does to you or is it different?_ Umm, I think to a different degree. So, like, for my brother, like she stressed, yeah, it's important to do it, but maybe not why as much. Like for me she kinda goes into like why it's more important to be healthy and things like that… I think it's cause I'm older… She won’t go into details like print out articles and things like that for my little brother, so. (Ashley, age 16)

_Differential treatment by parents in comparison with sibling due to age_

In the same way, a small number of the girls interviewed revealed experiencing disrupted embodiment in relation to their age, older or younger, within the family constellation. Differential treatment was first mentioned in terms of providing their daughters with an allowance due to a younger age.
My brothers whenever they ask for money, my mom give it, sometimes gives it to them and stuff, but when I ask for money she says: “No, cause you’re too young”… ‘Cause when you’re a teenager then you can get money and go to places by yourself. I just don’t like it. (Erica, age 9)

A second example was provided with regards to the designation of chores.

_Umm, okay, how about chores around your house? Do you do chores at your house?_ Yeah. Lately because my mom has been so busy, we, all three of us have to pick one day where we do the dishes. I actually did it like twice this week and my brother and sister only did it once, and it makes me so angry because my dad was home he’s like: “Hazel, do the dishes”. “God! I just did the dishes”… _Do you feel like there is equal chores or no?_ Uh, not really ‘cause I’m the oldest. _Right._ I have to do the most. It’s not really a gender issue in this case, it’s just because I’m the oldest, I have the most responsibility. (Hazel, age 16)

**Socially disadvantaged due to the family’s socioeconomic status**

For some girls, the socioeconomic status of their family and the economic stress affected the familial interactions and their ability to engage in certain activities or practices. For instance, Ashley described her difficulties with her skin and the financial limitations within her mother’s budget to allow for the purchase of specialized skin products for her daughter.

_Tell me about makeup. In terms of growing up, when did girls start wearing makeup?_ Probably Grade 7, Grade 8. _And was that when you felt pressured to do it as well?_ Well I have a lot of skin problems, so like wearing makeup which is not even an option for me. Like it would have to be really nice expensive makeup
especially because I can't have a lot of perfume in the product. So I'm allergic to lots of it, if it's not like really good quality. So at that point my mom was like: “Well you can’t really wear makeup because of the type of skin you have, and so that's kind of not even an option unless you want to invest in like makeup and this and that”. (Ashley, age 15)

For Erica, financial constraints were experienced following the separation of her parents inhibiting both parents from providing their children with a physically comfortable environment.

So that’s at your dad’s house that you sleep on the couch or that’s this house.
That’s at my dad’s house… ‘Cause my dad is still trying to buy us a mattress…
Oh, there’s only so much money you have. Yeah. Yeah. And then what’s it like for you? Do you have to share a room [at your mom’s]? Umm, well [my brothers] share a room… and me and my mom share a room ‘cause there is only three rooms. (Erica, age 9)

Finally, Kelly described two distinct effects of her mother’s financial situation. First, she highlighted how she was unable to participate in team sports as her mother was required to save money for her sister’s wedding. Second, she commented on her mother’s sacrifices for food to ensure that her children were feed appropriately.

Were you playing sports at that time? Umm, not team sports. My parents couldn’t afford it. Because your family is putting the money towards your sister’s wedding is that right? Yeah. (Kelly, age 14)
[My mom] used to be really tiny and then having five girls and then she had [my sister] and I and she couldn’t get it off. Soon after [my sister] and I that my father left. So umm what she would do is she would feed us and whatever was left over she would eat and stuff. Right.... She has a very busy schedule so she would just grab something. But before my step dad what she would do like we struggled with money and that so she would feed us and whatever was left over she would eat herself. (Kelly, age 18)

**Disrupted connection to one's culture**

Similar to the discussion of culture in the protective factor’s section, the term culture in this section was used generally to encompass aspects of social location including race, sexual orientation, geographic location or disabilities and excluding religion, which will be discussed separately below. So far, the discussion of the core risk factors included several examples of the disempowering effect of culture on the girl’s embodied lived experience related to the way cultural values are transmitted by the parents. For instance, Hazel described how her father’s cultural definition of acceptable educational opportunities has served to “crush her dreams” of becoming an artist and journalist (see ‘Feeling unsupported by parents in the pursuit of their own interests’ section). Similarly, Alice described how her embodied experience was affected by the circumstances surrounding her biological mother’s pregnancy and the age difference between her biological parents (see the ‘Identifying parental figures as negative role models of desired relational qualities’ section). Madison also highlighted two problematic cultural standpoints. First, she highlighted her father’s “racism” in discouraging her to date a “black guy” (see ‘Experience of conflict and disagreements with parents’ section). Second, Madison mentioned the teasing and harassment she suffered as a result of her ethnicity as Métis (see the ‘Feeling
protected by parents section’). A number of girls described the array of bodily practices and expectations as defined by their parents’ cultural identities.

*Umm, are there other labels that you think girls have to deal with?* Umm, well, if you’re not the pretty girl you’re the smart girl, you know?... Can’t you be pretty and smart?... Can’t you, like, flip your hair and be all like: “So, e m c, E=mc2, you know?”… There are certain stereotypes. I mean, it really just depends on, uh, what family background you come from…It’s mostly culture. I don’t know what they expect of Muslims – they usually expect you to be good at math or something. I don’t know. *Really?* Because they all become doctors or pharmacists… or something medically. (Hazel, age 16)

*Do you feel like that being black and being from the cultural heritage that you have helps umm protect you against or harming your body in any way to try and fit an ideal or...* I don't think it's a huge difference between that I think it's just social issues, and in that retrospect my mom has like adapted to this society's view on body image. *Can you tell me more about that?* Well for example like when she was young... it was a time of wealth and stuff if you were overweight because you have so much money and you have so much food to eat then it's like a positive thing, because many people starved all the time so it wasn't uncommon to see people that were people skinny and that was like a positive thing if you were overweight, it was like: “Wow, you have a lot of money”. (Ashley, age 16)

Islam is very focused on cleanliness, so having everything you know, sugared up or shaved off and everything it's better for you hygienically, so that's why we're
supposed to do that. But the other aspect, the Canadian aspect it's just like, you'll look better without all your hair. Go for a bikini wax. (Hazel, age 17)

*Let's talk a little about ethnicity stuff.* Your ethnicity is [from a Southwestern European Country], is that right? Yeah my dad is [from a Southwestern European Country]… Your mom's background is? My mom was born here I think. Have you felt like anytime in your life you've identified with one side more than the other?… I don’t see myself as [from a Southwestern European Country]. My twin sister does, she has the more olive tone. Sometimes I wish, because they tan a lot easier. Their skin is naturally tanned. Kelly, age 18)

*Okay, so how does being Metis affect your relationship with your body?*… Just the darker skin and everything. People always ask what my background is and I always say: “Metis”. But then they're like: “What's that?” *Oh really?* Yeah, it's like, come on! *How do you explain it to them?* Well, I say, usually, like usually it's a French person and Native person's child, so half French and half Native. But sometimes it can be other European countries. (Jackie, age 15)

For a small number of girls, a disconnection from the parental cultural background occurred as a result of an inability to identify with the culture or to communicate in their parents’ mother tongue.

*Do you feel connected to either [of the Caribbean cultures from your parents]?* Umm, [my mother’s Caribbean country]… uh, not really. I mean, if I was slightly connected, it would be more, like them trying to make me eat their food during
Christmas time, but, or any other time when someone asks Nanny to make a [Caribbean] dish. But other than that. (Roxas, age 16)

*So your mom didn't teach you that language when you were growing up?* She tried. I was stubborn. So I was like I already know French, and English, a little bit of Spanish. I don't need to know another language kind of thing. And when am I ever going to use it. That was the kind of attitude I had towards it. But now I'm a little bit more passionate and I like to, like whenever they're speaking something I'm like: “Oh what are you saying? What are you saying?” And like I think they've kind of made it their way so I feel, my brother and I, so we feel not included. Because they'll be having conversations, telling this wonderful story and they're all laughing around the dinner table and me and my brother are like: “What are you saying? What are you saying? Tell me. Tell me. Please.” Right? So they're just like: “Well, learn the language and I guess you'll find out what we're saying” (Ashley, age 15)

Within the Canadian cultural background, some girls described a disrupted embodied experience as a result of their parent’s reluctance to allow them to participate in Canadian cultural practices.

*Right. Are there ever times that those two are in conflict?... When I was younger and my brother wasn't born, she thought Halloween was really stupid and she didn't really understand it. Okay. But it was like a big deal to me and so she was just like: “Why can't I just go buy you candy from the store and then you can have candy?” And I was like: “No, I wanna go trick or treating!” And she was like: “That's dumb, it's not safe”. And she just thought it was ridiculous going to like*
random strangers homes and getting food from their houses, she was like: “That's ridiculous”… But then when my brother was born he was like younger than umm, like one of our big family friends always took him trick or treating. And I was like: “If he can go trick or treating, how come I can't go trick or treating?”

(Ashley, age 16)

Other girls highlighted the difficulties in navigating the different cultural perspectives between their parents’ culture of origin and the Canadian culture.

The whole value system is really really different. Okay, so more structure or less structure? Umm, in terms of different things, like okay so… [my mom] thinks that it's like really really absurd that… you see like, families fighting with each other, like having conflict, and she thinks it's like weird how… people like thrive on watching dysfunctional relationships sometimes! Sure. And so she thinks that's just really absurd and she doesn't understand… She thinks that like conflict between parents and their children are kind of promoted or… normalized and where she's from it's not normal to do that… Like what your parents say to you, you do… There's no such thing as rebellion where she's from… Children remember that they are meant to be seen and not heard to a certain degree… And she thinks it's weird how some parents try to be friends with their children and so yeah. (Ashley, age 16)

Have you experienced much, umm, of that kind of profiling or stereotyping, or?

Well, I noticed, like, ever since I started wearing a hijab, I was 13 when I decided to wear it. Umm, you know, I’ve noticed people usually do a double-take...
Especially ‘cause I, they always think I’m Bosnian or Lebanese or some sort of white Arab. Ah. You know? ‘Cause the ones who are paler than the Arabs who live in Saudi Arabia. But I’m like: “No, I’m Métis”’. And then they look at me funny. (Laughs) They always expect an accent or something… If I didn’t wear a scarf, they would just think of me as any other teenage girl really... But because I do wear a scarf, they look at me a bit differently. _Do you get that people assuming you weren’t born here?_ Yeah. “So, where you from?” “Canada.” “No, no. Where are you really from?” (Hazel, age 16)

One girl expressed difficulties in identifying her culture of origin as a result of her parents’ familial background.

> _Okay, so tell me do you feel proud of your heritage, like do you know a lot about where you come from?_ Not really. My dad's adopted, and I well, he doesn't know who his parents are. My mom does, but her parents, like her dad's not dead but he doesn't talk to her, and my grandma is dead. Like she died when my mom was five. And that's one reason she got put up in a foster home. It was because the dad couldn't take care of all five kids, so he took two of them and put the others in foster home. _Oh wow, okay._ (Jackie, age 15)

**Disrupted connection to one's religion**

Similar to the cultural features discussed above, experiences within one’s religion can also be internalized as disruptive. For a small sample of girls, the religious beliefs of their parents prevented them from being allowed to engage in ‘normalized’ Canadian practices or from participating in a dialogue with their daughters in regards to the developing body.
Are there ever times that you feel... like because of your mom's culture and what she grew up with, she has a hard time letting you do here, even if it's something sort of main stream? I think like culture isn't all, like I don't think our ethnicity has to do with it, I think it's mostly like our religious beliefs and stuff like that. Okay, yeah. Like for an example, like some people's parents wouldn't have a problem with them going to a party and drinking and they'd buy the kids alcohol, whereas my mom like I don't even know what her reaction would be, I don't think she would mind, but I honestly don't know how she'd deal with the situation. She's not the kinda person who'd be yelling at me or anything like that but I think she'd wanna know why I had to do that. Okay, so it sounds like...so you don't know necessarily how she'd react, but you know she wouldn't be happy with it. Yeah I know she wouldn't be happy with it. (Ashley, age 16)

And then you said you're kinda worried thinking about sex and stuff. What do you...tell me about that? Mostly the hurt (Laughs)...Where'd you hear about that?... I dunno. ‘Cause it's not my mom per se, but it's hard to talk about sex in Muslim families because it's not shameful, but it's one of those things that's very taboo. Just like, you know homosexuality. You know, that kinda thing? Right. It's a very shy topic. (Hazel, age 17)

For some girls, identifying with one parent’s religion disrupted their ability to relationally connect with extended family members, or even to feeling rejected by them.

Do you ever feel like you’re, you’re in trying to negotiate between like different worlds? Like, do you feel like you have your home world or and then an outside
world or? Well, I feel like kinda different when I’m with my dad’s family. Uh-huh. Tell me about that. ‘Cause like, it’s like I’m like the only like me and my mom are like Jewish and stuff like that. Uh-Huh. So, it’s like, I don’t know ‘cause they all like celebrate Christmas and stuff like that, and they were all like, they’re all like Christian who go to church and stuff like that. Okay. And I’m like my aunties are always like, blessed the Lord, you shall beware, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah…. And sometimes you’re feeling a little just? Kinda left out. (Alice, age 13)

We used to go visit my mom's family in [another province]. They live in like this ity bity hick town. And you go there and you're walking around the street with your grandpa or whatever and people are like looking at you like who are you alien people. Yeah, wow. (Laughing). Ugh, it's awful. And so what does she think about you and your mom wearing the...the hijab. Does she... I dunno what she thinks about it actually. I know that she just kind of gotten used to it. Uh-Huh. And she just kinda knows that's how mom and Hazel dress, and that's how I'll one day dress kinda thing. (Hazel, age 17)

For Ashley, language was a barrier to a positive lived experience with her religion.

So tell me more about that, so does your mom go to church with you or does she go with your brother?... Now we kind of have a (inaudible) type service, which is kind of like an African type thing so they speak in my mom's language and stuff, so she goes to that a lot. Sure, you do that with one now? I do, but it's kind of pointless because I don't really understand what they are saying so then I don't appreciate it, so it's just like it's kind of weird for me... I don't really know what
they are saying all the time, so it’s only beneficial to a certain degree. (Ashley, age 16)

Chapter 4
Discussion

The present study sought to explore the influence of parents on embodiment in a group of young girls from various ethno-cultural, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds thus providing us with the ability to explore the intersections of parental influences, body image experiences and the various demographic variables. Specifically, this study aimed to gain a better understanding of how twelve adolescent girls aged 9-18 lived within their bodies and perceived their embodied experiences as positive or disrupted through interactions with their parents. By means of a qualitative analysis of the girls’ narratives in a total of 39 interviews, three core protective factors and core three risk factors emerged to promote positive and disruptive lived experiences within the body, respectively. The first core protective factor involved the presence of positive relational qualities with parental figures including themes such as 1) feeling comfortable speaking about one’s body experiences with parents; 2) feeling comfortable in the presence of parental figures; 3) feeling supported, understood and heard by parents; 4) feeling protected by parents; 5) parental encouragement as a contributor to self-confidence and 6) identifying parental figures as role models of desired relational qualities. The second core protective factor focused on a supportive emphasis on self-care by parental figures encompassing the mindful guidance and advice by parents to their daughters with regards to 1) an emphasis on balanced and healthy eating; 2) physical activity for pleasure and pursuit of health; 3) feeling comfortable to ignore the external standards at home; 4) negotiating new body practices; 5) parents allowing their daughters to voice their opinions with regards to their appearance; and 6) handling the external
gaze of others. The final core protective factor examined the importance of the girls’ social location on their positive embodied experiences with regards to four themes: 1) differential treatment by parents in comparison with sibling due to gender; 2) differential treatment by parents in comparison with sibling due to age; 3) a positive connection to one’s culture; and 4) a positive connection to one’s religion.

In addition to the core protective factors mentioned above, three core risk factors emerged in relation to a disruptive lived experience within the body. Similar to the first core protective factor of positive relational qualities, the most prominent domain of core risk factors involved negative relational experiences with parental figures, including 1) feeling uncomfortable speaking about one’s body experiences with parents; 2) the experience of conflict and disagreements with parents; 3) being forced to comply or silenced by parents; 4) feeling unsupported by parents in the pursuit of their own interests; 5) feeling neglected or detached from parental figures; 6) identifying parental figures as negative role models of desired relational qualities; and 7) the impact of familial changes on relational experiences with parents. The second core risk factor consisted of the effects of the evaluative external gaze related to the explicit and implicit evaluation of girls’ bodies and appearance by the external perpetrators (e.g. their parental figures) with relation to five themes: 1) direct evaluative comments or conversations from parents towards their daughters; 2) evaluative comparisons by daughters against parental figures; 3) observation of evaluative comments by parents with regards to their own bodies; 4) exposure to evaluative comments regarding the ideal standards to beauty; and 5) the contribution of the evaluative gaze to embodied fear. Similar to the final core protective factor, the final core risk factor examined the impact of social location on disrupted lived experiences with regards to 1) differential treatment by parents in comparison with sibling due to
gender; 2) differential treatment by parents in comparison with sibling due to age; 3) socially 
disadvantaged due to the family’s socioeconomic status; 4) a disrupted connection to one’s 
culture; and 5) a disrupted connection to one’s religion.

These results will be discussed in relation to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems 
Theory (1979, 1986), to the Object Relations Theory and its relation to the development of self-
concept and body image, and to previous research related to the influence of parental 
characteristics, communication and behaviors with their daughters, such as the impact of the 
three core protective factors and the three core risk factors. Finally, the strengths and weaknesses 
of the current study are examined followed by a discussion of the need for future research and 
clinical implications.

**Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory**

The emergence of these core protective and risk factors through the use of an in-depth 
investigation of the parental influences using a critical lens and the context of social location 
(ethno-cultural, racial and socioeconomic) allowed for an array of unique experiences and 
challenges faced by these girls within their familial environment to be considered. Several 
theories have emphasized the power of the ecological setting on the human developmental 
processes. First, Lewin (1936) argued that an individual’s behaviors are embedded within the 
interplay of their personal characteristics and her environment. Building upon this notion of the 
context becoming entrenched within the child’s life, Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the influence 
of the environment on a child’s cognitive development using the concept of the “zone of 
proximal development”. Conceptualized within his theory, parents can be considered to be more 
skilled than their child in the domain of embodiment and can help their daughter within her more
limited knowledge of body image as she transitions through puberty and attempts to resist or abide to the sociocultural ideals of beauty and appearance. When learning the cultural context as transmitted by their parents, daughters internalize the communications and reasoning that assist them in gaining various social and cultural life skills and views (Ash, 2004; Umek, Podlesek, & Fekonja, 2005).

Bronfenbrenner is a contemporary of both Lewin and Vygotsky and is widely known as a catalyst in the consideration of the ecological context on developmental processes and provides a useful framework for examining the qualitative results of this analysis regarding social location. By means of his Ecological Systems Theory, Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) acknowledged that a child’s development occurs as a result of the connections and relations among the self, other important individuals and the features of the environmental system within which the child interacts. Thus, a reciprocal relationship exists between the child and the setting in which she grows. Bronfenbrenner identified five ecological systems that are hierarchically organized and complexly embedded within the framework of human development: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem.

The microsystem is the innermost component of the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) and involves the child and her immediate surroundings. The most important aspects of this environment are family members as they exert bi-directional effects (e.g. parents influence a child’s beliefs and behaviors, and vice versa) on the child as she learns to physically, emotionally, socially and psychologically connect with others. In addition, a child will learn to assume assigned roles and attitudes based on her experiences at this system level. As described above in the discussion of relational qualities, relational experiences at this level can range from nurturing to chaotic and emotionally overwhelming (Bronfenbrenner, 1979;
Swick & Williams, 2006) impacting the daughters’ development through influences such as the quality of parental relationships and behaviors within the home, the development of attachment, the occurrence of divorce, the presence of peer relationships, the provision of quality of child care, and parental emotional and psychological difficulties (Stacks, 2005). Given these important relationships, it is essential to subjectively examine how the child perceives herself within the context of the influential forces of the microsystem and the other four ecological systems.

The *mesosystem* is comprised of the relationship or connections between components of the microsystems that impact the individual. For instance, the mesosystem can include the interrelation between a daughter’s secure attachment to her parents and her ability to form meaningful friendships within the school system. As the child ages and enters new settings, the number of microsystems influencing her embodied experience increases and she develops the capacity to form knowledge and attitudes in relation to the other microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Strong connections between the microsystems can foster and optimized the development of the self. For example, a daughter’s ability to engage in extra-curricular physical activities depends on the availability of such activities within her academic and community settings, and also on the extent to which her parents value such activities. Similarly, the opposite relationships can also exist whereby the parents encourage physical activities but peer relationships deemphasize its importance, which can then influence the daughters’ decision. Within the study of embodiment, the inclusion of multiple microsystems within a consideration of the mesosystem would allow for an understanding of the complex and interconnected relationships between the family, peers and the media on the development of embodiment.

The *exosystem* involves influential forces that are out of the child’s direct control, such as the structures and systems of the larger society implicated in making decisions with regards to
the child’s environment. Examples of these structures include the parents’ place of employment, the mass media, and the communities and neighbourhoods that may positively or negatively impact the child and other influential adult microsystems and mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979). For instance, a child may experience difficulties emotionally connecting with a parent who is experiencing a substantial amount of work-related stressors or whose employment requires them to work long hours (Greenberger, O’Neil, & Nagel, 1994).

The macrosystem is the outermost component of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986) Ecological Systems Theory comprised of the broad overarching ideologies of cultural values, beliefs, customs, ideals, and laws related to socioeconomic status, ethnicity, country of origin or religion shared among members of the society and displayed in everyday life through customs and behaviors. The microsystem, the mesosystem and the exosystem are embedded within and are notably shaped by the cultures and subcultures of the macrosystem. For instance, the patriarchal and institutional context of the development of embodiment within Canada is one that emphasizes thinness as the ideal standard for appearance and beauty and is conveyed through the underlying systems of the mass media, peers and parents who may share or discourage the internalization of these messages and beliefs.

Finally, the chronosystem is of utmost importance as it encompasses the dimension of time and its influence to the emerging child as she transitions through various developmental periods (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). When considering the concept of embodiment, these transitions include physical changes (e.g. the development of breast, the onset of menarche, growth of pubic hair, body growth, and weight gain) and psychological changes (e.g. an increase in self-awareness, development of self-esteem, and the perception of pubertal weight). In addition to these aforementioned internal changes, the chronosystem includes the presence of external
elements, such as events involving the family (e.g. separation, divorce, the loss of a family member) and social changes (e.g. navigating the influence of the increasingly important presence of peers and the beginning of dating relationships). As daughters get older, the timing of these physical, psychological, environmental and social changes will influence their embodied experiences in different ways.

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979, 1986) is important in looking at the impact of parents on embodied experiences as it emphasizes the influence of each system on the growth and development of the daughters. Above all, his theory allows for a conceptualization of how the effects of the values and beliefs defined by the macrosystem have cascading benefits and consequences for the daughters at the level of the microsystem and mesosystem as seen from the core protective and core risk factors in the result sections. A second important theory related to this discussion involves the Object Relations Theory as it pertains to the interactions at the microsystem level.

**Object Relations Theory**

Contemporary feminist writers have drawn upon the psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983) to understand the embodied experiences of woman as they navigate discourses of body and weight. The Object Relations Theory contends that a child’s development occurs in terms of interpersonal relationships and considers difficulties in the formation of a positive self-concept to be a result of unsatisfying primary relationships. Therefore, the development of the child’s self centres on the parent-child relationships and the ability of the child to project inner self-images onto external objects (e.g. mothers and fathers) and to reintegrate them into the internal, often unconscious, concept of the self. As such, external
interactions with others and the internal world of relations between the self and others, allows for a child to develop and integrate either a positive or disrupted embodied self as determined by the quality of these two processes. The important development needs of being protected, loved, understood and appreciated as a unique individual with both good and bad aspects occurs in the context of these relationships (Winnicott, 1956).

A central tenet of the Object Relations Theory is the primary need for attachment systems, referred to as “the propensity of human being to make strong affectional bonds to particular others” (Bowlby, 1977, p.201). While the research literature has focused primarily on the infant-caregiver attachment along the dimensions of accessibility and responsiveness (e.g. Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), recent studies have investigated attachment processes in adolescent and adult relationships. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) described four attachment styles within these types of relationships. The first is categorized as secure whereby individuals feel worthy and loved, and are capable of being intimate and autonomous. The second style characterizes individuals who are preoccupied and lack self-worth. Nonetheless, these individuals are able to maintain positive views of others and continue to seek their love and acceptance. The third style describes fearful individuals who feel unloved and avoid interactions with others fearing that will be rejected. The final attachment type refers to dismissive individuals who disregard others who they believe are untrustworthy despite feeling worthy of receiving love from others. Cash, Thériault and Annis (2004) have linked greater body image dissatisfaction in relationships with less secure attachment types, especially more preoccupied adults.

Within the microsystem, the Object Relations Theory highlights parental variables, such as the parent-child bond, conflict, availability and responsiveness of parents, acceptance and
parent-child individuation that affect the development of positive or disruptive embodied experiences. As mentioned previously, no published research within the scientific literature has studied prospectively through a qualitative longitudinal investigation of narratives the lived experiences of girls with relation to parental influences. Defining and examining embodied experiences and the core protective and core risk factors through the critical lens of the social context as transmitted by parents has not been accomplished in the research literature. Nonetheless, the context of such parent-child relationships is important as the ideals and standards of the wider society shape the ways in which parents interact with their daughters. Consequently, the current findings are discussed in relation to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979, 1986) and to the Object Relations Theory and its relation to the development of self-concept and body image as both theories provide a useful framework supporting this study’s results. In addition, the core protective and risk factors will be examined against previous research related to the influence of parental characteristics, communication and behaviors with their daughters, such as the impact of the three core protective factors and the three core risk factors.

**Core Protective Factors**

**First core protective factor: Positive relational qualities**

Relational qualities within the parent-daughter dyad emerged as both core protective and risk factors to the development of embodiment for the girls in this study. The importance of relationship characteristics between daughters and both their fathers and mothers is of no surprise as parents represent a substantial relational force guiding the daughters’ physical, psychological, emotional and social development. Swarr and Richards (1996) are among a small
number of researchers who have investigated the impact of positive relationship characteristics on emergent body image in adolescence. Their results suggested that relationships with parents, especially with mothers, characterized as closer, friendlier and more time-intensive provided an environment that fostered positive pubertal development. Other researchers have demonstrated that parents who have a strong bond with their children, pay attention to their needs, display effective parenting skills and are emotionally available are associated with an increase in the daughter’s health and well-being (see Cordero, 2007 for a review).

Although the core protective factor of positive relational qualities also highlighted these characteristics at the microsystem level, the themes under the umbrella of this core protective factor of this study pinpointed specific circumstances and mechanisms that are considered important to these girls’ positive embodied experiences while interacting with their parents. Moreover, the themes highlighted the substantial impact of the macrosystem-level ideals and standards on the microsystem-level communications.

**Feeling comfortable speaking about one’s body experiences with parents**

The first theme related to positive relational qualities involved feeling comfortable speaking about one’s body experiences with parents. Several of the girls reflected on the importance of not only being close to their mothers, but more importantly, being able to relate to them and to use their mothers’ narratives as a guide of what experiences and changes to expect within their own developing bodies. For some, other microsystems (e.g. peers or romantic relationships) within the girls’ mesosystem did not allow for an honest and open discussion of their developmental transitions and they would therefore turn to their maternal counterpart to obtain this guidance and support. In particular, a feeling of safety and connectedness was
mentioned by Kelly as an important aspect determining whether she felt comfortable discussing her first sexual experience, which was associated with feelings of embarrassment, with her mother. The responses of parents to bodily disclosures reinforced the importance of positively responding to bodily changes with encouragements, attentive listening and celebrations of such pubertal growth, which was seen with Bronwen at the onset of her menarche. The openness of communication of daughters with parents regarding the body and the body’s needs is vitally important since the macrosystem tends to discourage the expression of women’s bodily needs and voice, which can result in disrupted eating patterns and preoccupations with body shape (Piran & Cormier, 2005).

**Feeling comfortable in the presence of parental figures**

The second theme related to positive relational qualities involved feeling comfortable in the presence of parental figures. Many girls reported positive interactions with parental figures within the context of other microsystems, such as Roxas with her grandmother’s preparation of breakfast for her and her friends, Alice’s weekly social outings with her mother, and the encouragements Sarah received with regards to her engagement in a male-dominated sport. The parents also provided an environment for their daughters where the ideals of the macrosystem related to religion and gender roles were safely and openly discussed and argued by daughters with their parents. This theme was important as the feeling of comfort and safety extended from experiences within the body to general life events that transcended several of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986) ecological systems while resulting in positive embodied experiences, a finding that is unique to this study.
**Feeling supported, understood and heard by parents**

The third theme related to positive relational qualities involved feeling supported, understood and heard by parents. As suggested by the Object Relations Theory and the theory of attachment, secure relations can evolve from having accessible relationships that are responsive in nature. This theme highlighted these components as the girls expressed an embodied sense of security while discussing important developmental experiences and events with parents. Additionally, a general sense of being loved and accepted arose from interactions in which parents unconditionally made themselves available to their daughters. As Bronwen, age 12, highlighted, parents need to “listen to their daughters and do things they love to do together”. Furthermore, parents allowed their daughters to feel supported, understood and heard concerning topics that may be considered as unacceptable by the macrosystem, such as the discussion of Kelly’s sexual experiences at the age of 16, Alice’s conversation with her parents regarding drugs and alcohol, or Hazel’s ability to fully disclose every mundane event from other microsystems (e.g. school, peers) to her mother. The later was considered “atypical” by the participant who noted that teenagers are not usually able to openly discuss both everyday topics and important sensitive issues with their parents. It was also considered important for parents to support activities and interests in other microsystems (e.g. sports and peer relationships) and to provide an environment where their assistance could be offered when requested by their daughters, such as in instances of harassment. As such, the reader can see that this study highlighted that the impact of feeling supported, understood and heard by parents transcended from the familial environment to several other components and systems within their daughters’ environment.
**Feeling protected by parents**

The fourth theme related to positive relational qualities involved feeling protected by parents. This theme built upon the previous themes where the girls felt comfortable disclosing disrupted embodied experiences to their parents and felt supported, understood and heard by them. Moreover, they felt that the parents responded to the disclosure with an act of protection, which assisted in restoring a positive and secure embodied felt sense. The disrupted embodied experiences often revolved around teasing, harassment and threats from the macrosystem-level ideals and pressures involving gender, racial and cultural stereotypes. The parents’ intervention at the microsystem and mesosystem levels provided valuable learning experiences for the girls as they were made aware of systemically-based pressures and taught by their parents’ actions to protect themselves against the internalization of communications at the macrosystem level. Although there are few studies investigating this theme, some research studies have shown that parents who offer supportive child-rearing strategies can assist their daughters in resisting the impact of the discrimination, prejudices and stereotypes engendered by the dominant culture (Ferguson-Peters, 1985)

**Parental encouragement as a contributor to self-confidence**

The fifth theme related to positive relational qualities involved the effect of parental encouragement on their daughters’ self-confidence. Several of the girls expressed receiving parental encouragements in the domains of community and extra-curricular sports and activities, talents, and academic achievements. The transmission of encouragements from the familial microsystem to other microsystems (e.g. school) created a high level of congruency within the mesosystem allowing the girls to positively engage in the activities and hobbies of their choice. In addition, the receipt of encouragements with regards to personal accomplishments highlighted
to the girls their capabilities and resulted in an increase in self-confidence. Since women are socialized by the macrosystem ideals to silence their needs and to restrict their expression of accomplishments due to fears of being portrayed as self-absorbed, girls receiving such encouragements are learning vitally important lessons by defying the societal expectations. However, in certain instances, the positive embodied experiences were described as a result of being praised for reaching the culturally dictated standards of beauty, which resulted in an immediate positive embodied experience; however, it is unclear from this study whether this positive feeling will persist if such standards are not maintained as they age and physically develop further. These findings support previous research showing that parents who demonstrate interest in their daughters’ school activities and who provide their child with encouragements can assist in creating and sustaining positive a body image within their daughters (Fenton, Brooks, Spencer, & Morgan, 2010).

**Identifying parental figures as role models of desired relational qualities**

The sixth theme related to positive relational qualities involved the transmission from parents to daughters of qualities that are embodied as important to them as women in their sociocultural contexts and during their transition to adulthood. For many of the girls, the observation of culturally desired relational qualities within their maternal counterpart were emphasized as being qualities they wished to embody in order to reflect a positive way of being. These included being unconditionally caring and loving of others. Despite the emphasis on these qualities, a substantial sample of the girls admired qualities that defied the culturally sanctioned definition of being a woman by identifying with maternal aspects of strength, resiliency and courage, celebrating the onset of menarche and appreciating oneself by demonstrating self-acceptance of one’s body. The research literature generally supports these findings showing that
parents are important transmitters of the macrosystem’s ideals and standards. Therefore, parental figures are in a position to effect positive changes on the lived experiences of their daughters through the modelling of their own attitudes, knowledge and behaviors (O’Leary, 1998). Further research is needed to determine how the relational qualities of parents can act as a protective factor with respect to embodiment, including the effect of the congruency of the parental attitudes, knowledge and behaviors with society’s ideals on the development of eating and body image.

**Second core protective factor: Supportive emphasis on self-care**

The second significant core protective factor identified by the girls in this study was the supportive emphasis on self-care by parental figures. For adolescent girls, the process of engaging in healthy self-care strategies is hindered by the proliferation of health information and advice provided by different microsystems, including peers, the media and at times, parents. Learning to navigate through these messages and to engage in positive relationships with their bodies is a challenge as the information received places a great emphasis on the personal responsibilities of young girls to attain the macrosystem’s dictated ideals of beauty and appearance. As such, it is important to have an environment where these anxieties can be discussed and supportively dissected. Some of the girls in this study reported having such opportunities within a caring and compassionate environment to learn ways in which they could care for their minds and bodies. The six themes within this core protective factor highlighted how the parents can act to protect against the influence of the macrosystem ideals.
**An emphasis on balanced and healthy eating**

The first theme related to a supportive emphasis on self-care involved a discussion regarding balanced and healthy eating habits. The results of the current study have shown that positive embodied experiences were associated with parents who discussed food and eating with their daughters as an important component for the promotion of a healthy pubertal development and long-term eating habits. As was seen with the girls’ narratives, temptations for weight watching, dieting and indulgences are ubiquitous. Parents who offered a supportive emphasis educated their daughters about the positive aspects of eating, including the sharing of joyful moments with parents and friends, the fulfillment of bodily needs according to their body shape, metabolism and developmental stage, and the luxuries of treating oneself to delightful foods as part of a balanced and healthy nutrition plan. The latter is vital as these girls’ perception of indulgent foods, as portrayed predominantly by the media, is that it should be avoided at all cost and that if eaten, one should engage in compensatory behaviors (e.g. food restrictions, diets or exercise) to counteract or eliminate the additional calories. Thus, supportive parents emphasized the provision of indulgences as an integral part of a nutritional and satisfying diet. Moreover, many girls appreciated their parents’ discussions regarding the detrimental aspects of dieting as a means of weight reduction. These findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that parents who support and encourage healthy food choices are associated with positive eating habits in their adolescent daughters, including the intake of fruits and vegetables and calcium-rich foods (Edlefsen, Reicks, Goldberg, Auld, Bock, Boushey et al., 2008; Granner, Sargent, Calderon, Hussey, Evans, & Watkins, 2004; Pearson, Biddle, & Gorely, 2009). In addition, such encouragements have been shown to protect against the consumption of fast food as the child ages (Bauer, Larson, Nelson, Story, & Neumark-Sztainer, 3009; Larson, Neumark-Sztainer,
However, few studies have elaborated on this protective theme and future studies should continue to investigate how parents can educate their daughters about balanced and healthy eating.

**Physical activity for pleasure and pursuit of health**

Similar to the previous theme, the second theme related to a supportive emphasis on self-care involved discussing physical activities for pleasure and pursuit of health. In order for physical activity to be associated with a positive embodied experience, many of the girls mentioned that their parents encouraged them to be active within their physical interests, level of athleticism and passions. In doing so, the girls appreciated their engagement in the physical activities and felt confident in their abilities. Moreover, for some girls, this appreciation led them to perceive physical activity as a benefit to the maintenance of their current and future health as opposed to feeling forced to engage in these activities for weight maintenance or loss purposes. Consistent with cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, these results show that parental encouragement, support and education regarding physical activities are associated with a healthy and positive engagement in physical activities throughout adolescence (Bauer, Nelson, Boutelle, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2008; Dowda, Dishman, Pfeiffer, & Pate, 2007; Heitzler, Martin, Duke, & Huhman, 2006; Kuo, Voorhees, Haythornthwaite, & Young, 2007; Springer, Kelder, & Hoelscher, 2006; Trost, Sallis, Pate, Freedson, Taylor, & Dowda, 2003).

**Feeling comfortable to ignore the external standards at home**

The third theme related to a supportive emphasis on self-care involved feeling comfortable to ignore the external standards of beauty and appearance at home. This theme is
unique to this study as no previous research has highlighted the process by which girls feel liberated in their own home environment to portray themselves in a way that ignores the macrosystem ideals. In this study, parents were important contributors to this process because they allowed their daughters to feel comfortable being themselves without makeup, styled hair or tight clothing in their presence. Despite abiding to the socially prescribed ideals of beauty and appearance in other microsystems (e.g. at school or with peers), these girls felt supported by their parents and expressed a lack of pressure to conform to the macrosystem’s ideal standards of beauty and femininity at all times.

**Negotiating new body practices**

The fourth theme related to a supportive emphasis on self-care involved negotiating new body practices, such as shaving, waxing, purchasing a bra, and doing their hair and makeup. During the transitional period where the girls felt ready to engage in these body modifying practices, the assistance and guidance of their parents, especially their mothers, was considered essential to the safe navigation of these practices while also fostering an acceptance for the changing female body. According to the macrosystem ideals, girls should engage in these practices once they reach an age where their physical bodies have developed body hair and breast in order to abide to the standards of beauty and to avoid teasing regarding physical attributes. To date, no research studies have investigated the ways in which parents can carefully assist their daughters with this transition without negatively impacting their daughters’ embodied experiences, which is a unique contribution of this qualitative inquiry. Further research should continue to investigate the mechanisms involved in the navigation of the social standards and body practices by parents with their daughters in the promotion of a healthy and positive body image.
*Parents allowing their daughters to voice their opinions with regards to their appearance*

The fifth theme related to a supportive emphasis on self-care involved the freedom of the daughters to voice their opinions with regards to their appearance, specifically in their choice of clothing. Many girls expressed wanting to choose their dress wear according to their level of physical activity, the style their peers sported and their sense of fashion. The latter was for some girls different from the general cultural expectations of feminine, fashionable or typical clothing and allowed them to originally express themselves with clothes that they matched or designed themselves. It is undeniable that parents have an impact on their daughters’ clothing choices considering that they have determined, from birth, what their daughters will wear. During those times, the clothing chosen can confirm with the societal standards of feminine clothing according to the families’ “socioeconomic, gender, religion, and other role expectations” (Damhorst, 2005, p. 263). Nonetheless, daughters who expressed positive embodied experiences reported parents who supported them in their clothing ventures, regardless of whether their choices reflected the ideals of appearance and beauty. The freedom and voice bestowed to daughters by parents with regards to clothing appeared to truly impact the girls’ self-concept as they were allowed to explore what clothing matched their personality and sense of being in the world. Since such findings with regards daughters’ appearance choices are not reflected in the current research literature, future research should also elaborate on the mechanisms by which parents assist their daughters in modifying the macrosystem ideals and allowing their daughters to formulate their own standards.
**Handling the external gaze of others**

The sixth and final theme related to a supportive emphasis on self-care involved parents teaching their daughters on how to handle the external gaze. As described in the second core risk factors of the evaluative external gaze related to appearance, this gaze can have a detrimental impact to the girls’ lived experiences with their bodies. As such, an important aspect of self-care is learning how to manage the judgments about one’s physical appearance, such as racial comments, body comparisons and appearance-teasing, grounded in the macrosystem’s unrealistic ideals and standards of beauty dictated by peers and the media. Girls with positive embodied experiences had parents who emphasized and appreciated their daughters’ individuality and beauty. These findings are consistent with a recent study which highlighted the impact of parents’ communications regarding weight, shape and the internalization of macrosystem’s ideals about beauty and appearance as a protective factor to body image disturbances (Cordero, 2007). However, the mechanisms by which parents exert their mediating effect have seldom been studied and further studies are necessary to determine how parents can assist their daughters when they are recipients of the influential external gaze.

**Third core protective factor: Critical perspective on social location**

The third significant core protective factor identified by the girls in this study was the provision of a critical perspective on social location. Within this protective factor, social location lead to positive embodied experiences within the family with relation to gender and age and within the wider social context according to their culture and religion. Results demonstrated that the girl’s identity defined within the familial microsystem in contrast to the macrosystem’s ideals
heavily influence the attainment of a positive embodied experience. Each theme is discussed within the existing literature.

**Differential treatment in comparison with sibling due to gender and age**

The first and second themes related to a critical perspective on social location involved differential treatment by parents in comparison with siblings due to gender and age, respectively. Positive embodied experiences were seldom mentioned due to an advantageous position as a female within the household or due to their age relative to other siblings. This is an important finding in and of itself since the lack of privilege of girls and women in the familial and larger social system has been found by feminist writers to relate to disrupted embodiment (e.g. Piran & Thompson, 2008; Silverstein & Blumenthal, 1997). For one girl (Erica), a felt sense of protection was experienced when her father acknowledged and appreciated her gender by engaging in gentle play with her as opposed to the rough play he demonstrated with her male siblings. With regards to age, only one quote highlighted the privileged position of being the eldest as a right to undergoing an aboriginal tradition. The current study only considered the influence of siblings within the context of an interaction with a parent. As such, only a small number of passages related to a privileged position in comparison to siblings were captured. Future studies should strive to understand how female daughters and those of differing ages are treated differently by parents in comparison to siblings, leading to a positive embodied experience.

**A positive connection to one’s culture**

The third theme related to a critical perspective on social location involved a positive connection to one’s culture. Girls reported positive embodied experiences as a result of their social location as characterised by their race and ethnicity when they were positively connected
to their cultural heritage. Parents transmitted their cultural standards and ideals through their interactions with their daughters, which were by some girls embraced wholeheartedly. Several girls reported a strong connection to their cultural community and the associated customs and traditions surrounding menarche and the transitions from a girl to womanhood, which empowered them within their body. In addition, the socialization of daughters by parents within the cultural viewpoint of the family allowed for a critical understanding and appreciation of the evaluative external gaze and the macrosystem’s ideals. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that different cultures emphasize differing aspects of the daughters’ lived experience within the contexts of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. For instance, within the Black culture, the teaching of the daughters by mothers emphasizes

the notion that it is not what you do but how you do it…; admiration for personal attributes…; a heightened sensitivity to nonverbal modes of communication; a person rather than object oriented focus; a response to wholes or gestalts…; a particular value of personal distinctiveness and spontaneity…; an emphasis on emotional sensibilities, emotional expressiveness, and interdependence among individuated group members; and a preference for oral and auditory modes of communications (Greene, 1990; p. 209-210).

In addition, daughters of African American background with higher levels of ethnic identity are shown to display lower levels of eating disorder symptomatology and body image disturbances (Shuttlesworth & Zotter, 2011). Previous studies have also highlighted that Black women’s positive body image compared to their white peers may be a result of a greater appreciation for body sizes that are larger than the societal ideals, the absence of an emphasis on thinness within
the Black community and the Black male evaluative gaze’s preference for fuller bodies (Patel & Gray, 2001).

Although some girls in this study with strong aboriginal ties reported positive embodied experiences in relation to connecting with their cultural heritage through their parents, they still often struggled with their body experience related to being exposed to repeated prejudicial treatment by their peers. A previous Canadian study found that daughters of aboriginal descent are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction, to perceive themselves as “too fat” and to be at risk for eating disorders than their non-aboriginal Caucasian peers (Marchessault, 2001). In sum, culture can serve to facilitate positive embodied experiences when it endorses a critical perspective of the macrosystem’s ideals and standards; however, as discussed in the third core risk factor of disrupted embodied experiences, culture can also serve as a significant risk factor. Therefore, further research is needed to identify the paths by which culture can serve to foster a positive embodied experience and protect the daughters against body image dissatisfaction.

*A positive connection to one’s religion.*

The fourth theme related to a critical perspective on social location involved a positive connection to one’s religion. For a small number of girls, religious influences (Muslim for Hazel and Christian for Ashley) were identified as promoting a positive embodied experience as aspects of their personal faith strengthened their connection to their body. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that, for Muslim women, the strength of their religious faith is associated with lower body dissatisfaction, body self-objectification and dieting (Mussap, 2009). In addition, research shows that women assigned to reading Christian-based affirmations emphasizing God’s love and acceptance of women’s bodies’ (e.g. “I love my mind,
body, and soul, unconditionally. God has created my body, and I am able to see the divine perfection in my own body" and "The Spirit of God is expressed in my body, and therefore, it is my duty to treat it with reverence and respect"; Boyatzis, Kline, & Backof, 2007) demonstrated a significant increase in their body and appearance esteem compared to a control group (Boyatzis, Kline, & Backof, 2007). Within clinical eating disorder samples, religious beliefs can be harnessed to improve adherence to treatment and the client’s motivation to change, highlighting that religious beliefs can have a strong positive impact on embodied experiences (Marsden, Karagianni, & Morgan, 2007).

**Core Risk Factors**

**First core risk factor: Negative relational qualities**

Similar to the core protective factors discussed above, the most prominent domain of core risk factors associated with a disrupted embodied experience involved negative relational experiences with parental figures. A wide body of literature does suggest that adolescent family environments characterized by lower levels of support, warmth and cohesiveness are related to body image disturbances and eating disorder symptomatology (Attie & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Strober & Humphrey, 1987). Furthermore, the quality of parental relations characterized as highly conflictual and dysfunctional or perceived as negative by daughters has previously been found to be an important risk for body image dissatisfaction, eating difficulties and dieting concerns in both clinical (Strober & Humphrey, 1987) and subclinical (Byely et al., 2000; Pike & Rodin, 1991) populations. With regards to the Object Relations Theory and the attachment theory, it is suggested that dysfunctional child-parent attachments and relations can impeded the development of wellbeing in daughters (Kirby & Fraser, 1997). However, the impact of
relational qualities on the embodied experiences is lacking within the research literature as the majority of research studies have focused predominantly on eating disorders populations and those who engage in dieting attempts. The seven relational factors discussed by the girls in this study highlighted how the lived experiences with their mothers and fathers can result in a disconnection with their bodily needs and desires, and an overall negative view of their bodies within the context of the familial microsystem.

*Feeling uncomfortable speaking about one’s body experiences with parents*

The first theme related to negative relational qualities involved feeling uncomfortable speaking about one’s body experiences with parents. Many girls felt unable to discuss with their parents, especially their father, the novel bodily changes they were experiencing during their developmental transition. This inability, due to a variety of factors (e.g. lack of opportunity to broach the subject, parents’ comfort level with discussing such topics, fathers being unable to understand the changes associated with a female developing body) resulted in negative emotions about one’s body, including the powerful feelings of embarrassment and shame with the normative developmental changes of menarche and assuming an adult female body. Therefore, the parental reactions and feedback to bodily changes, as well as the daughter’s perceived inability to discuss these changes, shaped the images and feelings that they developed about their bodies, a finding consistent with previous research (Daniluk, 1998). These emotional states, in turn, invariably reinforced the macrosystem’s deprecating view of the developing female body and the onset of menstruation as embarrassing, shameful and associated with discomfort and ambivalence (Daniluk, 1998).
The experience of conflict and disagreements with parents

The second theme related to negative relational qualities involved the experience of conflict and disagreements with parents. The narratives supported previous findings showing that maladaptive developmental outcomes and negative body image within the familial microsystem are associated with higher levels of family conflict and lower levels of cohesion between daughters and parents (Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996). Moreover, the findings expended the impact of conflict to include overall disrupted embodied experiences. As seen with the quotes within this theme, conflictual parent-child relationships have been demonstrated to lower a child’s sense of security, autonomy and support (Crago, Shisslak, & Ruble, 2001), and disrupted their ability to pursue new experiences within other microsystems (e.g. the pursuit of dating for Kelly). In addition, many of the girls reported continued conflictual relationships with their parental figures as they attempted to discuss pertinent developmental issues and concerns and perceived their parents’ responses as dismissive. For some girls, the occurrence of parental conflict resulted in an increase in connection and positive embodied experiences within other microsystems, such as disclosing their concerns with peers.

Being forced to comply or silenced by parents

The third theme related to negative relational qualities involved being forced to comply or feeling silenced by parents. This theme vividly portrayed the parents’ attempts to enforce the socially prescribed ideals defined by the macrosystem in the domain of physical appearance (e.g. hair, clothing, makeup, eating) by forcing their daughters to wear their hair in a particular way, to be dressed in certain feminine clothing, to put on makeup to cover their imperfections or to look more feminine, and to engage in family dieting in spite of the daughters’ normal weight. Not only did these experiences result in disrupted embodiment, but they were also perceived by some
girls to be disempowering as they were unable to have control over the decisions made about their bodies. Other examples were described with regards to the girls’ academic interests, passions and extra-curricular sports forcing them to abandon their interest and to choose other options which were considered appropriate by their parents. The adverse impact on embodiment of parental pressure on daughters to comply with restrictive ‘feminine’ expectations has not been explored previously.

*Feeling unsupported by parents in the pursuit of their own interests*

The fourth theme related to negative relational qualities involved daughters feeling unsupported by parents in the pursuit of their interests. In these instances, parents did not force their daughters to choose other interests, but strongly voiced their disapproval through discouragements. As a result, the girls experienced a disrupted embodied experience and a decrease in their self-confidence as their abilities to pursue activities in the domains of school, sports and activities were challenged. Consistent with findings within the eating disorder literature, the quotes demonstrated that parents who are critical and unsupportive of their daughters’ interests, attempt to manage them, create a co-dependency based on the parents’ interests, or prevent individuation of the daughter can foster the emergence of body image disturbances or eating disorders symptomatology (Humphrey, 1986; Meyer & Russell, 1998; Rowa et al., 2001; Smolak & Levine, 1994).

*Feeling neglected or detached from parental figures*

The fifth theme related to negative relational qualities involved feeling neglected, detached and isolated from the parental figures following a specific interaction or situation. The negative body experiences the girls reported following such neglect reflected that they felt
unworthy of their parents’ love and attention. These findings are consistent with previous studies where psychological problems and eating disorders symptomatology, especially bulimia nervosa, were associated with parents characterized as submissive, hostile and neglectful (Kirby & Fraser, 1997; Vandereycken, 2002). The findings from this study also extended to include instances within the interactions of the microsystem where daughters felt detached from parents as a result of preferential treatment of male siblings and perceived instances of sexism within the household with respect to the socially prescribed ideals about women and their duties as housewife as defined by the standards of the macrosystem.

**Identifying parental figures as negative role models of desired relational qualities**

The sixth theme related to negative relational qualities involved the disrupted experience of embodiment in daughters who did identified their parental figures as negative role models of desired relational qualities. These findings are new to the research literature in highlighting the adverse impact of negative role modeling of relational qualities by parents on the body experience of their daughters. One aspect of this negative modeling related to the macrosystem ideals regarding the definition of femininity and the ways in which women should act. Among other examples, the girls discussed issues arousing ambivalent emotions pertaining to their perception of lesbian relationships (e.g. Jackie), women with a strong voice and opinion (e.g. Melissa), and the act of adultery (e.g. Bronwen). These findings emphasized the importance of looking beyond comparisons with parental figures of physical attributes to looking at the perception of parents’ relational qualities on the daughters’ embodied experiences and conceptualization of the feminine ideals through the influence of the macrosystem on the microsystem.
The impact of familial changes on relational experiences with parents

The seventh theme related to negative relational qualities involved the impact of familial changes on young girls. Previous research has shown that family dynamic changes, such as separation, divorce, and relocation of the family, among others, are associated with eating disorder symptomatology, body image dissatisfaction, weight control attempts through dieting and exercise, and binge eating (Billingham & Abrahams, 1998; Shisslak, Crago, McKnight, Estes, Gray, & Parnaby, 1998; Yannakoulia, Papanikolaou, Hatzopoulou, Efstathiou, Papoutsakis, & Dedoussis, 2008). In the current study, these familial instabilities and transitions resulted in disrupted lived experiences and feelings of detachment, shame, distress and confusion as the family no longer represented the ideal established by the macrosystem of a strong nuclear household. Additionally, some girls reported an altered perception of themselves in future marital relationships as they feared being in situations with similar outcomes. Although the results of this study highlighted these patterns of disrupted embodiment associated with these family transitions, the number of girls with such experiences was small and future research should thoroughly examine the impact of separation, divorce, relocations, and the emergence of new parental relationships and reconstructed families on the development of embodiment and on the daughters’ perception of marital relationships.

Second core risk factor: Evaluative external gaze related to appearance

The second significant core risk factor identified by the girls in this study was the disruptive impact on embodiment of the presence of an evaluative external gaze related to appearance. Parents exerted this evaluative external gaze by means of explicit and implicit evaluation of girls’ bodies and appearance by means of teasing remarks, appearance comments,
and through comparisons by parents of their daughters with themselves and vice versa. As the girls internalized the external evaluative gaze, the macrosystem’s ideals were reinforced and some of the girls experienced disruptions as they failed to attain these societal standards. Each theme is discussed below in relation to the current research literature.

**Direct evaluative comments or conversations from parents towards their daughters**

The first theme connected to the evaluative external gaze related to appearance involved direct evaluative comments, teasing or conversations from parents towards their daughters. Both mothers and fathers in this study evaluated their daughters in the domain of appearance (body shape, weight or size, hair and makeup), ability to make independent decisions, food and health choices and societal labels (e.g. tomboy, weird and lesbian). Often, these comments undermined daughters’ self-image and reinforced the daughters’ reliance on the macrosystem’s ideals of beauty and appearance. The findings also showed that despite being well intended, these comments detrimentally impacted the daughters’ lived experiences. When daughters received negative feedback about their physical appearance in relation to the societal ideals, they experienced anxiety and shame about their inability to reach such high standards set by the macrosystem. This pattern is consistent with previous research (McKinley, 1999). These findings also strongly reflected previous research showing that weight and shape-related comments by parents towards their daughters are a strong predictor of the drive for thinness, the desire to control weight and engagement in unhealthy eating patterns (Levine et al., 1994). However, the current study extends these findings to include objectifying comments by parents based on the macrosystem’s ideals of beauty, resulting in some of the girls feeling disparaged by their parents and feeling ugly within their own family (e.g. Bronwen). These results showed how the societal
standards can permeate the interactions between parents and daughters on the subject of the body and appearance.

**Evaluative comparisons by daughters against parental figures**

The second theme connected to the evaluative external gaze related to appearance involved the daughters’ evaluation of parental preoccupation with social standards of appearance. Disrupted embodied experiences were reported when the daughters engaged in the evaluation of their bodies against the Western ideals of beauty and femininity in the context of parents’ own discomfort with not complying with these ideals. For some girls, these negative objectifying evaluations resulted in feelings of inferiority, imperfection, envy and shame. These findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that daughters’ appraisal of her mother’s body satisfaction, appearance investment and preoccupation with being overweight predicted the daughter’s own body-image attitudes and experiences (Rieves & Cash, 1996). In addition, they support research findings that show that girls who perceive maternal body weight and shape as an important physical attribute to their mother, regardless of the accuracy of their perception, express a stronger desire to be thin than girls who accurately perceive body weight as being unimportant to their mother (Field et al., 2005). However, the current findings also suggest that this comparison process with mothers can also transmit societal ideals concerning other appearance-related practices, such as the grooming of hair, the types of clothing to wear and the use of makeup towards the attainment of the beauty standards. For instance, Kelly observed her mother’s careful and lengthy grooming of her hair every morning and dreaded having to do the same.
Observation of evaluative comments by parents with regards to their own bodies

The third theme connected to the evaluative external gaze related to appearance involved the observation of negative evaluative comments by parents about their own bodies. Daughters’ observations of their mothers’ negative communications about their own bodies, eating habits, level of physical activities or weight reinforced negative pressures by the larger culture. Several daughters questioned their own ability to comply with these standards of appearance. For some others, witnessing their mothers’ lifelong attempts at complying with external standards resulted in feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and disrupted embodied experiences as they did not perceive themselves capable of fulfilling the ideals of beauty and appearance. In addition, paternal comments regarding body weight and shape were seldom made. This highlighted society’s differential emphasis of weight as a gendered phenomenon. Research findings show that from a young age, children’s eating habits, levels of physical activities and body image are shaped through parental socialization to food and food-related control practices (Golan & Crow, 2004). The current findings are consistent with previous cross-sectional studies on the role of family modeling indicating that adolescent daughters’ disruptive eating attitudes and behaviors are highly linked to mothers who also exhibit high levels of eating problems, attitudes and behaviors (Pike & Rodin, 1991; Smolak, Levine, & Schermer, 1999). Additionally, research also shows that daughters are more likely to try to lose weight if they perceived their mothers as being concerned with weight loss and body modifying practices (Field et al., 2001). Therefore, when mothers objectify themselves against the macrosystem’s standards of appearance, weight and beauty, the microsystem becomes permeated with these ideals resulting in disruptions in the girls’ perception of themselves.
Exposure to evaluative comments regarding the ideal standards to beauty

The fourth theme connected to the evaluative external gaze related to appearance involved the exposure to evaluative comments regarding the ideal standards of beauty. Similar to the previous theme, parents’ negative evaluative comments, attitudes and beliefs in regards to the ideal standards of beauty and appearances of women in general, and their beliefs of how women should conduct themselves (e.g. Jackie’s father expressed strong beliefs against strong-willed women) can have a disruptive impact on their daughters’ lived experiences. The current findings associating these negative evaluations to disrupted embodiment suggest the importance of the way in which parents address media messages at home. For instance, parents can facilitate the harmful effects of societal ideals portrayed in the media (e.g. television or magazine) by expressing comments criticising women who do not display a thin figure or by praising those that do (Nathanson, 2001). In addition, research shows that heightened parental attention and social comparison with a television character’s appearance is linked to an increase in attention and comparison between their daughters’ own body and those of media characters, resulting in lower body satisfaction (Nathanson & Botta, 2003). Therefore, parents can initiate the objectifying of their daughters by reinforcing the importance of thinness within the household.

The contribution of the evaluative gaze to embodied fear

The fifth and final theme connected to the evaluative external gaze related to appearance involved the contribution of the evaluative gaze to embodied fear. Daughters often reported disrupted embodied experiences characterised by fear following a parental comment regarding problematic aspects of complying with the established beauty norms as they grow up and become women, including weight gains, post-partum stretch marks, weight-related illnesses and health problems, and hereditary diseases. These processes instilled fear as the daughters’ ability
to attain the macrosystem’s ideals of beauty, health and appearance was threatened. For example, Kelly experience fear about her weight related to the post-partum weight gain of her mother and the associated decision of her father to leave the marriage. Kelly’s mother explained the reasons behind his departure as directly related to her weight gain. Such an event powerfully accentuated the objectifying consequences of not maintaining a slim body after giving birth to children. Through examples discussed in this theme, the girls realized that the pressure to conform with society’s standards do not subside as they age and perhaps, become increasingly difficult to attain as they have to contend with child birth and care, working full time positions and an aging body. The adverse impact of such concerns in girls has not been previously explored in research.

Third core risk factor: Disrupted embodiment as a result of social location

The third significant core risk factor identified by the girls in this study was the disruption of their embodiment as a result of their social location. Within this core risk factor, social location led to negative embodied experiences within the family in relation to gender and age and within the wider social context in relation to their socioeconomic status, culture and religion. Each theme is discussed below.

Differential treatment by parents in comparison with siblings due to gender

The first theme related to disrupted embodiment as a result of social location involved the differential treatment by parents in comparison with siblings due to gender. For some girls, being female within the family hindered the attainment of a positive and connected connection with their bodies. Compared to their male siblings, these daughters felt unable to pursue their dating interests, experienced lower levels of attention from and opportunities to connect with their fathers, were subjected to a different paternal evaluative gaze in the form of body comments,
were ascribed different household roles as a result of their gender and received a higher number of messages regarding the importance of their weight and health. These findings highlighted the gendered ideals emphasized by the macrosystem in Westernized societies. Smolak and Piran (in press) discussed these gendered differences and identified several etiological factors that could shape body experience. For instance, women and girls’ bodies are objectified as sexual objects to the fulfillment of pleasurable needs of their male counterpart and are associated with female stereotypes of being frail and closely allied to the home (e.g. cleaning, cooking, and taking care of others). As a result of these associations at the macrosystem level, parents in this study have either attempted to strongly protect their daughters against this conceptualization (e.g. preventing them from dating until a certain age despite their daughter’s interest) or emphasized these standards (e.g. imposing the role of the homemaker on the daughters), which resulted in a negative perception of their daughters’ lived experiences. The impact of gender inequity at home on embodiment has to be explored in future research.

**Differential treatment by parents in comparison with sibling due to age**

The second theme related to a disrupted embodiment as a result of social location involved the differential treatment by parents in comparison with siblings due to age. A small number of girls reported that being younger or older than their siblings disrupted their embodied experiences as a result of the way their parents interacted with them. However, similar to the theme above, the narratives were closely associated and intersected with issues of gender. For instance, a younger age resulted in not receiving the allowance that older brothers were receiving (Erica) and an older age was associated with having to engage in chores not required from a younger male sibling. (Hazel).
Socially disadvantaged due to the family’s socioeconomic status

The third theme related to a disrupted embodiment as a result of social location involved being disadvantaged due to the family’s socioeconomic status. For many of the girls in this study, the socioeconomic status of their family and the economic stress affected the familial interactions, leading at times to feeling uncomfortable with certain aspects of their body. Related to the attainment of the societal ideal of beauty, several examples were connected to the daughter’s inability to purchase feminine beauty products or to the family’s inability to fulfill the nutritional requirements of each family member. In addition, some of the girls’ described that their ability to engage in activities outside of the familial microsystem (e.g. school and community) was dictated by their parents’ financial means. For example, Erica had to sleep in the same room as her mom after her parents’ divorce, Kelly had to abandon playing soccer, and Madison could not afford to buy feminine clothes. Previous research has suggested a relationship between the family’s socioeconomic status and girls’ embodied experiences (Caldwell et al., 1997). Although the research literature generally indicated that higher socioeconomic is associated with an increase in weight-related difficulties (e.g. restraint and the pursuit of the societal ideals of beauty and appearance; Sobal & Stunkard, 1989; Wardle & Marsland, 1990), the results of this study demonstrated that girls from low socioeconomic status may be limited in their ability to engage in positive embodied experiences and comply with normative beauty standards, in line with previous findings (Piran et al., 2006). Therefore, low socioeconomic status is beginning to gain recognition as an important factor in the development of embodiment. Future research should continue to investigate how social class and financial means exert their influence on body image dissatisfaction and on the overall lived experiences of daughters in the context of their families.
A disrupted connection to one’s culture

The fourth theme related to a disrupted embodiment as a result of social location involved a disrupted connection to one’s culture. Within the strong influences of the Canadian macrosystem, many of the girls in this study felt disempowered as a result of their differing cultural backgrounds in comparison to the White-dominant culture. Disrupted embodiment was experienced in relation to the pursuit of educational opportunities, to the definition of the family of origin (e.g. language and paternal parents), and to the racism and harassment received as a result of visible aspects (e.g. skin color) associated with their ethno-cultural identity. Greene (1990) suggested that for the Black culture, race may operate as a stronger variable of social location than factors associated with class, education, occupation and religion as black mothers socialize their daughters with the context of a society which devalues women of color. As a result of the macrosystem’s influence on Westernized values of beauty, different races are vulnerable to self-surveillance and body dissatisfaction as they may feel unable to attain the societal beauty standards associated with a thin Caucasian female with blue eyes and blond hair (Frederick, Forbes, Grigorian, & Jarcho 2007).

A disrupted connection to one’s religion

The fifth theme related to a disrupted embodiment as a result of social location involved a disrupted connection to one’s religion. Girls discussed instances where the religious beliefs of the parents prevented the daughter from being allowed to engage in ‘normalized’ Canadian practices or from participating in a dialogue with their daughters in regards to their developing body. In addition, identifying with one parent’s religion led one girl to be unable to relationally connect with or feel accepted by extended family members. Despite the pervasive presence of religious influences, the research literature on the impact of religion on body image, eating
disorders or embodiment is limited (Richards, Hardman, & Berrett, 2007). However, some research studies indicate that adherence difficulties and conflict with the family’s religious beliefs, as opposed to the religion itself, may contribute to the development of eating disorders (Reddy & Crowther, 2007). Research investigating the Jewish religion, a faith system not captured by this study, have shown that young adolescent Jewish girls reported significantly more eating disorder symptomatology (Pinhas, Heinmaa, Bryden, Bradley, & Toner, 2008; Rayworth, Wise, & Harlow, 2004). Further research is needed to determine whether certain religious beliefs or adherence difficulties to these beliefs are associated with disrupted body images in adolescent girls as they undergo physical, emotional, psychological and social developments with the microsystem of the family and in interaction with other microsystems (e.g. peers and school) and the macrosystem.

Study Limitations and Strengths

Strengths

Within the context of the larger research literature on body image and embodiment, this qualitative inquiry into the influence of parents on embodiment has several strengths. First, the girls’ narratives allowed for an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences as they recounted the influential aspects of their interactions with their parents within the multilayered social context of their lives. Secondly, the life history approach (Cole & Knowles, 2001) and the longitudinal nature of the current study promoted an understanding of the core protective factors, which have seldom been studied in previous research, as well as the presence of core risk factors during pubertal changes, including physical changes (e.g. the development of breast, the onset of menarche, growth of pubic hair, body growth, and weight gain), psychological changes (e.g. an
increase in self-awareness, development of self-esteem, and the perception of pubertal weight) and social changes (e.g. navigating the influence of the increasingly important presence of peers and the beginning of dating relationships). Furthermore, the different transitions during puberty were captured by including girls ranging in age from nine years old through to fourteen years of age during the first phase of the study, and following them for a five year period. In addition, the girls were from diverse family composition in terms of their parents (married, divorced, single, dating, remarried parents and step-parents, same-sex relationships), and siblings (a range of siblings and step-siblings). In addition, the girls were from both urban and rural communities, and from different social settings with respect to their socioeconomic status and ethno-cultural group membership. Finally, the inclusion of the concept of embodiment, as opposed to body image, and the use of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979, 1986) allowed for a broader scope of experiences to be included and for the influence of parents to be considered within the larger social context.

**Limitations**

First, this qualitative study included only 12 participants and 39 interviews. Since the interviews focused on a wide array of experiences within the girls’ lives, including, but not limited to parental influences, each interview differed in its emphasis on parental influences. As such, it is difficult to determine whether saturation, reached when further theoretical sampling does not lead to the development of new concepts and ideas, was obtained (Holloway, 1997). It can be argued that more focused questioning with regards to the parental influences on embodiment during the qualitative interviews may have uncovered further core protective and risk factors that have not be emerged in this analysis. As this is a qualitative study, no generalization of the findings to the general population is made. The emergent findings of this
study could be pursued through further large scale quantitative research. Further, the current study analyzed solely the influence of parents on positive and disruptive embodied experiences. Although this analysis included some influential extended family members (e.g. grandmothers for both Ashley and Roxas) as maternal figures, other familial components, such as siblings, were excluded. Research studies have shown that female siblings can function as important comparative targets against which girls evaluate themselves physically (Tsiantas & Ross, 2001). In addition, male siblings have also been identified to be significant contributor to the male evaluative external gaze through teasing and appearance-related comments towards female siblings (Taylor, Bryson, Doyle, Luce, Cunning, Abascal et al., 2006). Furthermore, as the influence and presence of parents is known to decline as the child ages, the presence of other sociocultural factors (e.g. media and peers) and their interaction with parental influences should be considered in playing a key role in moulding the child’s self experiences. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of the internalization of culturally defined standards of ideal and the embodied experiences of these girls should have also taken into account the influencing agents of the siblings, extended families, media and peers in addition to parental influences.

Other limitations of the study relate to the timing of interviews with the participants. The study involved interviews of both pre- and post-pubertal girls at the first phase of the study. While this extended the age range covered in the study (9-18 year of age), the participant group differed in the timing of their interviews. In particular, for several girls, pre-pubescent accounts of parental influences were more restricted. In addition, related to scheduling difficulties, girls were interviewed on average 3 times over a 4 year period (three girls in this group of participants were interviewed only twice). This has limited the comparisons among girls who were prospectively interviewed within the same age ranges and developmental stages.
Finally, although this study involved interviews with a diverse sample, specific aspects of social location were not captured. In particular, the group of participants did not include girls from Asian or South Asian descent, girls with physical disabilities or families from higher socioeconomic statuses. Diversity is important in qualitative and quantitative inquiries as it increases the external validity and comparison ability between the girls included in the study and the broader population.

Areas for Future Research

Building upon the strengths of the current study and addressing the limitations, future research should further investigate the core protective and risk factors revealed in this study using prospectively and longitudinal designs. Furthermore, the results should be expanded to include additional familial core protective and risk factors involved in the development of embodiment during such an important development period. First, a larger sample should be obtained increasing diversity in terms of race, age, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion, geographic location, class identifies, abilities and disabilities. Future inquiries should also aim to expand the age range from this study by obtaining a sample starting in childhood with similar aged girls and following them into adulthood, which would allow for the development of embodied experiences to be understood throughout various significant development transitions. Additionally, future research should strive to conduct the interviews asking questions solely on the influence of parents, siblings and the familial setting in order to adequately capture those influences. Alternatively, a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the interaction of the multiple sociocultural factors, including the family, the media and peers, on core risk and protective factors for girls’ sense of self and their embodiment over a longitudinal period from pre- to post-puberty would be instrumental in documenting the intricate ways in which these social processes
are related to the internalization of the socially dictated appearance standards. Most importantly, future studies should strive to understand the multiple influences on embodiment while continuing to consider the five ecological systems of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986) Ecological Systems Theory.

Conclusion

The present study investigated, utilizing an emergent methodology, the role that parental figures play in girls’ body experiences during their pubertal growth and development utilizing a developmental and contextual lens. The resulting core protective and risk factors clearly pointed to the influence of parents as sociocultural agents to the development of an appreciation or devaluation of the body through communication patterns with children, parental attitudes regarding the body and self-care, direct verbal messages concerning the body and finally, the family’s social location. As suggested by Rodgers & Chabrol (2009) in their review of parental attitudes on body image disturbances, longitudinal and prospective studies are necessary to understanding the consequences of parental influences on the concepts of body image and embodiment. The emergent design of the current study provided a unique contribution by looking at aspects of the research literature that have largely been neglected, such as the influence of parents as core protective factors and mediators of the influence of the macrosystem. Moreover, the current study allowed for an in-depth understanding of the reaction of the daughters to their parents’ messages and comments concerning body shape, weight and eating behaviors through the use of the qualitative inquiry. More importantly, this study focused on the concept of embodiment, defined as the “experience of engagement of the body with the world” (Allan, 2005, p. 177; Piran & Teall, in press), instead of the narrowly defined concept of body
image, in order to allow for a broader range of parental impacts on their daughters’ body experiences to emerge.

Therefore, this study uncovered three dimensions that acted to facilitate girls’ positive embodied experiences (core protective factors) and three dimensions that acted as barriers (core risk factors). Distinguishing between the core protective and risk factors was important as published research has predominantly discussed barriers, as opposed to the facilitators, to the development of positive lived experiences within the body (Rodgers & Chabrol, 2009). As such, this study focused on the facilitators embedded in the relationship between parents and children, a contribution that is a unique to the wide psychological knowledge of body image and embodiment. In addition, the life history approach, which has not been previously used to study girls’ embodiment experiences within the familial setting, allowed for the exploration of both facilitators and barriers to the girls’ lived experiences along a number of age groups, including pre and post-adolescent girls.

**Clinical Implications**

The findings of this study have important clinical implication as they represent significant processes that researchers, therapists, health care professionals and parents should understand when considering the lived experiences of girls within the familial context as shaped by interactions with their parents as well as their ethno cultural and social location. Specifically, the core protective factors that emerged from this study allow for an understanding of the important components to the development of healthy and positive embodiment, body image and self-esteem. Additionally, the core risk factors confirmed the presence of detrimental aspects of the familial microsystem to the development of negative and disrupted embodiment. Moreover, the
results demonstrate that the transitional period of puberty constitutes an important landmark where parents exert their influence as their daughters are vulnerable to the proliferating influential mass media and ideals of the macrosystem.

It is my hope that this project will act as a catalyst for future research and I look forward to the continued emergence of research projects investigating the impact of parental influences of girl’s development of embodiment. Particularly, I hope that the current and future research studies can assist in developing tools to support adolescent girls within the family context to resist the societal pressures to attain the ideals of femininity, beauty, weight and appearance and to foster a positive outlook towards their bodies as they undergo important physical, emotional, psychological and social transitions and become women.
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