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Margins, Myths, and Media Representations
of the Body Among Young Anglophone Montrealers

par

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Mémoire présenté à la Faculté des études supérieures
en vue de l'obtention du grade de
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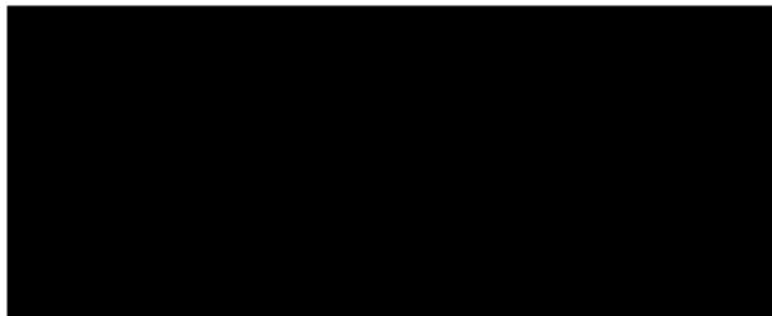
Ce mémoire intitulé:

Margins, Myths, and Media Representations
of the Body Among Young Anglophone Montrealers

présenté par:

Maeve Haldane

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Sommaire

Cette mémoire examine le rôle du corps parmi les jeunes anglophones à Montréal. Influencée par les travaux sur “l’image du corps”, notamment ceux des anthropologues Mary Douglas, Terence Turner, Thomas Csordas et du psychoanalyste Paul Schilder, ma recherche traite à la fois de la manière dont la culture est imposée au corps et de la façon dont notre identité sociale et personnelle se révèle par nos pratiques corporelles. Comment les sujets de cette recherche pensent-ils le corps, comment s’expriment-ils, quelles pratiques et croyances partagent-ils, quelles sont les influences principales qui agissent sur leurs corps et images d’eux-mêmes? La lecture des oeuvres des sociologues Bryan Turner et Arthur Frank, ainsi que de la théoricienne culturelle Susan Bordo, a sous-tendu plusieurs débats sur l’interaction entre culture, médias, contrôle et l’individu. Quelle était la mythologie, le discours le plus répandu au sujet du corps, et quel est le rôle des médias dans la transmission et la promotion des valeurs culturelles? Initialement intéressée par le concept de limite, tel que conçu par Stallybrass et White, je voulais capter les limites culturelles du corps “acceptable”, ce qui est considéré soit inattrayant, soit attrayant, pouvant nous aider à définir les normes de “l’acceptabilité” dans notre culture.

Après trois interviews préliminaires, j’ai procédé à l’entrevue de six hommes et six femmes, étudiants âgés entre vingt et trente ans et vivant hors du cercle familial. La moitié des sujets était composée d’étudiants en médecine, l’autre d’acteurs. Le choix de ces deux groupes basé sur leur familiarité avec la discussion du corps, laissait espérer des entrevues plus franches et approfondies. Avant l’entrevue, chaque sujet était informé de l’objet de la recherche et du genre de questions auxquelles il/elle pouvait s’attendre.

En traitant des sujets sus-mentionnés, d’autres sujets inattendus sont apparus, tels l’“allure” de la chirurgie plastique, la complexité et l’importance des relations familiales tant passées que présentes. Pour plusieurs, leurs partenaires et leurs pairs influent grandement sur leurs pratiques et valeurs. De même, certaines influences telles la famille et le contexte (géographique, scolaire, ou lors de voyages) étaient plus présentes que prévu. Nous avons abordé des transformations de l’apparence physique et de l’identité en périodes de transition ainsi que le fait que corps et images des corps sont constamment en flux et en progression.

Les personnes interrogées ont fait part d’une relation complexe avec les médias, qu’elles admettent avoir une grande influence. Ces personnes pouvaient être caractérisées

comme “consommatrices averties et intelligentes” qui réalisent le potentiel de fuite vers l’avant et d’inspiration contenu dans les médias mais qui dénoncent parallèlement leur manque de variété et leur promotion de l’uniformité. Toutefois, en période de crise familiale, les médias prenaient le rôle de guide que la famille abandonnait. Plus grande était l’insécurité des informateurs à certains moments de leur existence, plus l’image stéréotypée du corps tel que projetée dans les médias prenait de l’importance comme référent de succès.

Ces entrevues détaillées m’ont permis de brosser un riche portrait de quelques jeunes montréalais anglophones, de leurs choix, pratiques et valeurs corporelles ainsi que des influences attenantes. J’ai ainsi retracé le contexte de leurs habitudes et, par là, permis une meilleure compréhension des subtilités et spécificités des valeurs culturelles de cette communauté et de la manière dont elles sont transmises.

Résumé

Cette mémoire examine le rôle du corps parmi les jeunes anglophones à Montréal. Influencée par les travaux des anthropologues Mary Douglas, Terence Turner et Thomas Csordas, ma recherche traite à la fois de la manière dont la culture est imposée au corps et dont notre identité sociale et personnelle se révèle par nos pratiques corporelles. J'emprunte les théories sur "l'image du corps" élaborées par le psychanalyste Paul Schilder. Comment les sujets de cette recherche pensent le corps, quelles pratiques et croyances ont-ils en commun, quelles sont les influences principales qui agissent sur leur corps et images d'eux-mêmes, comment expriment-ils leur identité par le biais de leurs corps? La lecture des oeuvres des sociologues Bryan Turner et Arthur Frank, ainsi que de la théoricienne culturelle Susan Bordo, soulève plusieurs questions sur l'interaction entre culture, médias, contrôle et individu. Je veux déterminer quelle mythologie et quel discours sont plus répandus au sujet du corps; quel est le rôle des médias dans la transmission et la promotion des valeurs culturelles? Je suspectais sans bien la comprendre l'influence que les médias exercent sur nos vies. Initialement attirée par le concept de limite, tel que discuté par Stallybrass et White, je voulais capter les limites culturelles du corps "acceptable", ce qui caractérise l'attraction ou la répulsion pouvant aider à définir les normes de "l'acceptabilité" dans notre culture.

Après trois interviews préliminaires, dont deux avec des femmes, et l'autre avec un groupe de deux hommes et une femme, j'ai décidé de procéder à des entrevues personnelles avec six hommes et six femmes, des étudiants célibataires, âgés entre vingt et trente ans, vivant hors du cercle familial. Je croyais que ce genre de personnes étaient plus enclines à être influencées par leurs pairs et par les médias de la culture environnante.

Pour donner une dimension comparative à l'étude, les personnes interrogées provenaient, à égalité, de deux groupes: étudiants en médecine et artistes. Toutefois, j'admettais le fait que la comparaison principale demeurerait entre hommes et femmes. Le choix de ces groupes basé sur leur familiarité avec la discussion du corps laissait espérer des entrevues plus franches et approfondies. Les artistes furent faciles à trouver. Certains étaient des amis, d'autres des connaissances, nul ne m'était complètement inconnu. Les étudiants en médecine furent plus ardues à localiser. Une amie intéressée par mon projet me donna les numéros de téléphone de "sujets" potentiels. A l'exception d'un étudiant mâle, rencontré lors d'une conférence, je fis connaissance avec les membres de ce groupe durant les entrevues.

Chaque entrevue d'une heure à une heure trente environ, était enregistrée puis recopiée. Avant l'entrevue, je donnais au sujet une idée sur mon travail et sur le genre de questions auxquelles il/elle aurait à répondre. Je leur demandais de se décrire, de parler de leurs pratiques corporelles, de l'image qu'ils essaient de projeter (et dans quelles circonstances), et de toute transformation récente dans ce domaine. Ensuite venaient des questions sur les situations où ils/elles se sentaient à l'aise ou inconfortables, leurs peurs et appréhensions, attirances et répulsions. Pour terminer, nous passions en revue les influences qui déterminaient leurs décisions corporelles, les personnes avec qui ces sujets étaient abordés, les valeurs culturelles qu'ils/elles identifiaient comme ayant trait au corps, et leurs opinions concernant le potentiel de transformation corporelle. Par ailleurs, et au cours de l'entrevue, je sollicitais leurs opinions quant à certaines pratiques corporelles tels le tatouage, le perçage, l'utilisation de cosmétiques, et la chirurgie plastique.

Suite à ces entrevues, je postule que l'image saine du corps est toujours en flux. Toutes les personnes interviewées mentionnent une amélioration progressive dans leurs sentiments vis-à-vis de leurs corps, tous par ailleurs parlent de transformations de leur apparence physique en périodes de transition (au début d'un cycle scolaire, à l'arrivée dans une nouvelle école, ou suite à une maladie). Leurs corps, de même que les images qu'ils en ont, sont constamment en flux et progression, une pluralité qui reflète les relations qui définissent chacun d'entre eux. Ils/Elles permettent à des changements d'opinion, de statut, ou de caractère de se manifester sur le corps, cherchant une individualisation, mais recherchant à la fois l'accord et le soutien de leurs pairs. Mais les limites de chaque corps, tant par sa forme que par son potentiel, ont elles aussi un impact sur l'image que chaque personne forme de soi.

Je m'attendais à ce que les hommes soient aussi conscients que les femmes de l'image du corps. Ce qui m'a surpris est l'étendue du problème de la pilosité parmi eux. Ironiquement, dans les générations passées, les hommes s'inquiétaient du manque de poils. L'inquiétude d'un excès de poil dans cette génération est une indication de la manière dont la mode peut affecter le psychique. Les femmes, par ailleurs, mentionnent la famille un peu plus souvent que les hommes et de façon beaucoup plus ambiguë.

En traitant des thèmes sus-mentionnés, d'autres thèmes inattendus sont apparus, tels l'attraction de la chirurgie plastique, et les difficultés résultant de la dynamique familiale notamment l'empiètement plus répétitif sur les corps des femmes que sur ceux des hommes par

la famille ainsi que l'étendue de l'influence familiale sur l'image que l'individu forme de son propre corps. Pour plusieurs, leurs partenaires et leurs pairs ont remplacé la famille comme source de soutien mais le rôle formatif de la famille demeure un rôle à mon avis insuffisamment étudié en anthropologie.

Diverses situations et contextes influencent la relation entre l'individu et son corps, tels le voyage, la vie dans un autre pays que le sien, ou parfois dans une autre province. Les degrés de confiance en soi semblent dépendre du statut de la personne dans son nouvel environnement ou du changement d'expectatives dû à un nouveau cercle social. Les étudiants en médecine ressentent une dichotomie aigüe entre leur lieu de travail rigide (et son imposition sur le corps) et leurs vies personnelles. Les artistes exhibent une plus grande continuité entre les deux sphères mais ils sont extrêmement conscients de l'impact de leur apparence physique sur leur travail où le corps est souvent un outil professionnel.

Les personnes interrogées font part d'une relation plus compliquée avec les médias que celle élaborée dans les théories. Bien que les sujets ressentent l'influence des médias nul n'a réussi à la décrire de façon convaincante, sauf par analogie avec un cercle social étendu. Tous critiquent l'homogénéité des images diffusées dans les médias "mainstream" parce qu'ils estiment que ces images impliquent une certaine uniformité qui contredit la diversité humaine. En réalité, il semble toutefois que ces personnes utilisent les médias plus qu'ils/elles ne sont manipulée(e)s par eux-çi, démontrant une connaissance de la relation complexe entre consommateur et produit consommé. Par exemple, l'une des femmes explique clairement son utilisation des médias comme monde de fantaisie où elle peut temporairement être attirée par l'image de la femme victime et fuir sa propre indépendance. Une autre personne oscille entre fascination et révolte vis-à-vis des images diffusées par les médias. L'utilisation des médias change donc avec les changements interprétifs attribués au corps. Toutefois, en période de crise familiale, les médias remplacent la famille en tant que guide. Plus grande était l'insécurité des informateurs à certains moments de leur existence, plus l'image stéréotypée du corps tel que projetée dans les médias prenait de l'importance comme référent de succès.

Ces entrevues détaillées me permettent de broser un riche portrait de quelques jeunes montréalais anglophones, de leurs choix, pratiques, et valeurs corporelles ainsi que des influences attenantes. Je retrace ainsi le contexte de leurs habitudes et, par là, obtiens une

meilleure compréhension des subtilités et spécificités des valeurs culturelles de cette communauté et de la manière dont elles sont transmises.

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1. Introduction

From my past work on tattooing amongst urban Montrealers and, more recently, a look at the significance of hairdressing as a ritual (as initially compared with that of Turkish baths), I have glimpsed at how people struggle to form a corporal identity according to their own earnest beliefs and are able to be profoundly articulate and self reflexive about this process. Even in seemingly frivolous moments of fun - like fretting about your hair, dressing up to go dancing, or picking a tattoo design - deeper meanings are at play as we reinforce or create a new image. Wondering if your jeans are too tight belies a whole system of beliefs. The issue is 'too tight' for what, who, or where? How do our cultural and social myths, or discourse, influence an individual's practices and relationship with their body? How is our culture inscribed on the body and what is the role of popular culture media? Do people see their body as a consumer item, placing importance on its perceived accessibility to others as a medium of exchange?

It is not surprising that social scientists have written elegantly on the subject of the body - it is that which we are, own, feel, and nurture; without one we are nothing, embodied we are all: instruments of desire and communication, metaphor, symbol, nature, and culture. After reading about the bodily practices of the Kayapo, Nuer, and medical beliefs amongst the Azande (to name a few), and due to my own past research into tattooing practices of Montrealers, I became interested in applying anthropological thinking on the body to my own culture. I wanted to research how people use their bodies in our contemporary society and, furthermore, examine what influences them. What I am primarily exploring is the construction of bodily identity through margin and myth, to understand further how bodies are perceived, utilized, and inhabited among those aged twenty to thirty in the anglophone Montreal educated world.

I am interested in how young anglophone Montrealers define the limits of their bodies, and how popular imagery may serve as a reinforcement to ideas of what is acceptable. The margins of the body define us, in part by containing that within us, for sure, but also by clarifying what is excluded and not of us. The boundary of our skin, hair, clothes are the ambivalent markers of our selves. We also define ourselves by what we are not: we are not hairy, pimply, unhealthy, unstylish, too stylish, nor exuding the wrong effluvia. I wanted to explore what the definitive markers would be for my group of informants.

Having been (both intentionally and not) a participant observer of this group for many years puts me in a good position to carry out my fieldwork. With a background of theory of

the body, particularly concerning the body as a communicative tool and of practices in urban North America, I set out to interview twelve men and women between the ages of twenty and thirty. They were students working in either medicine or in the performing arts (and hence familiar with discussing bodies), not living with their parents, nor with a spouse (perhaps more vulnerable to the wider influence of peer groups and mass media). I asked questions both about their body (practices and presentation of), and more general interpretive ones about what influences them, what they see to be the cultural values and myths around them. Questions included if they have tattoos, what fashion trends they follow, what is their attitude towards their body, leading to what it is that fascinates, provokes, or bothers them. When talking about the idea of a popular mythology, or discourse, I often turned to the mass media as the messenger. I was curious to see how much they turned to the media as a factor in choosing how to comport themselves, if they felt it as a controlling force, how it plays on their fears and desires, and if there were popular figures that inspired them. I tried to impose few expectations on this group as my aim was to expose, rather than prove or disprove their habits and beliefs, but sometimes ended up surprised at their answers - not least because of their openness and generosity.

Mapping the Theories of the Body

The notion that the surface of the body reflects the centre of the body, or the soul, is one that has existed in North America for many years. Phrenology, the study of bumps on the head as an indication of character, was popular in the mid-eighteen hundreds.

The science of head-reading depended upon a theory linking centre to surface, giving psychological depth to the opaque contours of the human skull. Like the new American cartographers who were plotting far more revealing topographical maps in the 1840s, phrenologists with their calipers were charting the cranium for a more revealing topography of human character. Each sentiment, propensity and intellectual faculty had its own latitude and longitude on the bumpy globe of the skull. (Schwartz 1986:52)

We make maps, or theories, to guide us to the meaning of the body, but then the map inadvertently becomes the meaning. “The reality of the body is only established by the observing eye that reads it. The atlas enables the anatomy student...to see certain things and ignore others. In effect what the student sees is not the atlas as a representation of the body but the body as a representation of the atlas” (Armstrong 1983:2 in Turner 1984:209). “The atlas

is therefore a means of interpreting the body, of seeing its form and nature and establishing its reality” (Armstrong 1983:2). The surface is the key to the inner workings of one’s self, the margin is the meaning. The figurative road maps we create for the body’s surface become the factor by which we measure the body as a whole. The outward appearance of someone is a direct reflection of the person’s inner self. That people judged invisible attributes of others by the bumps on their heads is no different in spirit from judging them by the clothes that they wear, their weight, or bodily shape. The first professes to be science; the second, common sense. “Increasingly, the size and shape of the body have come to operate as a market of personal, internal order (or disorder) - as a symbol for the emotional, moral, or spiritual state of the individual” (Bordo 1993:193).

Theories of the body serve as an atlas for academics, as perhaps does mass media for the general population. Do we see the body as a representation of the media generated images, rather than view the media as a representation for our bodies? Many of my informants complained that the media only represented a fraction of what the population is like, usually depicting unattainable ideals of beauty or image. It is expected that people compare their bodies with images of the media, and see them as imperfect. Such can be the normalizing influence of the media, as are medical atlases, for the body. Theory, we can only hope, is the continued, questioning surveillance of the land and the formations beneath it.

Studies of attitudes towards, and practices of, the body constantly appear in popular magazines, giving the impression that the body is everywhere in discourse, perhaps fetish-like, as suggested above. Articles on morning beauty rituals (Merrel 1995), plastic surgery (Hunnewell 1995), liposuction (Kramer 1996), teenage girls battling difficult body image issues (Brody 1995), and North American culture’s distaste for underarm hair (Bachrach 1995) are typical of what you find in magazines geared for women. These often address the same issues that the social sciences do, such as diet (Schwartz 1986, B. Turner 1991), hair (McCracken 1995), or cultural expectations of the body (Bordo 1993, Winkler and Cole, 1994). It serves theory well to keep an eye on the different kinds of discourses, which in turn can be elevated by paying attention to the theory. “The diversity of sociological, semiotic, linguistic and phenomenological approaches can serve to prepare a solid foundation for an anthropology of the body only if the interrelationship between these various approaches is made explicit” (Polhemus 1978:27). We can only improve our work by being open to a variety of disciplines.

Anthropology

“Because human evolution and variation among human populations have always been part of the anthropological bailiwick, anthropologists have proved a good deal more alert to the theoretical challenge posed by the body than have other social scientists” (Lock 1993:134).

The field of anthropology has discussed the body starting at the beginning of this century, and has examined it in earnest throughout the Eighties and into the Nineties. It came to the subject before sociology really did, as Frank observes, “It was the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, not his sociological uncle and sometimes collaborator Durkheim, who introduced ‘body techniques’ into modern social scientific consideration” (Frank 1991:37).

Robert Hertz discussed the symbolism of the body as early as 1909 in *The Pre-eminence of the Right Hand*. In his work he ascribes the cultural preference accorded to the right hand as perfectly understandable given its greater physiological aptitude. The dualistic nature of humans has led to an obligatory symbolic pairing of all that is good and sacred with the right hand, and that which is bad, profane, and dangerous with the left. The slight physiological advantage the right hand enjoys has led to its reverence, but “If organic asymmetry had not existed, it would have had to be invented” (Hertz 1973 [1909]:10). He cites numerous examples world-wide in which the right hand is symbolically supreme as a consequence of an innate tendency towards dualism in “primitive thought.” The right is also the side that is towards the sunny south when we face east towards the strength of the rising sun, reinforcing the natural proclivity. “Thereafter, thanks to the plasticity of the organism, social constraint adds to the opposed members, and incorporates in them, those qualities of strength and weakness, dexterity and clumsiness, which in the adult appear to spring spontaneously from nature” (Mauss 1973 [1935]:21).

In 1933 Granet disputed this universal rule-of-thumb with his example of Chinese symbolism concerning left and right. The ascribing of meaning to left and right in China is rather complex as it shifts according to context, is dependant on a host of situations and circumstance, and by no means is the right preferred and the left ‘sinister.’ The left is generally honourable, while the population is still mostly right handed (due to learning to eat with that hand), but the right is not inauspicious. One’s actions are appropriate depending on time and place.

Mauss was one of the first to discuss the body as affected by culture in his “Techniques

du Corps” in 1936. In it he states that there is no such thing as natural action - it is all learned. During World War I Mauss had the opportunity to watch English soldiers try and manoeuvre french shovels. The problem was a matter of technique. Something that we take for granted as being natural is so learned that even a foreign shovel becomes an obstacle. He had more time to mull over this when sick in an American hospital, where the nurses’ gait seemed familiar. He realized it was a walk he’d seen in films, and upon return to France he observed the same mode of walking amongst young french women, particularly in Paris. Every physical action, from the way a convent girl walks, to the way we fall asleep, is learned, generally through imitation. “Body techniques are socially given - individuals may improvise on them but rarely make up any for themselves - but these techniques are only instantiated in their practical use *by* bodies, *on* bodies” (Frank 1991:49).

He had a great impact on the field of anthropology, and started the suppositions of the body that have been debated and refined ever since. Unlike some of his future colleagues he was very keen on an interdisciplinary approach. “What emerges very clearly...is the fact that we are everywhere faced with physio-psycho-sociological assemblages of series of actions” (Mauss 1973 [1936]:85).

According to the discipline of anthropology, we can have any number of bodies. The number ranges from Mary Douglas’ two, to Lock’s and Scheper-Hughes’ three, or John O’Neill’s five (as seen below). These analyses correspond to what Csordas refers to as the “multiple body” (“with the number of bodies dependent on how many of its aspects one cares to recognize”) (Csordas 1994:5). Our bodies are simultaneously our own, our society’s, our politic’s, our religion’s. They are physical, metaphysical, theatrical, magical; base and sublime, all without even having roused out of bed in the morning. In fact they are often not considered in any active state, but often as passive recipients of cultural meaning, this consideration being perhaps a necessary step before the exploration of the more intricate play between body and culture.

Martin believes that the current interest in the body may not only be because of its importance in Western social forms, but also perhaps because “we are undergoing fundamental changes in how our bodies are organized and experienced” (1992: 121 in Csordas 1994:1). Citing Levi-Strauss’s observation that academic attention seems to become focussed on phenomena precisely when they are ending she suggests that we are seeing “the end of one kind

of body and the beginning of another kind of body” (ibid.:121 in ibid.:1). Our corporeality is not as fixed nor constant as often assumed, and we are more aware that the body has a history.

“The paradoxical truth, in fact, appears to be that if there is an essential characteristic of embodiment, it is indeterminacy (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Csordas 1993)” (Csordas 1994:5).

Not simply individual, the body is “a unique material or medium of expression in that it can serve to integrate intensely individual and, on the other hand, intensely collective levels of experience” (Polhemus 1978:150). People interviewed for my study exercise to feel personally good, but also either to fit a collective ideal of attractiveness or to participate in a cultural belief of what is good for the health. Just as a tattoo may be a mark of one’s uniqueness or a symbol, it can also mean that one shares ideas (and ideals) with a certain group, or a mixture of both.

Csordas divides the analyses of anthropology of the body into, first, the study of the ‘analytic body,’ which looks at culturally tinted perceptions, techniques, and processes of the body; second, the ‘topical body’ which relates the body to various realms of cultural activity such as health, politics, gender, religion, technology, and emotion; and finally, addressing the “multiple bodies” as mentioned above. Csordas notes that these approaches tend to take the notion of *embodiment* for granted amidst cultural speculation, and proposes an anthropology which examines how embodiment can be a starting point for reviewing the nature of culture, how the body is the seat of subjectivity, as mentioned above. He prefers to think of the topic at hand as “being-in-the-world” and eschews previous simple representationalism in the field.

In our own culture we have had to deal with the pervasive Cartesian dualism which in some ways has led to an alienation and detachment from the notion of self and the body. In the west we inhabit our bodies, rather than are our bodies. Csordas, *apropos* of phenomenology, suggests that dualism is the consequence of objectification of the (and one’s own) body. There are two possible consequences of objectifying the body, circumscribing the physical from the spiritual, communal, emotional, etc. “That is the individuation of the psychological self and the instantiation of dualism in the conceptualization of human being” (Csordas 1994:7). Objectification of the body is not particularly a ‘cultural evolution,’ but occurs within the individual too. Csordas feels Descartes has been given rather short shrift in recent theorizing, and reminds us that his doctrine was a valuable analytic tool that was introduced in order to help free scientific thought from the Church. Mind/body dualism may have been the start to being

able to think of embodiment as a state of flux, in which we are newly attentive to changes in (bodily) awareness and experience. It is, nonetheless, difficult to stop distinguishing the mind/subject/culture from the body/object/biology although Csordas proposes we understand the body “as a seat of subjectivity” (1994:9). Jackson argues that the “subjugation of the bodily to the semantic is empirically untenable...meaning should not be reduced to a sign which, as it were, lies on a separate plane outside the immediate domain of an act” (1989:122 from Csordas 1994:10).

According to Douglas, who was influenced by Mauss, we have two bodies - the physical and the social. The latter constrains how the former is perceived, and the physical is a microcosm of the social, with the boundaries of one corresponding to the other.

The human body is always treated as an image of society and that there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social dimension. Interest in its apertures depends on the preoccupation with social exits and entrances, escape routes and invasions. If there is no concern to preserve social boundaries, I would not expect to find concern with bodily boundaries....Consequently I now advance the hypothesis that bodily control is an expression of social control - abandonment of bodily control in ritual responds to the requirements of a social experience which is being expressed.(Douglas 1970:98-99)

Douglas presages notions of grotesque with *Purity and Danger*, in which she shows that where there are conceptions of pollution there exists a social system. Order is created within a culture by exaggerating differences, between clean and unclean, male and female, inside and out. These classifications are often played out through symbolic metaphors on the human body. The more the external boundaries are under attack in a society, the more rigid the maintenance of bodily boundaries. “Strong social control demands strong bodily control” (ibid.:100). Bordo later applies this to North American society, saying that the excessive internal management of the body’s desires reflects the instability in the macro-regulation of desires within our social system (Bordo 1993:199).

However, Jackson criticizes Douglas’s representationalist bias, common in anthropology of the body, in which “the human body is simply an object of understanding or an instrument of the rational mind, a kind of vehicle for the expression of a reified social rationality” (1989:123 in Csordas 1994:10).

Polhemus compiled a choice set of essays in *Social Aspects of the Human Body* “about

the role of the body and adornment in social interaction and the role of the body as a concrete symbol of that social interaction” (1978:11). Despite its detractors, I find the symbolic approach appealing. Both issues of bodily adornment and linguistic aspects of the body are put forth. Polhemus stated that he would like to see both verbal and non-verbal communication moved into a framework of sign systems, rendering it more easily apprehended, like a ritual scar on a Nuer’s forehead. Textual analysis of the body has since enjoyed its advocates, “the body may be compared to a literary or ethnographic text which may be read closely for the ideological assumptions of its culture” (Burroughs and Ehrenreich 1993:4). There are many problems with this method - in a class of Margaret Lock’s, we discussed how the linguistic-type analyses have usually ignored ritual behaviour. Murphy, shortly before dying, nicely instructed “those engaged in seeing the body as a kind of text to climb down from the lofty level of metaphor to nitty-gritty social activity and regard the body as an *instrument* through which we interact with our physical and social milieus” (1990:335).

Lock and Scheper-Hughes put forth three bodies for our consideration, the individual, social, and political (1987). The individual body is “understood in the phenomenological sense of the lived experience of the body-self” (1987:7), with the reasonable assumption that all people are able to discern their embodied selves from other individual bodies. The social body follows that of Douglas, in which the body is a natural symbol “with which to think about nature, society, and culture” (Ibid.:7). The political is that which refers to the surveillance, regulation, and control of both individual and collective bodies, as expanded by Foucault. Lock has gone on to contribute work in the field of medical anthropology, contextualizing the self within culture, and “one point she makes, however, is especially relevant: that an anthropology of the body must include a theory of the emotions, and the first step toward such a theory is to recognize how arbitrary the Cartesian separation between ‘reason’ and ‘emotion’ is” (Strathern, A. 1996:7).

Terence Turner wrote about how the body’s surface is the common frontier “of society, the social self, and the psycho-biological individual, becomes the symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialisation is enacted, and bodily adornment...becomes the language through which it is expressed” (1980:113). He studied the Kayapo of the Amazon and discussed how they demonstrated their socialization, status, and age through body indicators such as cleanliness, hair length, body paint, lip-plugs and earrings. Room for individuality is allowed

for within the cultural codes, such as creating designs within body-painting. The Kayapo's identity, symbolic integration of their environment, and cultural values are represented on their skin, their cultural boundary. "The skin (and hair) are the concrete boundary between the self and the other, the individual and society" (Turner 1980:139).

Gillmore is one anthropologist who looked at the aesthetic requirements and beauty practices of men in various cultures and he points out "how we have managed to overlook consistent evidence that in many cultures, the appearance of the male is as important as that of the female, although perhaps in different ways....it has simply never been systematically studied" (1994:197). We have preferred to focus on men's performance, and I agree with Gillmore that this is a topic which deserves more attention. In the west, such criteria as hair and height are very important to men, whom he found to obsess over their looks as much as women do.

As Lock wrote, "Anthropologists often find themselves or their work used in medicine or for political ends"(1993:148). Their fresh perspective in these fields can be invaluable to those not used to thinking of the body in such multifaceted ways. Yet other fields have much to offer anthropology.

Sociology and Other Cultural Theory

Sociology has come to study the body in society more recently than anthropology but, in recognizing this, borrows from anthropology as well as other fields such as psychoanalysis and philosophy. From anthropology, sociologists have benefited from an exposure to ideas of how the body is seen as a source of constraint as well as potential, how in cultures contradictions arise between sexuality and sociocultural requirements, and that these are experienced differently according to gender (Turner B. 1991:4). There has been some good work done in the field, and many anthropologists are as likely to read Bryan Turner as they are Victor Turner. Although, granted, much of sociologists' energy is spent creating "elaborate body typologies" (Lock 1993:134), work which anthropologists have left behind. Although I prefer the anthropologist's approach, I have found these typologies useful.

As Bryan Turner opens his book, *The Body and Society*, "There is an obvious and prominent fact about human beings: they have bodies and they are bodies" (1984:2). He nicely points out that "much of sociology is still essentially Cartesian in implicitly accepting a rigid mind/body dichotomy in a period where contemporary philosophy has largely abandoned the

distinction as invalid” (ibid.:2). One interesting factor in the management of bodies that he explores is that of consumerism and diet:

This history of diet attempts to show that dietary management emerged out of a theology of the flesh, developed through a moralistic medicine and finally established itself as a science of the efficient body. The principal change is that diet was originally aimed at a control of desire, whereas under modern forms of consumerism diet exists to promote and preserve desire. (ibid.:3)

He later argues that “any sociology of the body will hinge ultimately on the nature of the sexual and emotional division of labour....a study of the control of sexuality, specifically female sexuality by men exercising patriarchal power” (ibid.:115). Studies from the Eighties on the sexual division tended to focus on the female half of the equation. For the Nineties it is more useful to examine *both* men and women and the intricate dynamic that plays between them which led to a history of gender disparity.

Frank, in his sociology and anthropology theory review, suggests that “bodies exist among discourses and institutions. Discourses imply cognitive mappings of the body’s possibilities and limitations, which bodies experience as already there for their self-understanding” (Frank 1991:48). And further, “the corporeality of bodies is the third dimensions of their constitution” (ibid.:49). For this thesis the influences of discourses will be discussed since my focus is more on the individual than the political (yet how can they be separated!), appropriate for the scope of this master’s thesis. I will also stay away from questions of the history of corporeality, (for example as raised by Bynum on saintly bodies in 1989 [see ibid.:50]) preferring, if unimaginatively, to believe that bodies are somewhat constant. Discourse provides parameters that can be applied and improvised on. It is these margins, the respect for and play upon them, that interest me. Also, play can only be recognized if the standard from which it is deviating is clear.

In discussing the sociology of the body, Frank relates four dimensions of the body’s experience and use to their respective typology: control is of the disciplined body, desire of the mirroring body, other-relatedness of the dominating body, and self-relatedness to the communicative body.

Foucault is at the fore of the disciplined body with his discussion of a (self) imposed regime and techniques of domination. He talked of ‘truth games’ which are “discourses ... which are ‘related to specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves,’ like

any discipline or regimen of care, such as dieting” (Martin et al 1988:18 in Frank 1991:56). His writing examines power structures more than focussing on the body *per se*. One implication of Foucault’s approach to the relationship between the order of things and the order of words is that the body is itself a cultural object which is the product of classification (Turner 198:209). Beyond discourse, the authoritative gaze is given power through surveillance as a regulator. “The survey, a mechanism for ‘measuring’ reality, could be transformed into a technology for the ‘creation’ of reality; the tactics of the survey could make the operation of disciplinary power throughout a society more effective and more efficient” (Armstrong 1983:43).

The mirroring body is that which consumes. It “finds itself to be predictable as it reflects that which is around it” (Frank 1991:61). This is the body which is practically tailor-made to refer to the media around us. But since the mirroring body is not the slightest bit self-reflective, there is no reality beyond its assimilation of that which is created for its assimilation. “If the disciplined body made itself predictable against an unconscious fear of its own contingency, the mirroring body is endlessly *producing* desires in order to keep its lack unconscious” (ibid.:62). “What counts is the endless producing and reproducing of desire, of the body in the world’s image and the world in the body’s image” (ibid.:63). This is an entirely superficial body, existing to be decorated, learning about itself through advertising. Baudrillard updated the Marxist theory of commodities to show how “the body reproduced itself by internalizing objects in consumption” (ibid.:64). Desire renders these objects signs, rather than the thing itself, because it is the sign that we’re after. Malls are merely where we hysterically and simultaneously consume and foster our desires.

The communicative body is a narrative body. Although it continues to be shaped by discourse, this body uses the discourse as means for expression. “The essential quality of the communicative body is that it is a body *in process* of creating itself. Theory cannot describe such a body, nor can it prescribe it. The task is rather to bring together fragments of its emergence” (ibid.:79). For the purpose of social typology Frank chose to look to the body in dance and medicine. He chose these fields for reasons akin to why I chose performers and medical students. For him, dancers literally embody expressiveness, and is often communal. Women in modern dance are particularly attuned to issues of socialization and try to transcend these issues in a manner that is not available to ballerinas. In medical care, Frank focuses on the ill, rather than the caregiver, although the latter is often complicit in evoking the narrative

of the illness. The moving account by Robert Murphy is discussed, along with how *recognition* is an important component for this communicativeness. The ill want their plight to be recognized by the doctors, the dancers want the audience to empathize. “What communicative bodies are about is the capacity for recognition which is enhanced through the sharing of narratives which are fully embodied” (Frank 1991:89).

John O’Neill first establishes the physical body and the communicative body as an inseparable lived body. Our bodies are instruments of the societies we live in, and are not only shaped by institutions and society but, in turn, shape them. There is also the social body, the body politic, and the consumer body. All for anthropomorphism, an engaging quality of his work is that O’Neill takes “a radical stand against antihumanism and, in particular, against any fashionable credo of *defamilization*, whose aim is to strengthen the state and the market as the ultimate matrix of human life” and appeals to “*a familial history without which there cannot be any one of us*” (both 1985:19). I think that some anthropologists (in the field of the body, anyway) forget that culture is transmitted through the family, and so there is little emphasis on the family’s role on an individual beyond dependant childhood.

O’Neill condemns consumerism for exploiting the body - the economic system teaches us to value our body only when embellished beyond the natural state. However he is aware of needs beyond the basic ones and supports rational economic behaviour, but wishes that we rethink “categories of consumption, production, and distribution in terms of the semiotics or *rhetoric of commodities* as discourse types signifying a variety of social domains ranging from subsistence to fantasy”(1985:98-99).

As Morgan rightly points out, much of Bryan Turner’s work (and that of many others) deal with women’s bodies. Not that he dismisses the fine work done in the area of exploring women’s fractured and confused relationships with their bodies, but he addresses this gender bias by writing about men’s bodies and “how men and ideas of masculinity are both embodied and non-bodied” (1993:70). One could say he adds to studies of women’s bodies by virtue of how he looks at how men’s bodies occupy power status in space and discourse. Morgan also discusses Frank’s four body types from a gendered point of view, pointing out each one’s association with masculine and feminine, and compares the masculine body in terms of the grotesque and classical.

Another bodily distinction of late has been how Bahktin (1968), then Stallybrass and

White (1986), made the distinction between the grotesque body and the classical body, and discussed the definition of the self and community in relation to the contrasting dynamic of these two concepts. As the classical body is controlled, aesthetically conforming, and is linked to high culture, so the grotesque body transgresses all of these bounded qualities and is considered low, and closer to nature.

The grotesque ignores the impenetrable surface that closes and limits the body as a separate and completed phenomenon. The grotesque image displays not only the outward but also the inner features of the body: blood, bowels, heart and other organs. The outward and inward features are often merged into one. (Bahktin 1968:318)

There is a correlation between postural models in psychoanalyst Schilder (see below) and the grotesque in Bahktin. It is nicely laid out how the postural image of the body is constantly shifting to include the previously inner, and the grotesque tweaks these psychologically sensitive parts. For Schilder, the body unit “not only appersonates parts but also frequently gives them away. The unit is also in a continual danger of losing some of its parts” (1950: 188).

Susan Bordo is a theorist who writes compellingly, and makes important distinctions about the female body in our culture. “We may be *obsessed* with our bodies, but we are hardly accepting of them....My aim, however, is not to portray these obsessions as bizarre or anomalous, but, rather, as the logical (if extreme) manifestations of anxieties and fantasies fostered by our culture” (1993:15). She has done interesting work on consumerism, diet, exercise, and obsessiveness among women, including rethinking anorexia in terms of a form of control, and negation of traditional gender roles.

There is some research that is narrower in scope than the ones mentioned above but are very useful nonetheless. These include Nichter and Vuckovic’s study of young girls in America, which exposes the difference between discourse and action. During their research on body image, diet, and smoking among girls in America they were struck by how often girls would say such things like “I’m so fat” and complain about their weight. Instead of looking at the diet behaviour of these girls, they decided, among other topics, to explore ‘fat talk,’ or the discourse of weight related issues, in a series of one-on-one interviews and group discussions. It seems that when someone says “I’m so fat” it does not refer to their actually believing that they are fat, but: “It is a call for support from one’s peers, for affirmation that one is in fact *not* fat. It can also act as an apology or excuse for behaviour, or as an invitation to listeners to

reaffirm group solidarity” (Nichter and Vuckovic 1994:113). The girls interviewed recognized that it is just part of the social interaction between them, and that “I’m so fat” is said to provoke the reply of “no, you’re not.” “When the statement comes before eating, it provides an apology or excuse by the speaker for the indulgence at hand (in effect, a secular ‘grace’ before eating)” (ibid.:113). In these instances you are effectively absolved from the sin of overeating if you acknowledge it beforehand. Those who comment on their weight are not actually overweight or obsessed with dieting, but want to hear a response, to see what others think of them. When they would talk about actually dieting, their criteria for a diet were pretty loose, and could mean eating right or eating very little, which in practice could translate to intending to diet with a friend, but then eating a candy bar a few hours later when tempted or bored (ibid.: 124-6). Much more energy and effort would go into the planning and discussing than the actually doing. This can lead to misreporting of diet practice and it can seem like teenage girls are forever dieting when they are merely planning to, feel they should, or are for just a few hours until tempted by a snack. Even if actions do not indicate their concerns with weight, nonetheless their discourse shows it, and takes the place of action. The walk must be taken into account with the talk.

The discourse we are hearing among teenage girls shows evidence of ritual talk about weight and a rhetoric indicative of a cultural mandate for weight control. Under such a mandate, even if a girl is not actually working on herself, she must at least talk about it. Talking about weight control in itself constitutes action as it serves to create and project an image of self. By engaging in fat talk, females present themselves to others as responsible beings concerned about their appearance. (ibid.:127)

In a way their study is positive, despite finding the girls’ obsession over their weight harmful. It would seem that since talking is an acceptable substitute for action, then these girls aren’t going to suffer the health consequences of excessive dieting. Talking about losing weight is a social action rather than a true belief in one’s lack of worth. It seems to me that these girls are more worried about fitting in with their peers, and exhibiting acceptable social control/behaviour, than if they are fat. With this comes the problem of analysis. It is hard to interview people in good faith and put different thoughts behind their words.

Anthropologists, and other social scientists, sometimes neglect to take into account the family in studies of contemporary American culture, preferring instead to examine the overarching discourse. This is why I have felt it beneficial to turn towards psychology, a subject

more likely to closely regard the family as a small-scale community and take its deeper hidden influences very seriously. As well as coining the term 'body-image,' psychologists have analysed it in depth.

Psychology

There is much more written about western body image in the field of psychology than anthropology. It is telling that in the recent book on cultural assumptions about the body *The Good Body* (Winkler and Cole, 1994) there is one contribution by an anthropologist amidst mostly scholars in psychology or other humanities. Of course, one reason is that anthropologists specialize in non-western cultures, so they write less on North American bodies, but when they do examine the body in western cultures it is of great use to the field. For an anthropologist is used to making discreet comparisons between and within cultures, and can highlight previously missed observations.

Polhemus, in 1978, noted that "The real move towards a symbiotic psychology-sociology of the human body has come from the psychologists and not from the sociologist" (1978:114). Ten years later Scheper-Hughes and Lock allow that body image is closely related to psychological conceptions of self:

Body image refers to the collective and idiosyncratic representations an individual entertains about the body in its relationship to the environment, including internal and external perceptions, memories, affects cognitions, and actions. The existing literature of body imagery (although largely psychiatric) has been virtually untapped by social and especially medical anthropologists, who could benefit from attention to body boundary conceptions, distortions in body perception, etc. (Scheper-Hughes, Lock 1987: 16-17)

One of the pioneers in the study of body image from a psychological perspective is Paul Schilder who wrote *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* in 1935. He wrote not only of neurological matters in abnormal situations, but also explored body-image phenomena in normal behaviour, and looked at sociology. Expanding from the phenomena of phantom limb syndrome, he recognized that the body image extends beyond the corporal limits. He defines it thus: "the image of the human body means the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say the way in which the body appears to ourselves" (Schilder 1950:11). This bodily schema is upheld through our sensate impressions, experience of bodily unity, and an internal postural model and is not merely the sum of these parts.

We expand and we contract the postural model of the body: we take parts away and we add parts; we rebuild it; we melt the details in; we create new details; we do this with our body and with the expression of the body itself. We experiment continually with it. When the experimentation with the movement is not sufficient, then we add the influence of the vestibular apparatus and of intoxicants to the picture. When even so the body is not sufficient for the expression of the playful changes and the destructive changes in the body, then we add clothes, masks, jewellery, which again expand, contract, disfigure, or emphasize the body-image and its particular parts. (ibid.:210)

The body image is also altered by that which is applied directly to the surface. "It is a new proof of the lability of the body-image that whatever comes into connection with the surface of our body is more or less incorporated in the body.... Tattooing, painting the lips, painting the face, bleaching or dyeing the hair, dressing the hair, are in the same category" (ibid.:202). These can also have symbolic meanings for the person, besides from the directly visible and conscious ones.

The whole concept of body-image boundaries has implicit in it the idea of the structuring of one's relations with others. It would seem to follow that if the body-image concept has something to do with the kind of defensive barriers an individual establishes about himself, an understanding of these barriers of peripheral boundaries should tell us something about the nature of that person's interactions with others. (Fisher 1968:206)

Some very recent books on practices of body modification, such as that written by Kim Hewitt, take a serious look at the psycho-spiritual aspects of the topic. Although I'm sure this book will become popular amongst those who practice tattooing, piercing, or cutting (using a razor blade to make permanent marks on the skin); and it has some useful interviews, it is a bit esoteric for my taste. She does examine the subject from a very up-to-date perspective.

That acts previously considered pathological and deviant are now considered part of a mainstream cultural discourse illuminates a renewed interest in the human body as territory for establishing personal, social, and spiritual identity. In turn, discussing the uses of the human body in overlapping spheres of private, social, and cosmic meaning, confirms the significance of popular culture and individual actions as both creating and reflecting cultural meaning. The human body is the oldest and most persistent vehicle for humanity's creative impulses, and interest in tattooing and piercing continues to increase as the public becomes more aware of the potency of body art. (Hewitt 1997:3)

Use of Theory

All of the anthropological theories mentioned above formed my thinking on the subject

of the body, but those that come most into use in this thesis were the investigations by Douglas, T. Turner, Lock, compilation of Polhemus, and I appreciated Csordas's words that both heed, and evolve beyond, Cartesian dualism. As much as I wished to put forth a political body analysis of my work in which the role of institutions could be examined, I found that the richness of the basic personal practices and beliefs of my informants occupied plenty of my analysis.

Of the other cultural theory, the two bodily categories that concern this study most are that of the communicative body, primarily, and of the mirroring body. But, not to discuss the disciplined body would be remiss. For instance, truth games will be seen here whenever an informant talks about dieting or working out, as will B. Turner's work on bodily regimens. Writers such as Bordo are useful in giving a recent and more widely read theory of the body and how it is shaped through consumer and general discourse. It was a relief to read Morgan and Gilmore, as critique on specifically male aesthetics is not easy to come by, although there is so much critique on a man's view (and dictation, some would say) of feminine aesthetics.

The more specific writing on 'Fat Talk' by Nichter and Vuckovic was a revelation as to how people may seem like they are falling hook, line, and sinker for a cultural value, but are actually more concerned with culturally apt appearances. The uproar over little girls starving themselves in an effort to be thin and proper could be based on overreported statistics of their diet activity. Of course they will tell any social scientist who asks them that they are on a diet, it would be shameful to be seen not to be. That they feel this embarrassment is something worthwhile to get worried about, but let us discern the true problems from the windmills.

Other than O'Neill's call to pay attention to the family, I found myself turning to psychology for this topic. Psychological studies of the influence of body image and the family were very useful, all the more so because my informants could more easily relate to such notions given the currency of psychological terms in our culture. Lay people are not so familiar with anthropological theory as they are with basic psychological tenets. Even though in my fieldwork I talked to people removed from a family scene, the influence of their families of origin rang loud and clear, much more so than the discourse of media, or notion of "culture" - a term of limited use for my informants.

Contemplation of the implication of the margins of the body, and definition of the self through repudiation of the other were with me all along, as well as significance of the grotesque

as a cultural demarcation. Although influenced by Stallybrass and White, which shows up through my findings, a specific, detailed analysis on these boundary matters will have to be left for a later study. Nonetheless I will touch upon them when I discuss aversions and repulsions. I ended up with more data than I hoped for, which is both a blessing and curse. It is the former for its ability to fascinate and spur me on, and the latter for leaving me feeling there is so much more to be said.

2. Fieldwork Process

My focus is on young Montrealers, between the ages of twenty and thirty. I wanted to talk to those who are as far outside of the family influence as possible, so I chose those who were neither living with their families of origin nor starting families of their own. As I was interested in media and peer influences on the body, I interviewed people who were students, since being in a relatively unstable environment (without the immediacy of family) they would interact wholeheartedly within the immediate cultural concerns of peers and popular culture. Although my preliminary interviews were with a hodge-podge of academics, mostly women, for my main interviews I decided to talk to six men, six women, and half medical students, half performers/students. I use 'performers/students' because they were not all performance students *per se* but all were involved with performing arts.

I wanted to talk with people who were accustomed to thinking about bodies - performers subjectively, medical students perhaps more objectively - and I was interested to see how or if their different experiences affected them. From my own experience in studying theatre, I know how much it is required to reflect upon your body and become very aware of its every compartment. Actors learn to observe people carefully in order to be able to emulate them on stage, and also to try and discern the motive behind their actions. Similarly, those in other performance fields such as dance, film, and singing are obliged to be cognizant of their bodies in space and as a performative tool. As Frank reasoned earlier, dancers literally embody expressiveness, and are trained to communicate with their bodies. I reckoned that anyone in these fields would be able to discuss the role of their body in their lives with ease. I knew less about medical students, however, but had one friend in the field who was interested in my project when I discussed it with her. After mulling over the choice of informants for some time, it became clear that medical students might be an interesting, and unknown (for me) group to interview. I chose them not so much for their differences from performers, but for similar reasons. They are used to talking about and studying bodies, albeit from a different viewpoint, and it is part of their training to be at ease when discussing personal matters, to communicate well, recognize the state of the body, and create a cogent narrative when dealing with the ill body, as Frank previously suggested (1991:89). It turned out that each group were also influenced by the different role models within their choice of profession.

I felt strongly about interviewing men as well as women because I feel that, for the most part, men have been excluded in cultural discussions about bodies, as if they didn't have them.

Bodily concerns are perceived as the domain of women, much as intellectual and political realms are viewed as men's. I wanted to listen to what men had to say about themselves, their bodies, and compare this to women's experiences. I certainly learnt from it, and hope that men's beliefs, fears, and desires will become a more common part of academic discourse, just as I hope for women's voices to be heard more in political discourse.

Women are used to talking about their bodies, and having their bodies talked of - evaluated, judged, exposed. Men are not - for instance, Grant McCracken chose not to include men in his book *Big Hair* because men would not easily participate in the research - "Oh, they would sit for the interview, but they'd reveal nothing useful" (1995:6). He was warned by a stylist that hair mattered to them *too* much, and so they were prone to trivialize the subject. Simply put, men are not used to having the forum to talk about their bodies and self-image, yet they are almost as often anxious about them. One recent summary showed that 55 percent of women were dissatisfied with their bodies as were 45 percent of men (Hatfield and Sprecher 1986:28-31). Although women's bodies may have been fetishized in our culture and media, a benefit is that this has at least allowed useful discussion to arise concerning the body's importance to one's identity and self-image.

The idea that women in our culture essentially only see themselves as flawed, and are painfully and constantly trying to conform to an ideal of beauty is prevalent in such books as *Beauty Bound* (Freedman 1986) and *The Beauty Myth* (Wolf 1991). Particularly in contrast to how men view themselves, which is supposedly with the utmost of confidence and nary a thought to how looks affect their lives. It is true there are women who are very insecure about their appearances, but generally not with the abject self-loathing that one is led to believe is commonplace. People have the oddest concerns, men and women both. And they possess the strengths to see where they are unjustly influenced, how they are biased.

A crucial element of fieldwork is finding informants who are willing and able to be interviewed. Since these interviews were unpaid I relied on those who showed enough interest in my project to free up at least two hours of their time. It was easier for me to find people in the arts to interview, because of my own connections with that group through my previous work in theatre. My friends knew of my project and I put the word out that I needed informants. Many people were interested in being interviewed, and some volunteered quite spontaneously. Some who didn't fit my occupation criteria I decided to interview as test

samples, but I made sure that they still fit the other criteria. Of the six arts students, all were people I had known for at least a year, and one I had known for ten years. Half were friendly acquaintances, half were friends, and I chose them because I thought they could give interesting insights into the topic, in part because of their eagerness. Of the six medical students, I knew only one beforehand and met the others through my research. I also made sure I didn't pick people who would be *too* interesting, by which I mean those who obviously practice large amounts of body modification. I certainly had access to people with an avid interest in tattoos, piercings, and more unusual routines, because of my previous work, but I wanted to try to focus on those who at least seemed more mainstream in their practices.

I have been accused of elitism, and that my chosen sector of the population is too rarefied and 'avant-garde' to represent anything other than the educated elite. (Asides from the point that they cannot truly represent anything but themselves). I do not think that students, by virtue of their being in a position to be educated, are particularly unrepresentative of the community in general. I could have interviewed those I know in the working world, for example, Neal's roommate who is a successful working countertenor, but I doubt he would have given me more, or less, 'real' material than Neal did, or Luke, a countertenor who still happens to be in school - just somewhat different due to his more regular environment. I chose students because of their proximity to a younger, more rootless, peer group. I know that Psychology studies have been criticized for using students and expecting them to be representative of the culture as a whole, but these criticisms are not necessarily apt, meanwhile we must still heed an individual's position within the culture.

Although my sample is small, I believe that this need not reduce the credibility of my findings. I attended a lecture recently, where a neurologist, Dr. Ramachandran, talked of his research on phantom limbs. He is occasionally confronted with the contention that his sample of a half dozen or so patients is too small to be scientifically valid. To this he offers the following hypothetical anecdote: "If I walked into a classroom with a pig, and placed it on the table and told you it could talk, your reaction would be 'yeah, right, get out of here, pigs can't talk!' And if I insisted this were so, you would still all patently dismiss this! And then imagine if I told the pig to talk, and it did! None of you would say, 'oh, yeah, show us another pig.'"

My questions are of a very personal nature, and although people can obviously be as open or closed as they wish, I found most to be very forthcoming and willing to share a fair

amount of information about themselves. Unfortunately one woman with whom I had been planning to meet for some time called me up an hour and half before we were to finally meet to say she could not do this. In order to answer the questions and do them justice she would have to wade through some very personal and traumatic past events to explain herself. Things she does not even write about even obliquely in her own literary profession, and only talks about once a week behind closed doors with a therapist. If they are too personal, intimate, 'sacred,' or 'taboo' for her own work and discussion, they were obviously not to be included in a buddies' master's thesis. I found myself, a scant half hour after talking to her, feeling a bit shaken. She revealed just enough to me for me to realize the gravity and horror of her situation and I was impressed that she had even considered responding to my questions in light of what murk it would drag into present light. I currently find myself mulling over the responsibility I have assumed in the role of anthropologist, particularly in qualitative analysis. When someone you care about calls up in tears unable to continue being your informant, it can sting. Although of course I dealt with this sensitively, I felt sad at having stirred up difficult feelings. They were at the fore of her thoughts anyway, yet I doubt she would have felt comfortable divulging them to me under normal circumstances.

I chose to ask challenging questions, knowing that they may well have been difficult for my informants to answer, and I had confidence in my abilities to be sensitive during the interview process to the relationship created between us, if they were either long time friends, or someone I had just met for the purpose of the interview. I am responsible for representing them fairly and to keep what they have shared with me confidential. Although perhaps these concepts are nothing new for more experienced anthropologists, I have had to only cursorily ponder these issues before. An anthropologist can represent an entire people, or one person at a time.

Ethics come into play here, and the notion of informed consent. I tried to give the questions to people before interviewing them, mostly so that they would have time to think about them. However, I realized the importance of doing so because of the events described above. My informants had a right to know what to expect. They certainly had a right to not answer the questions, or to not participate. In some cases an impromptu interview might open a can of unwelcome worms, leaving both informant and anthropologist uncomfortable.

An unfortunate byproduct of these dilemmas is that I will only be able to reach a certain

population with my fieldwork - those who are willing to answer my questions. I had only heard of this problem from the perspective of trying to find people with enough time to sit and talk, which leads anthropologists to often get in-depth interviews with fringe members of a culture, such as the underemployed, or family/community-less. My problem is also that I cannot talk to those who are too marginalized, for whom these questions are too upsetting. This may be one reason why I have yet to find and interview a female medical student with a history of serious eating disorders, despite my tactful efforts. Those for whom questions concerning body image are too probing are less likely to want to talk to some student with a tape recorder.

Some of my questions are rather complex, and even long after I decided to use them I still debated the choice. So I had a dream one night. In it, supermodel Cindy Crawford was visiting me, and I noticed and commented on her intricate, fine, scarification all over her face and upper body. It swirled delicately over her features, enhancing them, barely visible, for they were not coloured at all. She told me that she had them applied because she was fed up with being the way she was, and wanted something different for her looks. She told me that when she got them she suddenly regarded herself as less of an object and felt more like a subject. The act of having applied the scars rendered her more at one with her body.

I think I had this dream in response to my mulling over the issue of Cartesian dualism between body and self that is represented in my questionnaire in such questions as no. five, "Do you feel your inner and outer selves correspond?" I felt uneasy with posing this question to people, because of the bias it assumes *a priori*, that there are inner and outer selves, a body that we inhabit, rather than we are integral with our bodies. In the language used to discuss bodies it is difficult to assume absolute integrity. I talk about the body as something one 'owns' in the question, something one 'does things to,' and inflicts the self upon. I decided, however, that since my informants are intelligent we could discuss no. five when it came up, and I could ask if they had a problem with how it was phrased. Instead of taking umbrage with it, my informants, on the whole, commented that it was a good question, and provoked thought. While recognizing the inherent bias of the question, none of them had trouble understanding it, and grasped what I was getting at easily.

I conducted three preliminary interviews among willing friends who had expressed an interest in my work. Although I had talked to them about my interests I did not give them the exact questions beforehand. One was in a group consisting of one other woman and two men,

and two were one on one with women. I wanted to see if a group situation would lead to more meaningful discussion in which people could be encouraged by one another, and though I got some interesting and relevant data I decided to proceed with single interviews, modifying my questions somewhat. In these initial interviews I asked more general questions on practices of the body, self-perception, and delineation of boundaries, because I wanted to see which ones would work. From the first interviews I learned where I had to be more incisive and direct. I eventually adopted the technique of asking a wide variety of questions, running the risk of asking my informants to repeat themselves, but to good end. By giving them the opportunity to think about their bodies in different contexts I gathered a more in-depth portrait of what they did and were influenced by. And of course by asking the same question from different angles I gave them time to remember responses that early on they might have been too nervous, or not yet comfortable enough, to give.

The group interview was interesting and fruitful because each person was inspired by the other, but of course there was the problem of getting people to open up in front of others. They were all graduate students in political science in their mid-twenties. There was one woman, Lyn, who had been most generous in introducing me to, and supplying me with, popular fashion magazines. She had always shown a huge curiosity in my project from the beginning. There were two men, one was her boyfriend, Jeff, and the other, Mike, (I must admit) was mine. All were close friends and comfortable with each other. Nonetheless, I felt that with any one of them individually I would have heard a more detailed personal story although they were remarkably frank in front of each other. Because of Lyn I decided to ask directly about plastic surgery in all of my interviews, and I began to wonder about how the family dynamic differed for men and women. Having only had sisters, it was news to me how brothers could be subject to radically different values than their sisters.

My next pre-interview was with Amy, a lively friend who was a recent anthropology graduate. Because of her background I felt a little freer to ask some abstract anthropological questions, such as if she applied a certain trope, or way of thinking, to her body, or if she thought of her body in terms of performance, or semiotics, etc. When this question didn't work very well, nor with my subsequent interviewee (who answered 'as a work of art' which didn't quite fit any of the preconceived theories) I discovered that asking people to apply a theory to their body was unrealistic. I also asked her about what she felt were her bodily boundaries, what

she noticed at first glance about people, if she had a realistic view of her body. These questions just didn't go anywhere. But other questions such as what she was "grossed out by" were not only fun but led to interesting talk about fears and unsavoury transgressions about the body. From her interview I got the idea to ask people what products they spent money (and later, time) on. Young people with a limited income have to prioritize what consumer products are important to them, and it is important to know if they spend a lot of money on a gym membership, make-up, or good clothes. For Amy, her consumer habits were a strong indication of her body image - she used to measure her worth in dollars when she left for school - leather jacket, 500\$; skirt, 75\$; etc. She also gave me a taste of what was to come with the medical students, because she had worked for a year in a psychiatric hospital, and some of her articulated fears stemmed from that time.

My final pre-interview was with Helen, a quiet and thoughtful graduate political science student. I again asked about where she felt her bodily boundaries extended to, and if she "owns" or "is" her body, which was the last time those unanswerables were asked. Although I'm not sure how representative she is of young women for superficial practices (for example she had worn make-up maybe once), she had similar experiences to the others. Through talking with her I began to formulate how travel or spatial contexts, affects one. Helen had taught English in Turkey, and found that her body image had changed while there.

All of the interviews I conducted were taped, and usually held at either my apartment or theirs. I would try to get a copy of the questions to the informants before the interview, but often this was impossible for those I wouldn't be able to meet beforehand. In those cases I would give them over the phone, or for those who seemed comfortable with the process, I would ask them to think about practices of the body, what influences them, likes and dislikes, if there are commonly held myths, etc. After a few interviews I started to put the questions in an easy-to-read spot for us both, as we would go on many tangents, I found my informants sometimes getting lost and I wanted them to feel as comfortable as possible. On average the interviews lasted about an hour and a half, with the shortest being just under an hour, and the longest over two. They were then transcribed for easy reference, then summarized in point form so I could see the pith of the replies at a glance. The summary turned out to be less useful than I thought it would because I would always return to the transcriptions anyway, although it did help further my familiarity with the texts. The final questions I asked were as follows:

- 1) How would you describe yourself, what kind of a person are you?
- 2a) Could you describe some of the practices/habits that you do regularly concerning your body? Such as working out, getting a hair cut, etc.
- 2b) How do you spend time and money? For ex: are there products that you buy for your body? How do you choose to spend money on your body or accessories?
- 3) Has there been a change in your appearance over the last few years? Or in how you see yourself? Tell me about it.
- 4) How do you try to present yourself? Does this change in different situations, according to what impression you wish to give, who you are around?
- 5) Do you feel your 'inner' and 'outer' selves correspond absolutely, or not? Do you feel you adequately express yourself bodily?
- 6) When are you most at ease? When do you feel most confident, or at your best? Your most insecure, or worst?
- 7) Do you have any fears or worries about your body? Right now, or over time?
- 8a) What grosses you out, or repels you about some other people's bodies, their dress, comportment, or mannerisms? Do you have any relevant anecdotes?
- 8b) What attracts or fascinates you about other people? What do you find 'cool'?
- 9) Do you discuss your bodily concerns with anyone (if so, with who and how often)? Under what circumstances?
- 10) What and/or who influences how you present and see yourself? And in the past?
- 11) Are there cultural values that you would say influence how you think of yourself and your body? If yes, how are these values communicated? Do you feel that there are common 'myths' concerning the body?
- 12) How would you say the media affects you? Or others?
- 13) How plastic or mutable do you see your body as? To which extremes would you never go, or would wish to attain?

As well as these questions, I would (at some appropriate point in the interview) ask about opinions on bodily practices such as tattooing, piercing, use of make-up, and plastic surgery.

Informants

For the bulk of my thesis I will refer to these twelve interviewees, and will mention my preliminary interviewees when they add useful illustrations and support my findings.

All were currently living in Montreal, and those not from here had been here long enough to feel somewhat established and 'at home,' yet it was interesting to see how the different places they had lived gave them a fresh perspective on Montreal attitudes. They were remarkably forthcoming with personal and private details about their bodily practices and concerns, and often allowed themselves to be funny and candid. There was only one interview I was bit disappointed with, and even that one had merit - I gained insight into each individual's workings and also about our culture's attitudes from all of them.

I shall briefly introduce my characters, give their self descriptions (which were more clearly answered by some than by others) and my relationship to them, starting with the women in medical studies. Following the descriptions is a table for readers to refer to at a glance. Most of these interviews were held at either their apartment or mine (whatever was most convenient for them), but Kira and I took advantage of the sun and the park next to my building. Kira is 29, originally from Alberta and came to Montreal to do her undergraduate studies at McGill. She went on to live in Boston for graduate studies and also taught there, and returned to Montreal to do medicine. She is very energetic, athletic and considers herself to be "type A, but definitely trying to veer towards B!" By which she means ambitious and busy, but wanting to become more relaxed and laid-back. She's "pretty assertive...At least outwardly!" She is a friend of mine, who I met at the McGill gym through another friend. Impressed by how fit she was, I struck up a conversation about weight training, and we've talked openly ever since. Because of her I thought it might be interesting to include medical students in my sample. Her enthusiasm for my topic was helpful and led to finding most of the other medical student informants. I gave her a written copy of the questions beforehand, plus some extras, one of which she gave to Joanne.

Joanne, 26, is an American who was raised in California, spent time in Boston, and has now been in Montreal for three years for medical school. She considers herself young and "relatively self-confident." Within the first few questions it was apparent that she tries to look after herself (she mentioned trying to get enough sleep as important), and likes to pamper herself on occasion. She is noticeably overweight, but not obese by any means, and we talked

about how that shaped her body image, her actions, her trying to come to terms with not being able to lose weight at present. She is a friend of Kira's, and I only met her for this interview, having talked on the phone once to set the time.

Andrea, 25, was born in Montreal and only left to do undergraduate studies in Kingston, Ontario for three years. She admits to being ungainly, calls herself "uncouth," and says:

I'm the type of person that will say things that people aren't expecting to hear but that they actually relate to, though it might make them uncomfortable. And uh, I'm the type of person who doesn't know who I am!! I think I'm a mix between a lot of things. I'm not very good at focussing on something, so I end up pulling on different things all around me... So I'd say that I'm partly a liberal person, but partly a conservative person, depending on the day, different things will come out of my mouth and I'll always surprise myself, the other side of myself, with what came out. I'm a, according to the Jungian typing, I'm a thinker, but I'm a bit of the feeler - you know what I'm talking about?...I'm the intuitive, I'm the judger, and uh, I can't remember the other one, I'm the sensor..?

She was the acquaintance of another informant of mine. Andrea was the last to be interviewed - I had a hard time finding this last informant, as all other leads for women medical students fell through. I read out the questions over the phone in preparation for the interview, for which she was very appreciative. She said she was glad to have these questions to think about before, because if she were just asked on the spot, she might have more easily just tried to give me what I wanted to hear. This way she could think about them on her own at first more honestly.

Of my male medical student informants, Ethan, 25, was in the unique position of being both a medical student *and* a performer (he was a folk singer who would regularly put on shows around town). Originally from Winnipeg, he has lived in Montreal for three years. Although his persona certainly more closely fit that of a performer (long hair, looks like a "Jesus Freak," relatively lax about cleanliness) I didn't hesitate to include him in my study as a medical student because of his formative experiences in this field. As the least 'typical' medical student among them, I also felt that he had the critical perspective of a fringe member of the group. He was the first male medical student I met with, having got his phone number from Kira. He had a good interview (he said he enjoyed getting the chance to talk about himself for three hours), and spread the word, so that the other male medical students quickly followed suit. I interviewed him at my home and first met him at this time. I gave him some of the questions over the phone prior to this, and explained what I was interested in. He defined himself by his medical studies

and his political activism. He believes strongly in liberation, personal and political, and is annoyed at oppression of any sort. He said, "I see myself as a creative person and I'm drawn to other people who are creative and spontaneous. I see myself as a genuine person who is drawn to people who are genuine and who viscerally dislikes or resents people who are putting on an airs." He also dislikes insecurity and weakness in others, which he freely admits is a reflection of his own fears. He would like to see our community organize itself "in a way that's more consistent with our principles and that's less alienating and dehumanizing and degrading than the present system often ends up being." Once athletic, he now feels out of shape. We talked for a good two hours on tape, and possibly another 45 minutes off. A harsh social critic, he had a lot to say about the system of medical education, and about the forming of the student body.

The next male medical student I talked with was Tony. Again, he was someone I only met for the first time for the interview, which was held in a local café. I underestimated how much the ambient noise would interfere with transcribing the tape later on, so I avoided any further meetings in public places. Even so, it was a good interview, and I don't think the public place curtailed the intimacy - in fact, I had the impression that a more private place would have made him uncomfortable. He described himself as open-minded and fun, and likes to think he gets along well with people and is generally likeable. He said he supposes he's responsible, by which he meant, "I think I know when to have fun and when to be serious about things - that allows me a lot of freedom with what I do, academically and otherwise." He is attractive and takes care of himself physically - eats well and works out. He is a native Montrealer and 24 years old. Like Ethan, he is politically active, although, as he points out, he doesn't look the type to be so.

The final male medical student informant is Jack, who I had met a year before at a medical talk. We struck up a conversation and he expressed interest at being interviewed. Nonetheless, it took a full year before being able to coordinate a time and place due to our respective busy schedules. It also seemed that once Ethan had been interviewed, Jack's interest had been piqued anew and it was as if he were engaged in a friendly competition to have at least as long an interview as Ethan did. He is friendly and open, originally from Ottawa, 25 years old, and has been in Montreal for five or six years. He describes himself as having a bit of a dual personality, and said: "I'm a person who will at once be very outgoing and expressive and

charismatic and social and the next moment I will be very quiet and to myself and really enjoy my 'me' time and not really want to talk to anybody." He practices yoga, is a vegan, and also describes himself as "a spiritual person, whatever that might mean..." We did the interview at his apartment, and I had talked about the questions with him beforehand.

The performers I interviewed tended to be people I know personally, some quite well. It was good to compare these interviews with the ones above and find them similar in quality and depth. As is evident, most of the medical students I barely knew, and although I've run into some of them since, Kira is the only one I actively keep in touch with. The medical students were good informants in part because it is part of their training to be able to talk openly about personal things and not get embarrassed. Also, since I was a stranger to most of them, there may have been a certain freedom in talking with me, and they didn't have to worry about what I might think of them. With the performers, since they knew me, they may have been shy to talk to me openly, feeling as though they were divulging their innermost beliefs to a friend, rather than an impartial anthropologist. Or conversely, because they knew me prior to the interview, a certain level of comfort and intimacy might have been more quickly attained. With both those I knew and those I didn't, I feel satisfied with the interviews. I also wondered how the gender difference would affect the interviews. It is possible that the interviews with men were underscored with flirtation, or tension, but, again, I found them to be open and forthcoming with information that surprised me, but I wouldn't be surprised if my being a woman both helped and hindered our talks. There may have been an unwillingness to talk openly about sex (but it didn't really seem so), or possibly it was easier to open up to a woman because the threat of competition was absent. I'd like to think these things didn't matter, but am smart enough to know they do.

Of the performer women, two were involved in ballet, and one was an actress. The first one I interviewed was Colleen, a 23 year old, from Toronto originally, but went to high school in Winnipeg (where she trained for ballet), and has been in Montreal for four years. She goes to McGill University and is aspiring to work in musical theatre, where she can both dance and act. She thinks of herself as follows: "generally pretty out of the ordinary....I wouldn't say eccentric, but definitely kind of flighty, kooky..I definitely have millions of different tangents I go on. For the most part, gregarious and sort of cheerful." Unfortunately I wasn't as happy with this interview, one of the shortest. I had told her that I would get a copy of the questions

to her via her roommate, and gave them to him to give to her, but she never bothered to read them. I think that this hampered her ability to give me thoughtful and in-depth answers, which made me realize even more the importance of letting people know in advance what I was going to ask them. She had recently finished a project on dancers and eating disorders, and so her answers were more exclusively focussed on that topic than they might have been otherwise. Valid observations as they were, I found myself working harder to extract more out of her than I had with my other informants. She also seemed rather disengaged from the process, and I found myself getting impatient and bored with her. It is difficult to keep captivated throughout a long interview in the best of cases, but with her it was particularly frustrating. She did end up saying some interesting comments though, and if she had read the questions beforehand I'm sure it would have gone better.

Elsa, an actress who was finishing theatre school when I talked to her, is 22, and has lived in Montreal all her life. She is a friend of mine, and we discussed the questions beforehand and conducted the interview in a quiet part of Mount Royal Park. She found the question of self-description interesting, because she could choose whichever qualifications she wanted to describe herself:

I'd say a young woman, in my early 20's, y'know. Definitely part of generation X unfortunately....Um. An artist. Y'know, aspiring to make art. I consider myself to be a generally outgoing person, although I don't know if I actually feel like that internally most of the time. But outside I am considered an outgoing person because I can speak freely and easily to people, but, y'know..I think I'm a nice person [laughs], y'know.

The final female performer is Beth, the youngest of my informants at 21. She is also from Toronto, but has lived in Montreal since she was sixteen, going to ballet school. She is now at McGill University, and no longer dances in school because she had a serious injury. Disillusioned with how she was treated once she was 'damaged goods,' she has quite a bit of criticism for the classical dance world. She is someone who I also know socially, as she started going out with a friend of mine when she was sixteen. When I first knew her she was incredibly shy and, as I found out in the interview, intimidated by her boyfriend's peers. Over the last five years I have seen her change from teenage awkward muteness to a confident, interesting, and open young woman. She defines herself as being "a student, fairly independent, pretty positive....sensitive" and although she likes being around people she values being alone. I find

the trait of alternately social and wishing for solitude to be a commonly cited one. Perhaps people don't want to be seen as either unfriendly nor too reliant on others. We had a meal and held the interview at my house, having discussed the questions prior to this. I was happy with this interview. I was initially worried that Beth might be too self-conscious to get very personal with me, a friend, but not a very close one, but found her answers to be involved once she had warmed up.

The men in arts that I interviewed were all in different fields. The first one was Brian, a native Montrealer, 27, in film school, who also co-owns and runs a café. He has acted on film, but prefers to direct and produce, his main interests. We had a long interview at his house, after I had given him a copy of the questions. He is a friend, and was very open and talkative, as I suspected he would be. Not long after our interview he was diagnosed with a strong case of Attention Deficit Disorder and has since been put on medication. He is still the same person, of course, but we have both wondered how much differently he might answer the questions now, given his new boost in self-confidence. He describes himself thus: "I think very public, very public kind of person - my job forces me to deal with people on a regular basis in the public...I think I'm interesting, I hope I'm interesting. Um. I'm insecure, about looks, specifically the topics that you're doing.... But at the same time I think that I'm almost, I've had enough feedback to...convince me that I'm stylish or whatever else."

The next male performer I interviewed was an acquaintance - Luke, 23, and a singer. Specifically, he is a countertenor, which means he has the rare ability to sing in a high register (alto). Most of the music written for countertenors is from the renaissance period and for the church, and is currently enjoying a revival so he gets plenty of work. He studied music at school, and to round out his education, is now studying English Literature. Originally from Ottawa, he has been in Montreal for nearly five years. The interview was held at his place and he was wonderfully candid. He places his personality well:

I would say I'm a very high-energy, emotional person, who can be very sentimental and nostalgic. I'd say I'm ambitious. Self-confident but with a certain amount of insecurity that everybody has. Uh, I'd say I'm a happy person. I'm not somebody who spends most of their time unhappy. I'm generally somebody who enjoys life, likes people.

It was interesting discussing how his sometimes brash personality is at odds with his gentle singing voice and stage persona.

The last person on this list is Neal, 28, who is a close friend. I've known him for over ten years, as our parents were friends in Ottawa. He spent his childhood in many different countries because of his father's line of work (Canada, Germany, Denmark), but has lived in Montreal since he was 18. He is charming and willing to talk about anything, which made him a good informant choice. Now at National Theatre School, for a play writing program, he has also performed on stage and directed. He calls himself "quite a social person working in the performing arts, enjoy being in charge of groups," and says he is "normally not particularly regimented. I have habits, but, habits more for my pleasure, more than [for] my own self discipline." Although we had talked about my thesis subject before, when it came time to do the interview he preferred *not* to know what the questions were in advance. Trusting his ability to be honest in his spontaneity, and curious if it would obviously dampen his response, I let him be interviewed 'cold.' It turned out well, and perhaps due to his role as a playwright and social observer, he had much to say about notions of myth in our culture.

Tables of Informants

I. Preliminary Interviews

Mike, Lyn, Jeff	Group interview, graduate students. Lyn was the first to talk about plastic surgery, the importance of family dynamics and travel.
Amy	Anthropology graduate, was very media aware and consumeristic in teens, aware of money and time prioritizing.
Helen	Graduate student, taught abroad, talked about how her body-image changed while in another country.

II. Primary Interviews

II.i

Arts Students

Colleen	23	Previously in ballet school, now dancer/actress in musical theatre. "Flighty, kooky" "gregarious and sort of cheerful." Originally from Toronto, in Montreal for 4 years.
Elsa	22	Actress, smoker, does some art, considers herself to speak freely and to be "generally outgoing" on the outside, but doesn't always feel that way internally. Born Montrealer.
Beth	21	Previously in ballet school, now disillusioned after an injury, still a fitness buff. "Fairly independent, pretty positive ...sensitive." From Toronto, in Montreal for 5 years.
Brian	27	Film school, director/producer/sometimes actor, café owner, subsequently diagnosed with ADD. "Very public kind of person...interesting...insecure...stylish." Born Montrealer.
Luke	23	Singer (countertenor). "High energy, emotional...self-confident but with a certain amount of insecurity...somebody who enjoys life, likes people." From Ottawa, in Montreal for 5 years.
Neal	28	Playwright, director, has performed. "Quite a social person...enjoys being in charge of groups...not particularly regimented ... habits more for my pleasure." International childhood, in Montreal for 10 years.

II.ii

Medical Students

Kira	29	Energetic, very athletic, type 'A' but trying to become more relaxed. "Pretty assertive, at least outwardly." From Alberta, undergraduate degree at McGill, graduate degree in Boston, in Montreal 5-6 years.
Joanne	26	Looks after herself, a little overweight, lively, likes shopping, "relatively self-confident." From California, undergraduate degree in Boston, in Montreal for 3 years.
Andrea	25	"Ungainly...uncouth," speaks bluntly even if others uncomfortable. Types herself Jungian "thinker...feeler," a mix of many elements. Born Montrealer, undergraduate degree in Kingston for 3 years.
Ethan	25	Folk singer/medical student. V. critical of school's regimentation, "creative...genuine," political activist, strives for liberation. Looks like a "Jesus freak." From Winnipeg, in Montreal for 3 years.
Tony	24	"Open-minded...fun," thinks he is likable, responsible. Politically active, but 'doesn't look like it.' Very up-to-date in his clothing fashion, fit, interested in body modification. Born Montrealer.
Jack	25	Friendly, open, feels like he has a dual personality, will alternate between being outgoing and a loner. Practices yoga, "a spiritual person," a vegan. From Ottawa, in Montreal 5-6 years.

3. The Margins of the Body

First, I want to give an inventory of what practices of the physical body were mentioned, from the subcutaneous outwards to accessories. These concern body shape through musculature and weight as shown through habits of exercising, eating, (and the desired results from these practices), and will look at how the basic activities concerning the body (intake and expenditure) are dealt with. Then I move outwards to concerns of the skin, an important marker of health and beauty, and the body's surface, and then hair. I then shift to what is put on the body and talk about clothing and what it means to my informants' identity, first style, then size. This section ends with a discussion of accessories and adornment: make-up, jewellery, eyeglasses. I include body piercing in this category (being a classificatory extension of ear piercing) and also decorative tattoos. I deliberated over the inclusion of tattoos in this group as since they are a permanent dermal change they could be discussed either in the section on skin, or alongside plastic surgery (in one case I decide to do this). Since they do not affect the structure of the body, I felt more comfortable including them with the decorative body arts.

Subcutaneous

Let us consider why people work on the shape of their bodies. "Bodies seek only to mirror images they have already internalized. In their diets and exercises, and even more in their cosmetic surgeries, these bodies remain closed in the endless reproduction of their own images"(Frank 1991:68). Or conversely, is exercise about "an expression of the desire for community and emotional bonding in a culture of men and women alone" (Harvey Green 1986:323 in Frank 1991:68)? Is the body open (to others and new and diverse images), or is it a closed circuit? As we will see, people relate to their bodies differently throughout time and depending on their context, so I would argue that the internalization of an image is ever-shifting.

Athleticism and keeping fit were recognized as important by everyone I talked to, both for physical health and for the purpose of looking good to attract mates. Four of the men did some form of exercise on a regular basis. But Brian only exercises occasionally, and whereas Ethan had been athletic in high school he found his current medical studies and busy performing hobby left him no time for exercise. He complains that his 'ass, alas, is slowly disappearing.' Of the women only half found the time for regular exercise. Two of them exercised sporadically, but had been very fit in the past, and one never did and never was. Only one of them could be considered overweight, the medical student Joanne. Although many of the

medical students knew of anorexics in their program, none were so themselves, but many people noted that in the past they would flirt with eating disorders. Now, in their athleticism, they may be following similar, yet much healthier, patterns. This reminds me of Bordo who compares the habits of dieters with those of body-builders engaged in “the quest for firm bodily margins” (Bordo 1990:90). Although body-building appears to “have the very opposite structure from anorexia...building the body up, not whittling it down,” many body-builders “talk about their bodies in ways that are disquietingly resonant with typical anorexic themes” (ibid.:98).

All of the male medical students were vegetarian, as was one of the female medical students. One of the woman performers was vegetarian. None of the medical students smoked (my family doctor, who smokes, was happy to hear this). I certainly have heard of medical students smoking, though - they are often women who are trying to keep their weight down. A more stereotypical finding was that of the male performers and all of the female ones smoked at least occasionally, and the one woman who never exercised, chronically.

Jack, a self-described “recovering athlete,” continues to work out once or twice a week as well as do hatha yoga daily (45 minutes of poses, a half-hour of meditation). Although a considerable amount of exercise, it pales in comparison to his competitive swimming days in high school when he swam twice daily for about seven or eight years from the age of ten, when he took it up in order to get rid of pudge. As well as this, he also lifted weights and ran. Despite being incredibly fit, during those years he felt he had a very unhealthy relationship to food in an anorexic type of dynamic, and was “pathologically” obsessive with his appearance. “I had elements of bad body image associated with bad relationships to food”. This changed with time and a new spiritual emphasis. He has been a vegetarian for six years because of political beliefs, and a vegan for the last fifteen months. He cut out dairy products from his diet to clear up his asthma, which worked, and no longer drinks alcohol, which he used to overindulge in during his high school and CEGEP years.

Tony has been doing martial arts for three to four years and works out at the gym three times a week for 60-90 minutes including a ten minute run (this is much less from his previously “ridiculous” schedule of working out for three hours at a time, four or five times a week). He watches closely what he eats and is a vegetarian. Having been an overweight kid, and bulkier in the recent past, he is concerned with his weight and has lost about 25 pounds, keeping quite trim.

The aforementioned Ethan doesn't find that working out in order to look good is enough of a motivator. He tried:

I like to hope that I wouldn't care so much how my body *looks*, more how it feels, how I feel in it, but I think in the past I have been susceptible to how it looks, now that I think about it, because I've gone and worked out with weights in a weight room not because I wanted to feel better or get physically stronger; I just wanted to look better. And I didn't find it to be a very good motivator in my case, that is to go to the gym simply for the purpose of looking better. Eventually I found I couldn't sustain it, wasn't really a great motivator, didn't really bother me that I wasn't [doing it].

He was previously proud of his legs, strong from running in high school, but they are now getting spindly, the muscles disappearing along with his ass.

The male performers are all fit, Neal mostly so because of his in-school physical training, but also because he does push-ups before every shower (a "huge ritual, always do it that way around, right before a shower, and I get a lot of pleasure out of doing that"), and runs three times a week in the summer. He wouldn't bother going to the gym because he doesn't see a need to.

I don't even see the possibility of my body changing drastically from where it is. But I don't see any need at this point to change it. I suppose if every woman I came across were to say, 'god, Neal, you're really skinny, gawky' then I'd probably go, 'maybe I should go to the gym.' ...I *would* go to that extreme, but not for myself, only if other people were commenting that it needed the improvement.

He also likes his habits of tea in the morning and alcohol (preferably gin and tonic) before dinner. Neal feels "that those very physical rituals, the cardiovascular rituals, the body, using my body in a physical way, I feel that they help me to earn the pleasures that come after it..so they help me *earn* my shower, they help me *earn* my gin."

Luke works out four times a week (six or seven hours total), doing weights and running on the mountain. As he points out, "I'd like to say it's just for the health benefits of it but I think also it's definitely because I like looking slim and feeling fit...there's definitely an aesthetic thing there." He smokes occasionally, which he knows he shouldn't for his voice's sake.

Despite being one of the most stylish guys I've met, Brian doesn't feel motivated to work on his body, "I'm not large in terms of muscle, I'm small and thin. And so I don't work out. I feel physically not that attractive, I mean it's just silly but it's the truth, yet I don't have the motivation to build up muscle, at this moment in time I don't." Although he goes to the

gym now and again.

Amongst the medical student women Kira invests the most time and happy effort in working out and is possibly the fittest of all my informants. She goes three times a week to the gym and enjoys the convenience and routine, although “sometimes I chastise myself because I wish I were doing something where I were learning a skill, rather than just pumping iron or working on the Stairmaster.” Kira feels that her “athletic interests tend towards things that would be traditionally more masculine - hockey and softball, and outdoor stuff, um, yeah. .pretty assertive.” She used to be competitive in racket sports, relishes hiking and bikes everywhere around town and does the Bicycle Tour de L’Isle and Ski marathon every year. At her level of fitness there is no reason to be obsessed with her weight but she does notice it if it fluctuates and when she weighed 15 pounds more she felt encumbered and slower.

A vegetarian and naturally skinny, Andrea is either in the ‘getting muscle’ or ‘not getting muscle’ phase. Working out

...is a new thing for me because I always used to be either really scrawny, or... about two years ago, I was overweight....I had really eaten a lot and not exercised. I went through a phase when I started going out with my boyfriend where we were just, we were overindulgent in everything, and we would just get really high and order pizza, and then go to the 7-11.

And also, “on top of eating a lot, I guess my woman hormones just started kicking in...it was weird, like some people didn’t recognize me, because people really identified me as being a really skinny person. And I didn’t like it.” She has been doing yoga on and off for the past five years and has joined a weekly group of all women in the last year, meditating and improving her posture and comfort with her body. Of the new-found positions yoga has put her in, she says she is “shocked that my body’s able to do it,” as she is used to feeling clumsy. Perhaps this contributes to her feeling that “the one thing I’ve always wished that I could do is to do acrobatics.”

Although Joanne tries to work out regularly maybe two or three times a week, she does so only in fits and spurts. In high school she used to be a competitive athlete, but in her senior year she was injured which slowed her down and led to weight gain. In college she didn’t shed the weight, despite doing competitive rowing, finding that the six times weekly work-outs only served to bulk her up. After her rowing she dieted and lost 20 pounds, “but I was miserable, I made the people around me miserable, I was always hungry.” She is actively trying to

reconcile herself to her larger weight, and rather than to keep trying unsuccessfully to revise her body, she is now trying to revise her internal ideal, by saying to herself, “okay, within what I am now, I want, y’know, to at least be toned.” She is tall, and able to carry her 178 pounds handsomely, so she notes that “I can hide a lot of weight on my body, I’m lucky that way.” I felt that her comments about her weight issues were inconsistent. Initially she said that throughout high school she was slim, yet later on estimated that weight has “definitely been an issue since the beginning of high school.” I suppose that, for her, weight was an issue even before she had problems with it, and now that she has what she calls a “pooch tummy” she is even more frustrated when it comes to wearing the body-revealing clothes she has taken an interest in since moving to Montreal.

Of the women involved in the performance arts Beth is by far the most fit. She works out every other day for two to three hours which includes 40 minutes of Stairmaster, and the rest of the time doing weights, stretching, and sometimes swimming. She uses a nice neighbourhood gym, in favour of the free university one, and in the summer she also jogs. She is happy with her muscularity, but tries not to bulk up too much, finding her musculature less lean than when she was dancing. When she was in dance school she was exercising all the time, but prefers her exercise now since she feels she is doing it just for herself, “just because it feels nice, ‘cause it makes me alert, just physically I feel better doing that.” For her, working out also releases stress, and frankly, she would rather miss school than her exercise. Even when on vacation she begins to fret if she is unable to keep up her routine, and finds herself reverting back to her ballet school bad habits - insecurity, self-criticism, and poor eating. She is a vegetarian who takes vitamins, yet drinks and on occasion, smokes. Health is her main priority now, which contrasts with her dancing days priorities - basically how good her “thighs and butt” looked and how she looked in a costume, often at the expense of her health. She used to smoke like a fiend, and “in certain ways I had various eating problems, I mean I really didn’t eat that well - I would eat grapefruit and cereal!...I would drink all of this artificially sweetened stuff. When I think about it, it was so *unhealthy*.” “My health was like, y’know, who cares, as long as I looked good.” She later admits of her ballet school, “I guess we all had a *mild* case of anorexia,” with some more flagrantly so than others.

Colleen is another who used to be in ballet school, but she is still actively pursuing a future in acting and dancing. Her present exercise schedule is a bit of all or nothing, rather like

Joanne above. When she does exercise she works out at home doing sit-ups or push-ups, or dances, but this is irregular. How she feels about herself does depend on her physical condition, as in the following:

I think like most people I feel best when I'm in shape and I'm working out, when I've dropped weight. And I feel gross like, after I was really active over Christmas and the beginning right after Christmas doing shows, kind of stressed for school work, so I dropped a lot of weight but I felt in shape and good. Then after I gained all that back, and now I feel lumpy and gross.

She is aware of her weight, and has been ever since she was 11 or 12 years old when she started ballet. Fortunately she is now more self-confident and not as obsessed with food, but when she was in her teens, she was often dieting with a friend of hers, and would sometimes do so severely only to binge afterwards. Of when she was dancing she says, "I never had any eating disorder, but I definitely...I tried to purge, unsuccessfully, to bring the food back up, the easiest way was to flush it out the other end...I went through various bouts of that, and uh, but that just sustained my weight."

Elsa, finishing theatre school, is the chronic smoker who doesn't exercise at all. At the same time, her theatre training is reasonably physical, so she is perhaps more fit than she reckons. She maintained the same size and shape for years, but that's changing, much as how Andrea noticed her "woman hormones...kicking in."

Cause, for a long, long time my body never changed shape, except maybe boob size, like y'know, depending on if I was on the pill or whatever. But um, ... recently I've noticed my metabolism has started to catch up with me. It just started happening basically a couple of months ago, maybe a little before...I used to be able to eat anything I wanted and not exercise and not see any repercussions, y'know, and I'm starting to see repercussions.

Through age, situation, chemicals (such as the pill), and changing priorities, the work and methods put into maintaining or improving one's bodily shape and health shifted for many of my informants. Their bodies are not constants, nor their attitudes.

Skin

Off tape, an informant told me that Stephen King once referred to acne as the one true social horror. This reminds me of one of Postal's analysis of Kwakiutl folk tales: "...in most of the tales the physical characteristics of a person determine his fate. The great shamefulness of sores or other deformation of the body surface and, conversely, the admiration of well-

formed bodies attest to the importance of the body surface and its role in the reinforcement of identity” (Postal in Polhemus 1978:125). The bane of adolescents and the subject of many commercials touting zit-zapping treatments, acne was one skin ailment that some still worried about and felt the repercussions from a pimply teenage-hood. The skin is our surface, the literal boundary between self and society and the medium on which we most easily mark our identity for all to see. We are often racially defined by the colour of our skin, and our health and beauty signalled by the condition of our skin.

Three of my informants mentioned acne - Andrea, Elsa, and Jack. When adolescent, Andrea used to have some on her forehead and around her mouth which she hated, saying how, “it really bothered me because I thought it was unhealthy looking. The way I used to feel about myself was ‘I’m not asking for much, I’m not asking to be beautiful or anything like that, but do I have to be *gross!*’”

Prescient of her future calling, the *unhealthiness* was one aspect that annoyed her. Good health is generally a requirement of beauty, the turn-of-the-century fashion for wan tuberculoid Victorian ladies notwithstanding. Health crudely ensures reproductive success and hence, attractiveness in a potential mate. Although we may now be more complex motivationally than our lower browed predecessors, signs of good health are still welcomed.

Andrea’s plea to at least be not gross is one that easily evokes sympathy from anyone who went through the usual insecure teenage years. For Elsa though, her skin was not really an issue until she entered theatre school and analyzed her acting in film class. Seeing her face magnified and reified on film made her hyper-aware of its appearance. Thinking, “Ohmygod, I have to do something about my skin” she went to see a dermatologist who prescribed her drugs for her ‘condition.’ Her face is her future, her career actually can depend upon the smoothness of her skin. Although she does not need to be beautiful, she does need to be ‘not gross’ to do well in her work.

But, by far, the informant I talked to who was the most affected by acne was Jack. Interestingly, he recalled this only towards the end of the interview when I asked him about how plastic and changeable he sees his body as being. At first he only talked about how he wouldn’t want to change his body much other than through clothing, or an earring, but I reminded him that he had previously mentioned that as a teenager he was concerned with altering his appearance. He said how his youth was rife with drugs and sexual promiscuity, and what he

calls 'poor body image,' and then remembered with a start:

I can't believe I didn't bring this up before, something that probably affected my life as a growing teenager more than *anything* is I had *terrible* acne... Cystic acne, the size of quarters under my skin, like all over my face, my forearms, my back. I was on Acutane, I was on two courses of it actually. I went to a prominent dermatologist who said it was, like, one of the worse cases he had ever seen. I missed, I think I missed 100 days of school just because I'd stay home because I didn't want to be seen...um..because it was just *SO ugly* and I was just sooo - even if I didn't have the acne I would have changed the way I dressed, put an earring in, changed how my hair is to conform to a stereotype!, but I couldn't even get to that point, I was just sooo...grotesquely...concerned about all of these cysts all over my face and body...

I was flabbergasted. Jack is a handsome man, with skin so smooth I had noted it to myself when I met him. But he went on to tell me how as a teen he felt so much despair over his physical appearance he was suicidal. Granted, attributing the cause of his suicide threats to his looks was probably a symptom of his misery, rather than the only cause, but even those with the cheeriest of dispositions would have trouble with seeing themselves as:

sooo...*different* from what the stereotype was. The stereotype is you don't have a blemish, you have perfect, smooth beautiful skin..there's no pits, nothing! I was so away from that, that that *destroyed* me as a teenager, y'know, who's very concerned about socially fitting in and things like this, so... That I recovered from it is remarkable.

One of the ways he tried to hide his debility was by wearing cover-up make-up, uncommon for a man. He remembers stealing his mum's foundation and using it as only an amateur would.

It'd be really caked on, or sometimes if my acne wasn't too bad I would take just some cover-up and put it on, but I mean it wouldn't match with my normal coloured skin. So I would put a lot of this foundation on. It wasn't just that people were noticing my acne, people were noticing that I was covering it up! Teenagers being, especially young teenagers, wouldn't necessarily mean any harm, but they would poke fun, and say, y'know, 'you didn't put on as much make-up today as you did the other day' and I thought I was hiding it.

Later on, his mum (who of course could see where her foundation was going) would buy it for him. I had remembered that in my high school I also saw young men using cover-up for their acne, and mentioned it to Jack, who never saw anyone else going through the same problem, hence exacerbating his feeling of isolation.

Plastic Surgery

Many said that plastic surgery was appealing. I had never thought that this practice, which I associated with those unhappy about aging, had any appeal amongst this age group. Is it possible that plastic surgery has become more exposed in the media, and hence a more acceptable option?

I will go on to discuss the different types that people mentioned as appealing, those that are merely fantasized about, and those that are possibly being planned for.

I think the finding that surprised me most in my interviews was the extent to which people, future performers and doctors both, had thought about plastic surgery as a possible future action. I did not realize how much currency the notion had, and people often harboured ambivalent feelings about it. On one hand it is tempting and not a big deal, on the other it changes your 'self.' When I opened my eyes, I realized plastic surgery was being frequently mentioned in magazines for women and local newspapers; T.V. and movie stars were undergoing it *de rigueur* (indeed actresses, such as Cybill Sheperd, were noted if they had *not* succumbed to the knife). One notable performance artist by the name of Orlan was undergoing, it was widely rumoured, multiple plastic surgery to have her face conform to a composite image of the most beautiful women in the world. She would sell off the bandages, excess fluids, etc. from these surgeries to supplement the cost (already being funded by the French Government). This common media (mis)perception was recently rectified in an interview in the Montreal Gazette, where she said she had been devoting the last ten years of her life to denouncing contemporary aesthetic standards through "carnal art" by having her "body and face carefully reconstructed to unconventional specifications" (Greenaway 1997). In 1993, Orlan had small breast implants placed on her temples, and is planning to have her nose realigned so it juts out of the middle of her forehead.

It was in my preliminary interview with Mike, Jeff, and Lyn, that plastic surgery was brought up. Lyn mentioned how when she was younger she wanted to get her nose done. She now believes that "you grow into your looks: you grow into them, you're not that willing to change them." But then she said that she and a female friend "have decided after children we will have our breasts lifted" At Mike's exclamation she went on to explain:

Why should you have these saggy things around for the rest of your life that make you feel kind of uncomfortable? And y'know, you want to be sexy and

everything...because we've lived so long now that, if you have children when you're 20, why pay the price for 30,40,50,60, 74 years!

Lyn is very media savvy, and sees plastic surgery as being common among rich and famous people because they are in the public eye. When she looks at beautiful people in *Vogue*, she finds herself saying to herself (referring to plastic surgery) “well she's had this done, and this done, and this done.” It's a way of justifying the way you look in relation to this person who is this symbol of perfection, and you know that they alter things with computers.” Nonetheless she sees no reason why she should not take advantage of modern procedures that make her look better and feel better about herself. Susan Bordo, of course, sees other reasons behind such wants:

These women take the risk, not because they have been passively taken in by media norms of the beautiful breast (almost always silicone enhanced), but because they have correctly discerned that these norms shape the perceptions and desires of potential lovers and employers. They are neither dupes nor critics of sexist culture; rather, their overriding concern is their right to be desired, loved, and successful on its terms. (Bordo 1993:20)

Because of Lyn's comments I decided to ask all of my informants what they thought of plastic surgery, if they didn't bring it up themselves, and I'm not sure Bordo is right.

Joanne grew up in California where plastic surgery was commonplace. The Los Angeles film ideal is unavoidable and few of the women are able to attain the “Double D with the sucked-in tummy” unless they're “willing to augment it surgically.” All you need is the US\$20,000. My jaw dropped when she said, “almost all the women in southern California that I knew got that for their high school graduation present - boob jobs!” As a future doctor she feels that having your breasts operated on before bearing children is irresponsible, given the possible complications with breast-feeding. But also being in the medical field gives her a privileged view of plastic surgery and she can see what outcomes *are* possible. “I'd *know* a good plastic surgeon and I could work within my fields to know that I was getting what I wanted, and also know the long term effects.” So although she wouldn't remodel her face because she feels that “it's who you are, if you change that, you change the person,” her body is less linked to her intrinsic identity and she would consider liposuction or breast augmentation after having kids. It will depend how she feels at the time, if she's come to terms with her body, if it's important to her spouse, or what will happen to her breast tissue after breast feeding. “If I end up with super-droopy breasts hanging down to my *knees* or something like that then I'm

probably going to get them surgically corrected just to make me feel better about how they look.” (I’m amused by the term ‘surgically corrected,’ because it implies that the breasts in question have done something wrong). I later asked her why she felt differently about her face than her body, and it was because she had seen her body go through so many changes, and not her face, that she felt it was more malleable with fewer repercussions to her identity.

I was surprised to hear Elsa bring up her temptation with plastic surgery because of her generally ‘grungy’ style. But she has thought about it for her eyes which are heavy lidded. She finds that she is prone to headaches, light sensitivity, and tired eyes with dark circles beneath them due to the excess weight of her eyelids. She knows of two other people who underwent surgery to excise some of the extra skin fold, with greater comfort being the result. However Elsa also admits that other than for the medical reasons,

I can’t deny there’s an aspect of it that I would prefer to have eyes that look like that, y’know? But I don’t know if I could ever actually go through with it to tell you the truth...I don’t think I would ever be able to go through with cosmetic surgery for the sake of cosmetic surgery if it wasn’t for medical reasons to begin with as well, to justify it to myself.

In her line of work she is surrounded by actors who are constantly striving for a better body, who are constantly at the gym and who opt for plastic surgery (particularly those who move to Toronto, which any graduate of her school is expected to do). So she’s aware of cosmetic surgery as a tool of her trade, even though she finds something about it and the insecurity it implies, repulsive. In the following quote she expresses a typical dilemma.

Sure there’s been times I’ve considered it for anything, I want to get my face liposuctioned, and I want my stomach liposuctioned, and I want electrolysis everywhere....I’m constantly wavering between trying to decide if I should just learn to love my own body and stop worrying about it, or if I should actively try to create the one I like.

Andrea was initially turned off by cosmetic surgery but as she met people who she liked and admired who had undergone the procedure, such as her boyfriend’s mother who had a face lift, her bias softened.

[I] *try* and have a non-judgmental attitude towards it, although my judging tends to be kind of negative. And yet I completely understand why people would want to do it, and why they would be so excited by the thought of being able to totally transform their body.

But she does perceive having plastic surgery as weak, and perhaps embarrassing, too, should

people find out. “I wouldn’t do something like that, because it seems like such a dumb thing to do. But yet there is the person inside me that’s like ‘yes, I want large breasts, please!’” She had a story to tell me about playing with the idea of doing something to permanently change her body, discussing it with her boyfriend, and I think she waited until she was comfortable with me and the interview.

I just thought of something funny also, I forgot to tell you about, also concerns, is that I have really small nipples!! They’re like boy size, they’re like the size of quarters, or something, and that is something actually that I am a bit insecure about - not insecure, but I just think that..I mean I have small breasts, and that’s okay, but if I could at least have big nipples and they would look like something?, but like as it is, like they don’t look like much..

Recently, she had been attending a class in which a plastic surgeon was discussing how after some reconstructive breast surgeries a substitute nipple has to be tattooed onto the breast tissue, carefully using inks that emulate the natural colour.

Wheels were turning in my head, and a few days later I was like ‘hey, I could do that!’ I could get those big nipples!, and it would be the plastic surgery that nobody would ever have to know that I did, because I mean how many people really notice my nipple size !! Yeah, so I suddenly got really excited about it, and I was asking [my boyfriend] about it, and he was ‘oh, no it’s silly, no’ and I was like ‘I think it’s okay, I don’t think it’s like *that* vain a thing to do! Because it’s more just like a sexual thing, and it’s more just that I want to have, like, it’s like with bright red lips, I just want to have like, the, the ‘items’ whatever, [the ‘accoutrements’] yeah [of sexiness] yeah. and uh, he was like, ‘it is kind of vain, but if you want to argue it that way, it’s fine, but you could say that about anything, I guess you’re right, I guess it just depends where you’re going to put your limit.’ But anyway, I went to the mirror, and took out my lip liner, and my uh, my lipstick! and I enlarged my nipples and um, and I *really* liked the way that it looked, even though it was the off colour, and everything, and um, and uh, and once [my boyfriend] saw it he really liked it too, and he’s like, ‘oh, maybe you should do it’!!

The other women I talked to had no immediate anecdotes or desires concerning cosmetic surgery. Kira had ‘not too seriously’ wanted a nose job when she was younger, and had been exposed to the idea through her stepmother who had one, albeit an odd one in which her septum was left lower than her nostrils. Beth doesn’t like the idea of plastic surgery. Although Beth likes making temporary changes to her appearance, for her, plastic surgery would mean not being her self, particularly changing the face, as for Joanne above. “But changing the structure of your face, I wouldn’t want to do that, I wouldn’t want to wake up

every morning and be 'thrown' when I look in the mirror!! 'She looks great but who is she!'" When her mother mentioned to her that she might get a face lift, Beth was adamantly against it, seeing her mother as beautiful and young looking.

Some of the men were also interested in plastic surgery. Of those in the arts, Brian can imagine himself having plastic surgery at some point in the future. It is not a nagging desire for him, just that matter-of-fact, funds willing, he might very well. "If I were to ever have plastic surgery I would get a nose job, for sure...I just have the feeling that the field I'm going into I will probably be able to afford to, comfortably." He thinks that he probably feels this way because in the past he got teased for his big nose and although no one teases him now he perpetuates this image by making jokes at his own expense. He also believes that his inner insecurities will not be fixed by changing his physical appearance, but conversely that an inner self-confidence could somehow improve his physical appearance, as well as his attitude towards it. So, in short, he is not so much waiting until he has the money for a nose job, but is striving towards a greater self-comfort and happiness.

Luke would never do something 'unnatural' to enhance his body and wouldn't want to make irreversible changes to himself. He believes that although one can change one's shape in terms of leanness, one's basic proportions limit how much one can do with their body. Ethan feels likewise, and although he does like to play with his image, and sometimes enjoys it in others, he prefers people to be 'themselves' and shies away from permanent changes. Now although Neal does strive to be attractive for women and would undergo superficial physical changes if they were suggested to him as a way to improve his looks, he would only alter himself 'within reason.' He would never, for instance, get a "butt implant," no matter who told him his ass was too scrawny.

The other men who considered plastic surgery were Tony and Jack. When he was an adolescent Jack struggled with his appearance and was convinced that he would be better looking if he got his ears taped back, his nose done, or facial scar removed. He says he was "absolutely obsessed with how I looked at all times," but now considers himself "good-looking." And even while being exposed to plastic surgery in medical school he has fostered a spiritual attitude which has completely turned around his outlook.

I mean I know I'm in medicine, I've been exposed to plastic surgery, my body's very artificially changeable. I mean I could change anything - I could do

reconstructive surgery. But what I believe and value..is whatever I've been given ..by god, or whatever spiritual being might have happened to give me what I was born with, um, is what I live with, that's my gift. I'm beautiful because I have it, no matter if anybody else thinks I am.

Tony has yet another position on plastic surgery, drawing his own line at what would be an acceptable degree of change.

I would do plastic surgery if I wanted, I have no problem with it....I wouldn't do anything crazy, like, I dunno, I wouldn't, I don't think I would do it to hide my age. Maybe if I was having trouble...I guess if I was having trouble losing weight a little bit here and there I would get some liposuction if it was feasible (I know there's only certain percentages that they can take out). I guess I would do that. If I had a scar I wanted removed, y'know, sure. But I don't think I'd get a face lift, nothing like that, 'cause that's just a little too phony. I mean I don't want to age but I'm not afraid of it either.

It seems that the people I talked to had reasonably clear ideas as to what the limits were to what they deemed an acceptable amount of bodily change, and had stricter limits concerning changes to the face. Going beyond those pre-ordained limits is "too phony," "unnatural," and would irreversibly change the self. Some are sympathetic to the desire of others to undergo what they see as a radical change, and understand the urge within themselves, too. For others, any "unnatural" change is too much of one. It seems that from what they say, none would casually do as much as occurs to them that they could.

Hair - Facial and Body - Cutting, Dying, Shaving, Waxing, Plucking

Edmund Leach was influenced by psychoanalyst Dr. Charles Berg's work *The Unconscious Significance of Hair*, in which hair-cutting and shaving were symbols for castration. Upon analysing ethnographic data, Leach concurred with this position in most cases and wrote that "...ethnography indicates a persistent link between hair as a symbol and the phallus as a symbol and to this extent it is appropriate that hair should be prominent in rites denoting a change in social -sexual status..." Long hair was equated with unrestrained sexuality, close shaven hair with celibacy, with consistent variations between. As Polhemus says, "We can appreciate Leach's essay 'Magical Hair' as an attempt to bring together psychoanalytic and anthropological-sociological theories of body symbolism. Whether he succeeded in his attempt, however, has become a subject of much dispute"(1978:133). Hallpike (in *Social Hair*) dismissed this deftly, remarking on how is it that *head* hair came to represent penises when

chest hair more readily suggested the coarser pubic hair, and also, what does head hair then mean to women?

Debatable analyses aside, hair is seen as an extension of the self by many. Some cultures recommend that you dispose of your cut hair (and nails) in a ritualistic manner so as to avoid others getting their hands on it, or rather, on a piece of yourself. Its liminal status makes it particularly noticeable.

My informants all placed some importance to their head hair as well as body and facial hair, and men had the most to say about it. This could be because men may have fewer culturally acceptable outlets for expressing themselves and so fixated on their hair. Or they are asked about it less frequently. Two of the men absolutely *hated* their body hair. Brian who has emphasized, "I feel *horrified* by the amount of hair I have," has a lot of hair on his back, which has made him feel awkward in any situation where he takes off his shirt. So he rarely does at times when men might, on a hot day for instance, and he shaves his back before going to the beach. "I mean I will shave my back.... I won't take my shirt off in the summer, my T-shirt, whatever, I just don't feel comfortable." Compare this to Gilmore's interview with older men (ages 30-50) in which one man felt embarrassed over his *lack* of body hair. This made him feel effeminate and 'hideous' which put him at a disadvantage at the beach where he would avoid participating in games for fear of revealing his hairless armpits (Gilmore 1994:211). The standards have changed for the younger generation. No longer do we see the fuzzy Burt Reynolds in magazines, or other similarly hirsute macho men in the media, but instead we meet with smooth, more sleekly muscled pared down Nineties men. As Brian believes there is new Nineties prejudice - back hair. It's not considered:

...nice and clean, and it seems to be this 'if you're hairier, henceforth you're more savage.' Y'know the films...either it's the intelligent gay sociopath, or it's the demonic hairy biker, in terms of villains there's no in-between, and even in comics and stuff like that, those who don't shave, they tend to be the bad guys because they don't groom themselves. But I'm sorry, I can't shave my back every day, so I guess I'll be a villain in the next movie.

But he does shave his back occasionally. He tried waxing his back before, but had problems with ingrown hairs. He also has a problem with what he calls a 'monobrow' and goes to have his eyebrows professionally plucked.

Tony also commented on the new male aesthetic, citing the public's ideal as "whoever

is in the Calvin Klein ads at the moment, which right now is Antonio Sabato Jr. How can I compete!!” Disliking body hair on other men, too, Tony is not particularly hairy but hates facial hair about as much as he hates shaving (“if I had my way I’d have my whole face electrolyzed”) and later told me “as soon as I have money - electrolysis. Of the body.” He regularly talks with a friend, his work-out partner (who apparently convinced a girlfriend to get rid of the hairs he disapproved of), about electrolysis or if “I wanted to get my buttohole waxed!” One of his fears is of getting hair on his back, which he would promptly zap. And he also doesn’t relish the thought of losing his head hair as he ages. Most of the men at the time of the interview were clean shaven, and the issue of shaving varied amongst them. Tony, as is clear from above, shaves regularly, and furthermore hates beards in general. One of them with a beard, Ethan, still shaved around it every two to three days, and trimmed his beard every week or so, mostly for hospital presentability. He has considered shaving it off though, because it looks too much like everyone else in his milieu, but probably won’t because he does like how it looks. Shaving was connected with control and presentability for all. Neal likes shaving and having a clean face, and:

-... for example, now at school. I don’t want the teachers to think I’m working too hard in a strange way. So I don’t want to look like..I’m ..flustered and tired out, so I shave on purpose to appear well groomed and well slept.

-Like you have the time to do such...

-Like I have the time to do that, it’s funny it’s a bit of a power game. I don’t want them to think they’re going to be better than me! Which may have a lot to do with image. Why nine-to-fivers want to shave, cut their hair, keep it short, because they have the time to do that, it’s under control. And as soon as you start to look bedraggled, I guess, you start to, it’s as if you’re bowing to the elements, you’re bowing to the pressures you set up for yourself.

But Neal likes beards, because his fun and loved godfather has one, and grew a beard (out of curiosity) during the Christmas holidays two years ago, time he spends away from Montreal with his family. He tells an anecdote of that time in which a woman he approached on the street to ask for directions “*literally* ran away” from him. He supposed it was because “this beard made me look quite tatty,” and hence, threatening. When he returned to Montreal most people didn’t like his beard and he shaved it off within a month.

Jack shaves daily, occasionally skipping it if he’ll be at home, partly because of the appearance he must keep up at the hospital where he sees that those in the “medical establishment” place a premium on how to comport themselves, and an “establishment

philosophy” is in place where one must heed stereotypes. “Everyone’s going to have certain stereotypes and say ‘this is a Dr.,’ like it or not, good or bad, some people are going to have that. So I do present myself as neat...but not to the point that they necessarily want me to.” And Jack also notes: “You’re dealing with patients, you want to present yourself a certain way.” Jack, despite his overall opinion that it’s what’s on the inside that counts, harbours prejudice against those who are slovenly and unshaven, who “...aren’t taking care of themselves, their physical bodies. [I imagine] walking past a bar and see somebody smoking a cigarette and putting back a beer in a restaurant as their belly hangs out of their pants, everywhere, half shaven...I’m exaggerating, I don’t think I’ve ever seen anybody like that!” But the image of someone so flagrantly transgressing the normative boundaries is a potent one, bristles and all. (Note it is the liminal *half-shavenness* that is distressing, neither bearded nor smooth). Jack will put an effort into his looks when he is visiting either his girlfriend’s parents or his own mum, which includes shaving.

Luke makes sure to always be clean shaven for a concert he’s performing in, and keeps his long curly red hair pulled back.

Asides from pleasing the public and showing the world that all is under control, the reaction of women to facial hair is very important to these men. Neal, a bit of a philanderer, plans his actions accordingly: “Some girlfriends like it when I don’t shave - so it would depend on the girl I was seeing that night!!”

Brian was recently asked to play the part of a hit man in an amateur movie and in order to make his looks less boyish and give himself an ‘edge’ he grew a goatee - “and luckily, it has seemed to make me the sexiest man on the planet!!” A lot of women liked it and when he shaved it off there was so much hue and cry that he grew it back. “So all of a sudden I discovered my look is completely contingent on other people’s feedback. Completely. Because I shaved it off for comfort.” He found it uncomfortable and, despite using conditioner on it, its rough texture was ticklish for his girlfriend during sexual activities (who otherwise thought it looked sexy). He began to feel self conscious about kissing her, and found himself kissing less often than he used to, instead hugging her more, stroking her hair, etc. So that’s when he shaved it off, and although he grew it back by popular demand, is again thinking of shaving it off for the above reasons but also because “I’m not feeling particularly comfortable or satisfied with the way my life is going at this moment, so I’m looking to change.”

All of the women I talked to attended to matters of hair removal, such as shaving their armpits, shaving or waxing their legs, or bleaching dark facial hair. Most had no conflict with it and shaved regularly and unquestioningly, but two women had debated the process.

Elsa finds herself caught between different facets of herself as represented by two of her social worlds: that of her more hippie, “home-made brand of cool,” “natural” friends who she visits in Vancouver; and that of the black-leather clad, stylish Montrealers. “Like should I wax, should I just let it grow and be natural, should I shave, y’know, ultimately I end up shaving even if I didn’t really want to because you’re going to some party, like, y’know?” She also uses a product for bleaching her dark facial hair on the sides of her face.

Yeah, because I have, uh, quite a bit which is something that always bothered me about myself. Always bothered me. I always feel like a big hairy ape, y’know, for someone who’s so pale I’d figure I’d be almost hairless, but no. [she points out some more hairy spots she’s self-conscious about, like her belly and knuckles] So sometimes I’ll buy that, but most of the time I’ll just forget about it...[I buy the product] when I’m feeling insecure actually.

Andrea also has hair on her face that bothers her so she tries to go regularly to an electrolysis, but usually just ends up trimming the hairs because she hasn’t had the time to book an appointment.

For years Andrea tried to figure out the best way to get rid of her leg hair. Wax or shave? Different methods for upper and lower leg? She was under the impression that shaving her bikini line left her with ingrown hair follicles (from one try in grade six), until she noticed women at the gym doing so with no problem. So she tried it again, and has now settled on shaving her lower leg and bikini line, while waxing her upper legs. She shaves her armpits because she’s afraid of the pain of waxing them, and has heard stories of people’s armpits bleeding of which she succinctly says, “creeps me out.” At her boyfriend’s suggestion she once grew out her armpit hair and “some of my friends I was living with were horrified” She says she kind of liked it: “it was soft, and I liked the way that it looked but I found that it didn’t smell very good, and so that’s why I decided to shave.”

Hair on the head is the physical attribute that people most often alter, usually just for the sake of change. Most are timid about changing their hair, going along the lines of ‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,’ and only change their grooming habits after much prompting from others or internal debate. Although I do know people who change their hair style or colour often, no

one here fits into that category. Length is the most often deliberated trait, and hair is often cut short upon a change in status (from student to non-student, undergraduate to professional). Growing hair takes more time, of course, so it has less of an impact on one's immediate appearance. Subtle changes in colour or style are often employed as a means to express oneself, grander changes indicate an adventurous outlook.

About a month after she entered medical school, Andrea cut her hair shorter by about a foot, to chin length.

I guess I felt ready for a change, and I wanted to be bit tidier. And uh, and it also, I used to have my hair long, and I almost felt that this is the only part of me that's nice. And I think I slowly started to feel good about myself, and I didn't feel I had to have long hair to be pretty.

There are two factors at play here in her decision to cut her hair. Her entrance into medical school, a milieu which seems to require more tidiness and professionalism than an undergraduate degree, and an increase in self-confidence which may have been related to the above.

Joanne also mentions how being at the hospital compels her to pull her shoulder-length dark hair back more often, in order to minimize her looks and maximize her professionalism. She gets her hair cut often, and colours it a bit "I sort of muck around with that - I'm not *terribly* adventuresome, but I try different things"

Kira, the most conservative in terms of hair changing, has for the past two years put highlights put in her dark blonde hair yearly. Initially she thought it was a frivolity, to spend money on such a thing, but after a friend convinced her to try it she's been quite happy with the results and plans to keep doing it.

Of the arts student women, Beth dyes her very long light-brown hair and gets it 'done' every two to three months at a local funky salon, "mostly because I'm afraid to cut it." She's attracted to variety: "I would love to have short hair at some point. In order to get that thrill of change, I just keep changing the colour and dying and playing with it, and stuff." In terms of styling she prefers to keep it simple and natural.

Elsa has been really paying attention to her hair lately, trying to make it look good by looking after it and keeping it healthy since she got a new hair cut at a proper stylist's. "It really changed, like, a big outlook for me because my hair had always been something I knew *could* look good if treated properly." She now finds it fun to use hair products on it and dyes it and

uses a hair-straightening product designed for African-Americans to make it look shinier and less frizzy.

Colleen has been dying her hair for years, mostly to make it blonder than it is, and is now contemplating dying it reddish. A few years ago she “wanted a change” and cut her considerably long hair very short, also because she thought it would look good with her fine-boned, narrow face. But because of theatre productions she’s been in she has been required to grow it out. Her peers have admired her hair and “now everybody says to keep it long,” so she has compromised and now keeps it a sort of medium length above her shoulders. Changing her hair regularly is part of her self image of a dynamo: “I do drastic things - I’m not one for keeping, like, hair. I’ve had numerous different haircuts.” Although she doesn’t make a thoughtful connection between hair length and self-confidence like Cathy, Colleen did say that she became more secure a few years ago.

Half of the men I interviewed had long hair, and two of those who didn’t once had long hair. Both Brian and Tony had long hair in high school. Brian used to “kind of create a wall, so to speak” by virtue of his long hair in front of his face, and was nicknamed ‘Spook’ by his classmates because he “was short and hairy.” This went along with his whole persona, in which he tried to dress “kind of Quebecois Biker type...I would definitely dress outwardly aggressively to try and dissuade others from hitting me.” Now his hair is relatively short but “when I go into production phase I grow my hair longer, I tend to *look* the part in order to attain the part...whenever I go and do a shoot, depending on the environment, depending who I’m shooting and what I’m doing, I will gear myself to be as chameleon-like for the environment.”

Tony described himself as being a “‘woody’...it was like a hippie-rocker type,” which required long hair, old T-shirts and jeans. He cut his hair off in his undergraduate years after a two week stay in the hospital during which he couldn’t wash it. “It was all long greasy and gross” and he swore to himself he would cut it short when he got out. Over time he got it cut shorter and shorter until its present length of one inch or so. Along with this came a major style change.

Luke gets a hair cut every year or so, and feels that “I’m a young person and that hair is a beautiful thing. And I can grow long red hair, which is something you don’t see all that often, uh, and I don’t know when I’m going to go bald! So I might as well have it long until

I no longer have the choice!”

Neal’s most outstanding physical feature is his long hair, brown, curly, and below the shoulders, which he readily pampers using gel and conditioner. Four years ago he had it cut short for a job and says that, “I just felt more normal and people just treated me like I was more normal.” Like Luke above he thinks of future baldness, and believes that one of the “dangers of long hair” is that it can lead to a receding hairline. “The irony being I have long hair to show it off, and I end up losing it faster because of it.” This belief was new to me and I expressed my surprise, to which he replied, “just the way combing tugs at it more, there’s more pull on it all the time, the wind takes it, you put your hand through it you get a clump...” When I said I didn’t think there was any *scientific* validity to this claim he admitted, “I haven’t heard any concrete evidence, maybe it’s a myth, people have talked to me about it, but it could be just a myth...”

The only male medical student with long hair is Ethan, whose image is more akin to his folk singing side-line. As he puts it, “My styles are four: washed or unwashed, pony-tail or no pony-tail, and there’s the four permutations of these.” He goes roughly every nine months to a hairdresser to get his hair cut, and more recently, before his summer travels, dyed a subtle purple. He wanted to distinguish himself from other people in his neighbourhood, the Plateau. “And I guess I realized the Jesus Freak Radical look is really common. So I had my hair cut and dyed in an effort to look less anonymous in that respect.” He grew out his hair four years ago on the suggestion of his hairdresser, and after good feedback from his friends, “it started to be some sort of part of my identity because, I mean businessmen and bankers never have long hair, and I consider myself well, sort of the polar opposite to that type of person, based on my activism.” At the same time he sported big bushy side-burns to further individualize his look.

Jack’s hair rituals have changed a lot from the days when he would obsess over it and use gobs of hair spray and gel and mousse and, “if it wasn’t a good hair day I wouldn’t go out!” He now just keeps his hair short and neat, wetting and brushing it once a day. When he was a pained teenager he had a bad experience with hair dye, in which he tried to go blond and instead his hair turned a disastrous orange. He attempted to dye his hair back to brown with his mum’s assistance, but,

It looked so bad! In my eyes, it was so artificial! I was crying! it was the end of the world for me! I was like 15, 14, this was the end of the world, I was so

upset I couldn't think of tomorrow! My life would end. And so my mum took me to her hairdresser who dyed my hair bleach blond and it was bleach blond until it grew out...

And he hasn't mucked with it since.

Clothing style

A full understanding of the psychology of clothes is of course not possible when we only consider the postural model of the body of one individual; we must consider all the interrelations between the diverse schemas of the body. We identify ourselves with others by means of clothes. We become like the other. By imitating their clothes we change our postural image of the body by taking over the postural image of others. (Schilder 1950:204)

"...the postural model of the body reaches to the tip of the feather in a woman's hat." (Schilder 1950:203)

Much has been made of style, from the Comte de Buffon's *le style est l'homme meme* to countless magazines such as *Vogue*. It can be a somewhat ephemeral notion as in one either has style or doesn't, or it can merely refer to the clothing you choose to wear which may ally you to or alienate you from a social group. Earlier, anthropologists were concerned about the phenomenon and origin of dress, and different culture's beliefs of what it was to be either clothed or naked, what parts of the body were necessary to be covered to be properly dressed. Often the seemingly 'naked savage' was quite elaborately dressed with various non-western (and hence unrecognizable as such) clothing. There are theories that wearing clothes could have started as a reaction to shame and modesty, or as a practical matter (protecting against climate and brambles, providing pockets). "To some the first clothing meant to be a protection against the evil eye or other supernatural perils, while other authors tell us that nakedness and especially naked genitals, radiate magical powers and therefore have to be covered. To others again the first clothes were ornaments or badges" (Fischer [1964]in Polhemus 1978:182). These days people are more apt to discuss the significance of clothing, such as Hebdige below:

Each ensemble has its place in an internal system of differences - the conventional modes of sartorial discourse - which fit a corresponding set of socially prescribed roles and options. These choices contain a whole range of messages which are transmitted through the finely graded distinctions of a number of interlocking sets - class and status, self-image and attractiveness, etc. Ultimately if nothing else, they are expressive of 'normality' as opposed to 'deviance' (i.e. they are distinguished by their relative invisibility, their appropriateness, their 'naturalness'). (Hebdige, 1979: 101)

Clothing is used to express something about ourselves, and some of us are more aware of this than others. It is a form of communication, intentional or not. Although the style, or type, of clothing communicates outwards to the people around one, some people mentioned the *size* of clothing as an issue in which the size communicates something to the wearer only. Each of my informants had a particular style of clothing (which may shift within a range) although not perhaps within a definable genre. Some of them I benefit from knowing well and seeing often, some who were strangers before the interview I have since met again with the benefit of firming up their image in my mind, two I have met only once. Joanne and Andrea were the ones I met only for the interview and have not seen since, but my image of who they are and what they like to portray rings clearly to me, perhaps because of the distilled instance of meeting and the efficacy of the interview. As Angela Carter observed:

Clothes are the visible woman - the detachable skin which expresses inner aspirations, dreams and fantasies; they are the signs of our status to ourselves and to other people. Nevertheless, we are never fully in control of our appearances. There are movements in the wearing of clothes - movements not completely dictated by the fashion industry. (Carter 1978:51)

Although this thesis holds that men do have bodily concerns which may be equivalent to those of women, in this section some of the differences in their experiences and expectations come out (as well as some similarities). One of the differences is the attitude towards shopping for clothes. Most of the men mentioned the last time they went shopping as a year ago, or more, whereas the women would, generally, go shopping more often.

Joanne likes to go shopping and enjoys getting the new styles of clothing. Impressed by the style of Montreal women she tries to emulate the chic, high-heeled, sleek, black-clad look and has changed accordingly since she's been here. She is tall, and thought,

Y'know, if I was going to be tall, I might as well be very, very tall and at least look maybe a little leggy with the high heeled shoes and uh... [I] bought some more sort of going-out stuff. Bought some a little bit more risque stuff. Lower neckline, shorter skirts, um, that being sort of a more Montreal style.

Being in Montreal also has a down side, as experienced by the:

...size of clothing I can fit into in stores.... It's frustrating actually, for me to shop in Montreal, especially for pants. Y'know when you try on the biggest size and it doesn't fit...makes you feel really 'yucky' about yourself. It doesn't make you feel good about yourself. It places you in that realm of people who do not belong in the normal range.

On one hand she is happy to expand beyond the normative boundaries of height, but on the other she is saddened and frustrated by not fitting into the norm of clothing size. She is trying to reconcile herself with her heaviness, and may reach the same acceptance with that as she has with her height, but it's not the same. She doesn't come across instances in which she can't fit in a room because of how tall she is, so from that she doesn't experience the same sense of exclusion.

A common theme amongst the medical students is that on weekends they are more likely to dress down, in contrast to the formality of the hospital setting. Andrea used to dress up on weekends, but now she's just happy to wear jeans and be sloppy when she can. Overall she says,

I think I put a lot of focus on what I'm wearing...I usually like to express myself in what I'm wearing, and uh, and I don't view it as being vain, or uh, yeah, it's just for me I have so few ways that I get to express myself in my day, that at least I have getting dressed to look forward to.

In her general manner of dressing Andrea likes to display a sense of humour, perhaps, she admits, as a mask or diversion, a kind of defence mechanism. She conveys her humour through her offbeat sense of colours, 'clashing' items and funny retro clothes "...and combining them, though, from different times, so it doesn't quite make sense." She says, "I need to have something quirky about what I'm wearing" and she doesn't want to look "...like some kooky person who's not shapely...so I guess I want to present myself as 'witty, yet sexy.'"

Although Kira now dresses casually, also saying how after being in the hospital, "when I come home I just yearn to be in my Levi's" she used to be quite extravagant in her shopping habits and would spend an "exorbitant amount of money on clothing." We all have clothes in the back of our closet we don't wear, perhaps an impulse buy or a result of impaired judgement, but Kira has clothes that she bought years ago still with the price tags attached, such as expensive suede suits that have no relevance to her lifestyle (nor her career in which she's "probably going to end up with vomit on it"). She got the habit from her mother who:

...used shopping as a way of sublimating a lot of feelings when she's really down, or up - something's gone really well, she treats herself...when I was an undergrad I did that a lot. For example, after my exams I would go out and I would just blow a wad on a shopping spree!!

Until a few years ago she still felt like her mother was dressing her, but in the past two or three years she has been weeding through her closet and feels like she has finally developed her own

style independent of her mother's. This consists of casual, sometimes sporty, now and then chic and form-fitting clothing, such as jeans or wide legged linen pants with a bodysuit top. She likes her body more now than she used to, when she would dress in sizes that were too big, "like a gunny sack, y'know, and now I think I'm quite pleased with it so I'm wearing much more form fitting clothes." She had an interesting experience with how she felt about her body and status as a student at MIT, and how she adjusted her style accordingly, which will be discussed in the section on influences.

Of the Arts students, both Colleen and Beth dress simply most of the time. Colleen says at school she dresses like a 'total slob' (but she'll always wear make-up) and likes to wear clothes that are too big for her, such as her boyfriend's jeans. When I asked why, she replied, "I think it's to feel smaller, actually...when I feel fat, I wear [his] jeans because they're so much bigger on me." She likes the feeling of loose clothing, and comments, "although I used to wear leggings, but I always covered my bum." For Colleen clothes are used to portray an image of thinness and smallness.

Everybody comments I wear clothes that are way too big. And a friend of mine calls me the anorexic poster child 'cause I'm like, 'oh, I can't fit into my clothes anymore!' and I always wear sweaters that are ten sizes too big, and she's, like, 'hiding your body, there?' [laughs]. So, but when I'm going out I always like to..I mean depending where, if it's like casual, if it's a date with my boyfriend, then, like, generally jeans. But if I'm going out with a group of people I don't know, or to a party, or a social event, if it's informal then I try and wear a nice sweater, or a nice pair of boots, and y'know. And formal occasions I always dress up. Like wear a dress, and earrings, accessories and make-up.

Beth wears more fitted clothes than Colleen, and pays more attention to how she looks now than when she was dancing and, ironically, is more concerned with her body. "I paid *way* less attention to myself in general. I never cared how I looked like, how I dressed..I think mostly because I was so sort of insecure at that point, and unhappy in general, I didn't put that extra effort in, and maybe that's why now I lavish all these things, because I feel more solid."

She likes to put effort into her looks and get "all decked out" every now and then, like when going out for dinner, as much for other people as for herself.

Especially someone who doesn't know me, I'll put more thought into it then. Because when you know someone, you dress a certain way, they know you and how you usually are, they have an idea of you in the first place. But when they don't, I'm just getting to know someone, I think I do think about it more. I wonder if I dress a way I don't usually dress and I'm not that comfortable

wearing those clothes, or acting a certain way, I wonder if that's going to affect how I am with that person, if I'm going to feel uncomfortable...

Elsa falls into the 'grunge' category of style - well-worn jeans, beat-up old Seventies style clothes, comfortable clothes, the shunning of logos and the tidy mainstream. "I won't wear anything that is obviously manufactured. Manufactured isn't the right word. I won't wear anything that is mass-made or too much 'in style.'" She likes to make her own mark on her clothes by putting something of her own onto it, like a patch. "I get very turned off by people who are obviously dressing to be cool." She has adopted a style that purports to be beyond the realm of style and hence not susceptible to the vagaries of trends. "I'd much rather see someone who is comfortable in what they're wearing than look uncomfortable in something that might be nice 'in-style'-wise, but that changes every fuckin' three months!" She also tries to make herself look better if she's going to a party than if she's going to school, and prefers to wear slightly loose clothing, "not too revealing, but not too baggy so that it looks like I'm fat." A bit insecure, she tries to cover her flaws with her clothing. "I bought this jacket which is short and it shows my butt, and I've never been worried about it before and I realize it's because I always keep my butt covered.... I subconsciously constantly hid it without realizing."

At the same time she would like to explore more feminine fashions but there are a few things holding her back from doing so:

Being a woman walking around the streets there's a lot of things I won't wear. Most often I won't wear things that are form fitting. Because I'm scared! Of being too revealing, of inciting...not saying that anyone who does wear that is inciting, just that I'm very, very conscious of *rape*. It's a very, very, predominant thing, and I think a lot of women gear themselves the way they look, so that they are not appealing.... So culturally there's something for me because I've always been a tomboy ever since I was a kid, that's when I wear things that are very feminine I feel very fake. I feel like people won't buy the fact that it's me wearing it rather than me trying to look like someone else wearing it. So I know I don't allow myself wearing things like that. There's a lot of things I won't look at and say 'well, that's really nice, but I will never wear it because...it's not me,' but if I like it, it would be me, you know?

She attributes her style in part to her family, who are all very casual dressers, and also how her mother dresses - sneakers, pants, conservative colours. "I find she really stops herself from looking like a woman, she's always had really short hair-cut, she always wore baggy things, y'know."

The only man who expressed a consciousness of clothing size and how it relates to self

image was Tony. If he feels fit he will wear slimmer fitting clothes.

And another day I could wake up and it could be that I haven't worked out for two days which makes NO difference in the way I *look*, two days, it doesn't do anything, like nothing happens in two days! Or it could be I didn't eat right the day before, something stupid like that! It becomes almost obsessive! And then I'll be like, 'ah, I don't think I'll be wearing 'slim' today, I'll wear a sweater.' It just ...I do it without even knowing it, and I catch myself, and that's just *fucked up* 'cause, it's bad when you're obsessed with what's going on.

He hates it when he catches himself at being "obsessive" like that, and thinks it has to do with how he was chubby as a child, or rather, he reflects that he *thought* he was overweight. If he looks back at photos from the time he realizes he was fairly slim then, too "...so maybe it's just ingrained in me, must get thin, must stay thin, if I don't look good I can't let it show that I'm not as thin."

In high school Tony never spent money on clothes, "I wore jeans until they were falling off, y'know, I just had t-shirts, that was it. I didn't understand people who spent money on clothes, and then now, it's like, it's almost as if I buy material objects to fill some void in my life!..I spend all kinds of money on clothes, I'm not sure why!" His style now is what he calls "bordering on club wear, I still don't go for too much mainstream clothing, I guess in my own way I still try to be marginalised." He dresses sharply and stylishly in a 'raver cum hip-hop' fashion (cotton pants, interesting and funky T-shirts, sweaters, Seventies style clothing reinterpreted for the youth of the Nineties, somewhat trendy) and he has friends who manage stores where he can get discounts on the kind of clothing he likes. There is a link between the clothes he wears and the people he hangs out with and the music he listens to, but he has a hard time disentangling them from each other. On the transition from one social group to another he says:

It's strange, it's kind of like I started looking into other kinds of clothes, started buying other clothes, slowly branching out, and then...*after* that I started to meet a lot of the people I hang out with now who are in a different kind of group. So it's not exactly like that, just strange. I started to be more attracted to this type of clothing, the people fell into place?

But there is a schism between the type of clothing he wears and his beliefs. "I probably look more conservative than my thinking is and I also probably look less socially aware than I am....I don't project it the same. Because I don't dress *that*." He has a lot in common with Ethan and Jack - they hold the same politically correct beliefs and share the same attitudes on social issues,

but whereas with the style that Ethan and Jack dress (see below) you can guess with accuracy the tone of their activism, Tony can come across as a bit of a party guy.

Throughout the social transition he has maintained a “tough guy” image that he used to cultivate in high school “...and now it’s kind of stuck!” He is also more aware of his sexual appeal than ever and has received a lot of attention from women in the last couple of years. He is attractive, enjoying it and, with his career underway, is concerned with attracting a mate. “Right now more than any other point in my life, right now there is more emphasis on appearances. Physically, clothes, everything. More now than ever, ever before in my life.” I expected more people in my sample to talk about this aspect of style - who they wanted to attract, the importance of being attractive to those of the desired sex. Obliquely, the desire to attract is present in all of the interviews, and Tony shows an acute awareness of it.

Ethan finds himself drawn to brightly coloured clothing and tries (but not too hard) “to present myself as being sort of relaxed and a bit loud, actually.” He prefers to avoid clothes with logos on them - “I don’t want to be a billboard,” and at times when just going around his neighbourhood “I’ll wear sweats, or like fleece pants, I’ll wear really crappy old shoes, *just whatever*.” On the other hand, he likes to wear bright, fun, casual stuff and bought a loud orange-red shirt at the GAP, essentially because the sales girl told him that he’d look good in orange, he could “pull it off.” He wishes that “my style, clothing-wise primarily, or accessory-wise, hair-wise, was louder. Or more adequately reflected who I am, who I want to be...(and I’m not sure which of the two it is).” He hopes to have more time later on in his life to spend on clothes, and says, “I definitely want to be more loud, not just loud but also unique. If I had a friend who’d make clothes for me, that’d be really cool...I think about that more than any body aspect, like I more often go ‘huh, my wardrobe is boring.’” He both admires women and their clothing for the range of choice they have, and decries how it seems to him that women have to care about how they look all of the time. He notes that men and women have different cultural expectations and believes that men are made to *think* they have less choice, and he feels he has fewer options to dress creatively than women do. Ethan admires a few female friends in fine arts who dress uniquely, and he cites one in particular:

Yeah, she’s not afraid to really flaunt her difference in creative ways, even slobbish ways! As I mentioned before women are expected to be prim and proper and presentable once they leave the house. This individual will often make efforts to look unpresentable and walk around, I think it’s really

admirable! I don't know what the equivalent thing I could do would be...I could dress in drag or a skirt I suppose, but that has all sorts of different connotations for me, and culturally also.

For a woman to stand out in her community for being sloppily dressed is a form of subversion which doesn't translate directly for men. Also women routinely wear clothing that are marketed as menswear without communicating much more than a wish to be comfortable, whereas for a man to wear a dress or skirt connotes something altogether different and is more startling. If the man is heterosexual, as Ethan is, it would make a different statement amidst his community than if he were homosexual. Unfortunately perhaps, that topic is beyond the scope of this work.

Tony called Jack's style "granola," not derogatively, but to give a label to the kind of style and sentiments that expresses a natural, updated-for-the-Nineties, hippie sensibility. Jack likes his clothes to be comfortable, and when he does go shopping (which is about once a year) "I love buying nice, neat stuff, that's still comfortable." By "neat" he was referring to interesting, and judging by what he was wearing (a Dr. Seuss T-shirt), playful. He is tidier than what I would think of as "granola" (perhaps more of a granola-preppie combination?), because he does value not being sloppy, and will in many situations make an effort to look orderly. Among his friends he will sometimes wear clothes he has picked up during his working travels in India and Africa, which he finds loose and light and comfortable to wear:

Sometimes when I have friends over I'll wear that, be as comfortable as possible. And also a lot of my friends have similar interests, y'know, international cultures, different philosophies and religions, so, when I'm around them I'll probably wear clothes like that. Because it reminds me of part of that community, these are a community of people who share the same interests, and I got these clothes in doing something that they're interested in.

He takes the opportunity to reinforce his image within his community of friends through his clothes.

As I think about the clothing of my male informants, I realize that the medical students dress more interestingly than those involved in arts. Although the arts men all dress well enough, they don't try to imprint their personal style on what they wear to the same degree as the other men. This could be due to how the medical students have less of an outlet for creative expression in their field, and indeed, in their everyday life when working at the hospital. They may have this outlet later on a daily basis if they choose to practice privately (my own family

doctor's style of dress is very funky), but for now take the opportunities to express themselves when they can. Those in the arts are encouraged to express their personality in many facets of their lives, so may not feel the need to dress eccentrically. Or, my sample is particular, and the idiosyncrasies of their dressing habits have more to do with their personal family background, peer history, or environment in which they grew up.

Brian dresses well, and presents an engaging, simple, sexy manner through clothing, which sometime masks his insecurities. He jokes about dressing so well that people often mistake him for being gay. His style is more clean-cut than his earlier "grunge" days, and lately he tries to dress well for a reason:

My inner self, I feel very turbulent, my outer self I'm not very pleased with, but at the same time I also happen to think I'm looking better now than I ever have. So it's interesting, I'm masking all these other things by presenting myself as being, the way I look... [I] think the outer self is trying to lift the inner self by dressing nicely, by creating that positive energy, by saying I'm going to look good, so hence I'm going to feel better. But it's worked to a degree, but not much, not much...

Like some of the women I talked to, he expressed how he uses clothing to accentuate the positive. Remember from above how he doesn't feel motivated to work out, so "I dress in ways that, instead of showing off my body, I show off my mind, my style, whatever. I choose to cover certain aspects of me and bring out another side to attract."

Neal recognizes that he dresses rather drably, given his energy and theatrical environment. Even his mom calls him a "dead leaf" for his dark autumnal colour choices. He goes shopping about once a year, usually at second hand clothes stores. "I don't pay much attention to clothes, although I probably have a pretty distinctive style. I've worn the same kind of clothes for years, the past eight years, I haven't really changed my style. Tweed jackets, jeans, shirts, and sweaters." Dressing nicely and simply, he feels that his long hair gives him the edge he shies away from in his clothes. He also suspects that if he had more money he would "*slightly* change my body image," mostly by buying nicer pants. "Trousers. I'd buy more jeans that'd make my bum look nicer," and more expensive tweed jackets. Musing on how women have told him that they love to go shopping when they are depressed, he said, "I've never felt that that would be a cure for my depression, that would be a cure for my blues, to go out shopping. Whereas so many women do say that." He attributes this to a media influence.

Luke claimed that he doesn't think about what he's wearing *too* much, but does admit

that:

Yeah sure, I'm not just wearing anything, I'm definitely discriminating about what I wear. Uh, I try to wear clothes that don't make a statement but don't *not* make a statement either. I don't know if that makes any sense to you but they don't uh, that are nice, that are sort of fairly current and whatever, but don't *say* anything about me.

With his noticeable hair and high "unbridled silly" energy, he radiates enough of a presence that perhaps his clothes don't need to do the speaking for him.

Accessories - Makeup, Jewellery, Earring Placement, Eyeglasses, Tattoos, Piercings

Accessories are often a means to express one's style and self when clothing doesn't say enough. Cosmetics, for us, enhance the outer skin, deliberately attending to personal physical features. This leads to the possibility of an antithesis between the body so decorated and the inner or whole person.

Formal decorations in Hagen ...also rest on a contrast between and inner and outer self, but the operation supposes a continuity between these elements. Ornaments are hung about the body, yet the attention of spectators should be directed not to the body itself but to the decorations as a separate entity. They are meant to be attractive in themselves; far from a costume or regalia the actor dons, they are symbols of himself turned inside out. (M. Strathern 1979:254)

The decoration of the Hagen serve not so different a function from the examples cited below. Sometimes decoration is censored, as in one case, where an informant went to a private school where she had to wear a uniform, and there were even strict ideas on the use of accessories. In other cases, those who wear glasses may take advantage of this addition and choose interesting frames. The use of make-up on a regular every-day basis was in the domain of the women, but one man would wear it for his performances. Jewellery was again worn mostly by women, with some exceptions amongst the men. All of the women had pierced ears (but two of three women in my pre-interviews didn't), but not all of the women regularly wore earrings, and three of the men had pierced ears, too. Only one of my informants had a tattoo (I expected a higher proportion) and a body piercing (one other had a short-lived belly-button piecing), but many more had toyed with the idea of tattooing, or are planning to get tattooed, fewer so with body piercing. One person's decoration is another's mutilation. Although some people I know who were heavily tattooed volunteered to be interviewed, they didn't always meet other criteria, and I didn't *want* to search out those with tattoos. My peers often recommended I interview

those with interesting body habits, but I wanted at least to try to get “normal” representatives.

All the women wore make-up, but not all of the time. The basics were lipstick and sometimes eyeliner/mascara, and if their skin had blemishes, some sort of foundation/coverup. How much they would wear would depend on where they were going to be. And while people had different criteria for what was “too much” make-up, this was shunned by all. Joanne, for instance now tends to wear lipstick, because, as she says, “I find it makes me look a little bit more professional.” I remember seeing Kira once after her rounds at the hospital, and she told me that she had just put on lipstick before saying goodbye to her patients so she would look “more together.” Andrea was the only female medical student who didn’t mention a relationship between her hospital appearance and make-up, but rather puts on make-up when she’s going to go out socially (eye shadow, mascara, lip liner/stick, maybe foundation/coverup/face powder). Otherwise she doesn’t, mostly by default by not having (or taking) the time to. But her skin has improved so she says, “I don’t need to cover it up or anything.” Kira, a self-professed “lipstick-queen,” like her mother is, remembers clearly what prompted her to wear lipstick:

I actually remember vividly one instance where I must have been ..gosh in my early teens, maybe even 12, 13, and my mother’s sister was over and said to me ‘you’d really,’ something about how I’d ‘really look good wearing lipstick’ - I should be wearing lipstick...and I think that’s kind of stuck in my mind, y’know, yeah maybe I come from a long line of lipstick queens, I dunno!

Other than her regular use of lipstick, she doesn’t wear much make-up, a little foundation usually and sometimes eyeliner. Of the women in the arts field, Colleen wore the most make-up, the most often (lipstick, mascara, eyeliner, blush), except on weekends if she wasn’t going anywhere in particular, when she would wear less. Elsa wears less make-up, like cover-up on her pimples, or under her eyes and “blush so I don’t look like the walking dead,” sometimes eyeliner, or lipstick, “But usually in the mornings I’ll check and see if I need cover-up, and if I do then, but it usually wears off in an hour.” Beth doesn’t like the feel of a lot of make-up, and feels she’s not very good at putting it on, so she wears it sparingly, again mascara and lipstick. “I like to just get out of the shower, throw a bit of lipstick on and go! Not really spend that much time..” The only man who talked about wearing make-up was Luke, who puts on eyeliner for his performances.

-I know when I wear makeup sometimes on stage I put a little bit around my

eyes and my whole face just..changes! I become slightly more feminine looking but I definitely become conventionally more beautiful..with just a little bit of eye makeup on and I think to myself 'geez, why don't you wear makeup, y'know?' --[laughing] so why don't you wear eye makeup?
 -uhh, first of all I can't really be bothered, also because there's the whole expectations, I mean: 'that guy's wearing makeup, he's gotta be, he's gotta have a problem.'

I asked men what they thought about make-up on women, and they all agreed that a bit to enhance their features was fine, but that too much was a turn-off. Ethan was one who felt he was attracted to make-up because of social conditioning, but feels that to wear it is to hide your self. I question some men's abilities to recognize how much make-up a woman is wearing, because she could be wearing a lot applied in a natural style and blended well, thus rendering it less visible to the untrained eye. An anecdotal example, my husband didn't even realize that a peer of his wore a considerable amount of make-up every day, being unaware of the range of application techniques. Unless it's blatant, for men, it just isn't there.

As previously mentioned, all of the women had their ears pierced. But when Elsa finally got hers pierced at age thirteen, after much dispute with her parents who thought that earrings looked "cheap" on kids, she discovered that they were uncomfortable for her and her earlobes were prone to infections. Furthermore, they got in the way, so she doesn't wear earrings. Kira is the only other one who doesn't currently wear earrings because using a stethoscope makes it difficult. This saddens her because she loves earrings, but she has found an accessory substitute in scarves.

The men who had pierced ears were Tony, Jack, and Luke. They had specific stories about getting their ear initially pierced, and two of them related it to social relationships. Tony has two holes in his left ear, the first was with two friends during a high school class trip to Europe, and the second he got done two years ago, and he is planning to get a third in his other ear.

Jack got his ear first pierced when quite young, at thirteen, essentially to be "cool" and to attract girls, which is why he did it again at seventeen or eighteen. He no longer wears them, even though he likes the look (and says he might still wear earrings if someone bought him a couple of loops as a present). A little embarrassed by the reason for taking them out, he told me anyway. He was meeting his girlfriend's parents for the first time:

[They] are from Eastern Europe and uh, they're from very conventional, old

school, and so try to make an impression on them I just took them out and never really put them back in. And I don't know why I didn't put them back in because I enjoyed them and I could've, y'know, worn them with myself and not with them, so, I just never did it. And in the hospital, y'know, some doctors who are your superiors are, like, 'the patients don't like that, you shouldn't wear that,' so there's a lot of that too. Which I don't agree with, but this, y'know, these are the people...

Jack admits to being heavily influenced by his peers when young ("some friend would tell me that 'this' was cool so I would go out and buy it and wear it"), and he is very eager to please. I question his statement that the earrings would be a problem in the hospital environment, simply because Tony mentioned no such thing, even though he was aware that other piercings might be a problem professionally.

Luke's girlfriend thought earrings would look nice on him, so about two or three years ago he got each ear pierced when he was with her. He says it was "on a whim." "Frankly I didn't think about it that much - [my girlfriend] thought it would be nice and I said 'yeah, sure, what the hell' and when I think about the ears, if there's any part of the body it's not going to make a difference, it's your ears." To have one in each ear is a bit unusual on a man, but Luke thought it looked as nice as it does on a woman. One of the holes, the left one, grew over, and I asked him about it, since there used to be a social code in North America in which if a man had his right ear pierced, it indicated that he was gay. Luke didn't seem to think it mattered anymore, which may reflect the general tone of his generation, or may have to do with his international travels where such codes are reversed, and he doesn't bother with worrying about what may be only local. But I do wonder about that because in his line of work it is often assumed that if you're a countertenor, you're also gay.

As far as other jewellery is concerned, most people wore some, and occasionally it would be more significant than merely decorative. For Elsa, she would associate good or bad luck with the items she wears, for example she will attribute good luck to a certain necklace for a while, like a talisman. Andrea seemed aware more than most of the faddishness of certain jewellery, citing a necklace she bought in Israel and wears often as being like the one on a T.V. show ("it was two years ago I went, before they started wearing it on *Melrose Place*"). She also got out of the habit of wearing earrings, "I think people sort of stopped wearing earrings for a stretch of years a little bit? and I think I may have just stopped without realizing it." Tony was one man who had obvious jewellery on, sort of a silver, spiked bicycle chain as a necklace,

along with an ohm pendant on a chain.

Of the women, only Kira wears eyeglasses, and of the men, Ethan and Neal. I missed the opportunity to ask if people were wearing contact lenses, because I think some of them were, and I know that Luke switches between his glasses and (most often) lenses. But the only people who brought attention to their glasses were Ethan and Kira. When Kira did her undergraduate degree in chemistry she had to wear glasses instead of contact lenses in the lab for safety reasons (“if someone got an organic solvent in their eye they can weld the contact lens right onto the eye, and do a lot of permanent damage”). So she became very used to wearing, and comfortable with, glasses. “I like glasses that say something, that really kind of make a bold statement, I think, because, um, gosh, if you’ve got to wear them you may as well do something about them!” So they are an area of indulgence for her. “Glasses are maybe the one domain where I feel I like to splurge and every year my big treat to myself is to get one new pair of glasses. Interestingly this year I got a pair that are quite... I wouldn’t say outrageous, but quite pronounced. They’re red, sort of tortoiseshell.” Ethan, on the other hand has a plain pair of wire-rim glasses, but is thinking of getting slightly smaller, more up-to-date ones. He has considered contact lenses, but is “too lazy” to be bothered with the additional time they would take to put in and take out, and besides, he is used to his glasses and feels they’re a part of his identity.

I had glasses since I was in grade three and I really got teased about it a lot (and I was always a big nerd in school, until high school) from having worn them all those years and being smart. Y’know, glasses are associated with intelligence ...maybe it is just part of my identity to wear glasses. I don’t mind them. I don’t get into the fights so I don’t have to worry I’m going to be blinded. It’s part of my identity, I don’t feel like a guy-without-glasses. There’d be different expectations. I feel like there’d be different social expectations if I didn’t have glasses, maybe that’s weird...

Elaine Hatfield, in *Mirror, Mirror* commented on the belief that wearing glasses makes people appear more intelligent, and cites studies that back that up. An early one (Thornton 1944) indicated that people looked not only more intelligent, but industrious, and a more recent one (Elman 1977) revealed that men with glasses on “were seen as gentler, more sensitive, and more of a follower.” Dorothy Parker may have been right in 1936 when she quipped “Guys never make passes at girls who wear glasses,” but I sincerely hope she is wrong. Not only do I wear glasses most of the time, but Montreal has a thriving industry in selling interesting, attractive

glasses frames to a myriad of people who believe they can look interesting and attractive in glasses. There was one singles ad placed in an American newspaper in which a fellow wanted to meet a woman who wears “interesting glasses.” I have caught myself finding men in the gym *more* attractive if they were wearing glasses, presuming they were as well-read as they were well-muscled.

Body modification such as tattooing, body piercing, branding, etc. has become popular in Montreal amongst young people. Indeed, this is a reflection of its increasing popularity in North America, a trend which started in major urban centres like San Francisco and New York and has spread to remote areas like Fort Smith, NWT (pop. 2 000). Nose piercings are common, tattoos are no longer just for convicts and gang members, and navel rings have entered the mainstream.

The moment that body modification irrevocably entered the public eye was 1993 when supermodel Christy Turlington sauntered down the fashion runway with navel ring....Ironically, as body modification becomes fashionable and trendy, it loses significance as a personal choice and garners importance as a cultural fad that will peak and then pass. (Hewitt 1997:93)

We are exposed to images of American body modification through the usual forms of media, including the Internet, and at bars and clubs - any forum where people want to show off.

As for tattoos, Tony was the only one currently sporting any. He has an attractive black tattoo of an ohm centred on his upper back, done only four months ago. He had wanted one for a long time, and initially planned to get one of a design that an ex-girlfriend drew, but it was too intricate and hence would have to be big and quite expensive. He chose the design because it reflects his East Indian heritage on his father’s side, and as a religious symbol he won’t regret it later on, and the location because it can be covered easily. His mother is Irish, and he wants to incorporate a tattoo of a Celtic weave pattern branching out to his shoulder blades from both sides of his ohm. He loved the experience of getting tattooed, calling it a “rush” and saying “I understand why people can’t just get one, because it hurts a little y’know, but it’s not so bad,..then there’s this ache afterwards, I was like ‘god it feels nice,’ like it was such a nice ache...ahhh, god I wanted more!” There is one other man in his classes who has a tattoo, and even though he says the medical student body is a conservative one, many of the female students have belly-button piercings or small tattoos:

I would guess that I’m the only guy in the class with it. Because women are

different, women - it's more acceptable for women to have a tattoo - It's small and cute, on the shoulder blade, or just here, or something like that, and it's okay. With men it's got more associated with the seedy side of things.

His experience with his nipple piercing was not so enticing, but "just a thousand times worse." He picked the right nipple to "balance out" his left ear piercings, and is unaware of any placement social code. A birthday present to himself, he described the experience:

It's really, really painful. Like, they put this clamp, it's like haemostat-like thing. When they clamp it's like fire, squeezing as hard as he can, you're like 'this really hurts, this really hurts but! it hurts so much it cannot get any worse!' That's what you're thinking. So you're like, 'I can take this, I can take this' ..and then...when they push the needle through you it's like ...unbelievable excruciating pain, *excruciating* pain.

He doesn't recommend it to anyone, but "wouldn't mind getting other things pierced...I'd like to get my tongue pierced but I'm not in a profession where I could do that, I have to be practical - it's pretty easy to spot people with one." As much as he loves body modification and endorses it, too many piercings, or tattoos (especially on women) he deems unattractive. In this realm, everyone seemed to agree that too much of a good thing can be ugly.

Colleen is the only woman who had pierced her belly button, but it grew out in a matter of weeks:

I was going to a Tori Amos concert, and I took an ice cube and I just pinched a little piece of 'flab,' a piece of skin, and all I had was a safety pin and it wasn't working too well and after the first attempt I couldn't get it through the other side and so I let- I started to bleed and unfreeze and then I called myself a wimp for giving up [laughs] so I was stupid and then pierced it and put an earring, a little hoop thing in right away....Well three weeks it later it was black and it grew out because it wasn't very deep obviously.

She likes how it looks, but "again it's become a fad, so it's like 'I don't want to do that.'" One of the reasons why she did do it was "because I had to prove something..when I get an idea I want to do something - it's rarely that I don't do it." She values her self-image of being stubborn, and willfully piercing her navel on a whim fed that image. At a Valentine's Day strip club party she witnessed a woman getting her genitals pierced on stage, which for some reason grosses her out far less than the pictures she's seen on the Internet of men's pierced genitals. She associates tattoos with her grandfather's war time markings and is scared of the pain of getting one, but her primary reason for not wanting one is that they, too, are a fad, and she doesn't want to follow a fad.

No other informants had done any forms of body modification other than ear piercing, but many of them found tattoos and piercings appealing. The only other medical student thinking about getting a tattoo was Joanne, who being from Berkeley, has been exposed to all kinds of tattoos and believes that “a few of them in moderation suggest to me this person is more interesting than most, and I’d actually be more interested in getting to know them.” She is planning on getting one, of a circle quartered by a cross which has many significations for her - a compass, an inverted woman’s symbol, a Celtic symbol. This would be a small one, placed discreetly on her ankle as she also feels that a large one would be unacceptable in her profession. She finds tongue piercings “arresting,” but finds those on genitals and nipples masochistic (as well as potentially medically unsafe) and suspects they are done for shock value.

Brian would like to get a tattoo, but thinks his body is too hairy for one to look good. If he did get one he would want one of a “deep” symbol with interesting connotations to communicate something about himself (a sort of shameless self-advertising):

I would garnish myself with something I would consider very deep, and hopefully in an effort also for other people to consider very deep too. And that sounds very shallow, but it’s the truth and I can’t get away from it...I would have an attraction for having an infinity symbol, not only because I’m interested in the concept of it, but I would like other people to understand I find it interesting, and henceforth think I am interesting, that I would want people to not only appreciate what it is but to think I’m cool because of it.

Piercings of any sort *completely* repel him, and he was literally squirming in his chair when we discussed them.

The other informants who would contemplate getting a tattoo are Neal, Luke, and Elsa. Neal not too seriously, just that he could imagine doing it someday for the decorative aspect (although piercing he finds totally irrelevant to him because of his age). But Luke and Elsa are both ambivalent about the idea. Elsa finds the body beautiful enough on its own and says:

I also get hit with the idea that I’m permanently scarring my body, which is something I could end up regretting....But then I go ‘wow, wouldn’t it be cool to put my own mark on it’....sometimes it just comes down to guts, y’know?....It’s useless unless it’s something you really want, that’s important for you, and I guess I haven’t found that.

She feels similarly undecided about piercing, and in this she lets the opinions of others (peers and family) dictate her actions, and even colour her view:

I really wanted to get my nose pierced for some time, I hear so many people go

on about how ugly they find it, y'know. And I let that influence me, and I don't want it to. And there's also sometimes it just looks like there's snot hanging out your nose, but, y'know, and my family too... [disapproves]

In Luke's case, the sentiments are similar. He thinks tattoos can be beautiful and is tempted to get one because they represent youth to him, but wonders if they imply that the bearer doesn't think his or her body is beautiful enough on its own.

Aren't you...saying when you get a tattoo, 'my body is not beautiful enough the way it is? Is this some way of making what I have more beautiful because it's not good enough the way it is?' So, I dunno. But it seems often the people who get tattoos are seemingly the least caught up in their own body image - who aren't worried about it and they just sort of do it on a whim because they think it would be neat....They're not the type of people who take their body so seriously they can't make a change, y'know.

His feelings, however, are not nearly so ambivalent when discussing body piercing, which to him is a disfigurement. "I'm not into this whole new stapling your face and your body 'thing.' There's something about it that just gives me the impression that these people are *angry* at somebody, they're angry at something, they're angry at the world and they're doing this out of, I don't know, frustration."

The remainder of my informants have no desire to tattoo or pierce themselves. Kira likes the look of men with pierced ears and women with pierced navels and noses, which she suggests may be because she knows people who have those (familiarity breeds acceptance). Jack declares that a lot of tattoos are unappealing, but finds a few on a woman very sexy, and feels likewise about nose, navel, and nipple piercings (influenced by his travels in India), but doesn't like lip or tongue piercings.

4. Influences on the Body - Personal

The two spheres of influence that I look at are the interpersonal and the cultural. I had initially speculated that this group would turn to cultural structures at large for influences and direction in how to 'appear,' such as mass media and peers. But I did find that many mentioned family dynamics as still an influence in how they perceive and portray themselves, sometimes directly, sometimes lingeringly. Far more often could my informants specify friends, lovers, or family as having a profound influence on how they comport themselves. But a trend reported by my informants is that although they were heavily influenced by their family when younger, they were not so much any longer and now preferred to turn to peers (friends, lovers) for direct or indirect guidance. For these people, media was a vague entity that must obviously influence them and everyone somehow, but not many personally significant anecdotes were told. For those of my informants who were not so lucky in their family life - where there was breakdown or strife, media was more directly cited as an influence. This will be further examined in the section on media and myth, but should be kept in mind when reading about the relationships within the family.

The Family

My informants often directly attributed their attitudes towards their bodies to their families. This happened much more frequently than anticipated, and was apparent from the first pre-interview onwards. For some it was blatantly acknowledged that how they were raised instilled both their positive and negative bodily beliefs. Luke was very happy to have had the parental influence he did, and credits both of his parents for a healthy body-image and, in particular, his father with giving him an appreciation of physical fitness. For other informants it was not so obvious *how* their parents influenced them, but it was evident that they had by references to them in their answers. In a few interviews family receded into the background and was barely mentioned except for say, Ethan's inheriting bad eyesight from his mother, or perhaps more tellingly, certain women's fears of looking like their mothers. In fact, family was mentioned more often by women, and generally in negative terms, which would seem to reinforce Glassner's claim that "generally, though, women's bodies are more influenced by their relationships to their parents than are men's. This is because most parenting is done by mothers..." (1988:66). But this leaves us with the question of what, then, influences men's bodies? If the mother is the primary care-giver, men (as are the women) are influenced by their

parenting, albeit it is easier for the men to later dissociate themselves from her because of their gender difference. But fathers, even if through their absence, also present a model of the body for their sons. Perhaps we consider women's bodies as more easily prevailed upon than men's because of the relative ease in which they are able to talk about their families and bodily expectations, and, conversely, the ease in which women's bodies are talked about. But sadly, along with the increased discourse surrounding women's bodies, comes inevitable anxiety and fragmentation of the self-image.

Brian, Tony, and Ethan say little about their family, except that Tony pays homage to his ethnic heritage through his tattoos, and Ethan talked of his financial arrangement with his parents (and that his mum sends him shirts from time to time). Luke, Neal, and Jack had more to say about their families.

Luke's family has a history of cancer which influences their lifestyle, and he worries about getting it (particularly when he smokes a cigarette). His dad has always exercised, having grown up in Northern Ontario surrounded by big lumberjack types who would spend time in the gym. It was just what men did in that community. Luke said, "I started to run when I was in high school because that's what my dad did, and I figured 'he looks good, he's almost 50 years old. Shit, if I do the same thing maybe *I'll* look that good when I'm 50, y'know.'" His mother is not so fit and tends to be plump, but when young she had a beautiful curvy figure. Luke suspects that she never had to learn to exercise to be in good shape, so when age took its toll his mum made no effort to fight it as others might have been used to doing. Although she seems comfortable with her body, Luke believes his dad wishes she were still slim, and Luke himself wishes "she would take care of herself better."

One of the situations in which Neal feels most comfortable is when he's with his family, maybe in part because he takes on a specific role. He presents himself as "a good son" and is funny and light and becomes a calm resolver of conflict between other family members because that is what is expected of him. "I do fit the role they want. I think I do feel expectations and as soon as I feel an expectation from someone, I fill it." His family used to influence him greatly when younger, mostly by endorsing or vetoing Neal's clothing when they would go out socially - even now, if they go out together he likes to pay his mum the respect of asking how he looks, even if he knows what he's wearing is fine. At the same time they didn't hold expectations for him to be in vogue and were very accepting of him - fortunately because he was actually quite

unstylish and plain as an adolescent yet didn't realize it because of the acceptance he felt. His family regards their time together as special - his mum likes him to shave before dinner, and Neal is happy to oblige. Of course these days, Neal is more likely to try to dress to please other women than his mother.

Jack's parents are divorced and he lived with his mother. I've already described how his mother was there to bail him out emotionally and practically when he was feeling upset about his looks. She was a professional singer and dancer, so, like many of the performers mentioned here, is heavily invested in her appearance. She wears lots of make-up and jewellery, is obsessed about her weight, and had her eyes "done" surgically to hide her age. Jack is convinced that "if you gave her a million dollars, y'know, \$999 000 of it would be spent on clothes and [appearance] - I'm exaggerating, but it's very, very important to her." He is critical of her preoccupation, but "she'll argue that this is her livelihood and if she doesn't look good on stage, when she's singing or something, then she might not get hired....I grew up with that influence as well." Jack likes to look nice for his mother, and when he goes to visit her in Ottawa he'll take pains to see that his jeans are neat and without holes, and he'll be even more sure to shave. However, his work further emphasizes the rift between his current convictions and those of his mother. When she recently noticed and teased him over a newly developed "love handle" he felt offended due to his recent exposure to those with serious body-image problems. "It was also when I was doing pediatrics seeing girls who were obsessed with it, and it's like, 'it's just a love handle..big deal!' Now we have different ideals of body image." As we will see later, much of what repels Jack sounds suspiciously parallel to his and his mother's struggles with body image. A more cheerful influence that his parents had on him was to impart to him a love of music and rhythm (his father is a band leader), extending to an appreciation of how bodies move and corporal confidence.

During my pre-interviews I first heard how daughters were treated differently from sons, how my women informants' bodies were made public, commented on, and discussed within the family, sometimes to a much greater (and more invasive) degree than those of their brothers'. "The adolescent girl, unlike her brother, feels her relationship to others mediated through her body, and particularly her clothes, which serve the ambiguous purpose of covering and revealing at one and the same time" (J. Cohen, quoted in Beaune 1989:470, in Frank 1991:52). Helen's mother had a certain idea of how she should appear and would buy her clothes that were

“dowdy” and, unsolicited, tell her what make-up she should wear to improve her looks. Helen’s older sister gets even more harassed by their mother “because she’s overweight and that’s a big no-no,” and her brother for being slovenly. Lyn was overweight as an adolescent and one summer lost fifteen pounds, partly at her mother’s prompting and partly because she was changing schools, “...and my mother would brag to people about it, y’know what I mean, it was very....now that I think about it, it’s very icky.” Her mother was constantly reprimanding Lyn for being overweight, even though she herself was, and is, fat and felt ugly. “I always remember her being very bitter and depressed, whatever, through my whole childhood...and as the years went on she gained more and more weight and she would always talk about losing it.” Lyn’s brother (except for the time he shaved his head) was exempt from bodily criticism. As Frank suggests, brothers and sisters have different expectations thrust upon them because “the body of each is constituted within respectively different discourses of adolescence. In, for example, his athletic performances (or when he first dresses in a locker room), he no less than she may be of his body as well as in it, but society naturalizes his embodiment as it alienates hers” (Frank 1991:53). As society alienates her body, it becomes open for discussion and criticism.

...my whole family feels that they can talk to me and comment to me about my body, or about like ‘why am I bigger in one little section than another.’ I mean I’ve actually had, y’know, my grandparents pick out, ‘so, you’ve gained weight, you’ve gained it here, why is that?’ or something. And they all feel they can comment about my body and my looks and my clothes, whatever. Whereas with my brother, it’s pff, never....nobody feels free to say ‘well, you’re getting a little more muscular’ or ‘you’re getting a little more fatty.’

Although theoretically out from under her mother’s influence now, Lyn joked about a possible tattoo “I don’t care if people would know, although my mother would kill me [giggles].”

In Amy’s case, neither she nor her mother had a weight problem, but that didn’t stop her mother from making bizarre intrusions, nor from discussing Amy’s body with others.

My mother would tell me, would alert me, as if she had this access, ‘Well, y’know, you’re going to have problems, you can tell when you’re gaining weight, it’s in your *shoulders*,’ y’know, ‘Your face, because you have big cheeks you will always look fat to people, and that’s something...’...I was alerted to these things people would think, so I’d always have this very strange image of that, and perception of self....*anything*, it didn’t have to be necessarily weight, it was good posture, ‘oh I saw your daughter walking yesterday. She has excellent posture.’ That kind of stuff.

For Joanne, her weight has come under scrutiny by not only her mother but also her

“*petite*” sister. “Well, she and my sister have been pretty harsh on me, for my weight.” Her mother’s weight has vacillated (depending on if she’s depressed or not) from “health-problem slim, to being sort of ‘plump’ for her shape.” Joanne was particularly influenced by both of these family members during high school.

As already seen, Kira is very aware of how much her family used to influence her, from her mother’s dressing her to her father’s and brother’s athleticism. She still admires her brother for how he has blended his work with his love of the outdoors. But to actually discuss bodily concerns was “sort of off limits.”

One of the funnier replies I got to my question on fears was from Andrea who quickly said “I don’t want to end up with an ass like my mom’s.” Although her mother apparently has an admirable figure for her age, when she’s naked you can see that “she has this *monstrous bum*. It’s really scary because not only is it *big*, it’s not that, that I wouldn’t really care about, but she’s got all these horrible dimples...it’s kind of grotesque looking.” She and her mother share a viral skin condition in which they get small red spots on their bodies. It’s just starting to manifest in Andrea, and no doubt she is anticipating it worsening like her mother’s, while she would clearly prefer to distance herself corporally and emotionally from her. One other reference to her family came up when we talked about plastic surgery and nose-jobs. She said “actually my parents offered me one when I was younger, they said ‘you can always have one if you want it, dear,’ because I used to complain to them about my nose, I felt it was too *big*, *bumpy*, and stuff”

Beth is closest to her sister, who she adores for being “totally natural,” and says, “she was one of the *few* women I knew who never criticized herself! Never really felt like she wasn’t good enough, and she’s a very successful person too! And I think it has to do with that incredible faith she has in herself.” She also talked about her mother, who used to look very natural with her first husband, Beth’s father, but would fight a lot with her subsequent husband, and Beth saw a change.

It all started to come down to very material things, and her appearance was *very* important. And I remember seeing that, and always being very confused by that, because she would be *so* angry with him, and yet she would get completely ‘decked out’ to go see him, y’know? And he made a lot of comments about her hair, her this, her that, and my mother is *beautiful*.

Where Beth admires how her mother looks, and hopes to take after her, Elsa sees only reason

to worry. “I look at my mother’s body and I go ‘okay, my boobs are going to sag and my stomach’s going to get bigger, I’m going to start worrying about my ass.’” We’ve already noticed how Elsa thinks her mother doesn’t feel comfortable with her own femininity, and how she suspects that has had an effect on her. Elsa resembles her father more, and naturally, is turned off by men who have a lot of body hair “possibly because my father is covered!! [I interject ‘you like him though!’] - yeah, but I don’t want to be sleeping with him!”

Colleen cited ballet as informing her own weight awareness, but mentioned that her mother, once curvy and slender, is now “quite a bit overweight” and how she fears that when she gets older she too will “get fat.” Her mother also forbade junk food in the house, so Colleen was always in awe of her friends’ households laden with Oreo Cookies and Captain Crunch cereal. This was the extent to which she talked about her family, but I was left with the suspicion there was much more to say about her mother’s influence on her. Unfortunately, it is only fair to abide by the rules of anthropological fieldwork, use what they say, and not fall prey to speculation.

Lovers and Sex

As we grow older and start to form sexual relationships the family’s influence recedes and what our lovers think of our bodies becomes more important, and we learn from them instead. Mother’s ringing words are replaced by a lover’s murmurs. Attracting people sexually becomes a main incentive to work on our bodies, and obsess over them.

Neal is calculatingly aware of how his practices affect his presentation to women, and ultimately his sexual experiences. He wants women to be initially attracted to him so he has an audience and can then further win them over. This appreciation of his own looks started in his late teens (“since women have become attracted to me I’ve become more attracted to myself”), which prompted a change in style. As previously said, he was not very fashionable when younger, and wore braces and thick glasses. As he became aware of women, and of his nondescript mode, he accelerated his change all the more so. He dressed smarter, got contact lenses, the braces came off, and he made an effort to keep fit.

Even my jogging, my keeping in shape has to do with having a body that’s just a little bit more agile in bed. I do like to have a lean body because it makes me feel good. And I like to be strong, I like to be able to climb my steps and not be out of breath. But I also realize that some women do like ‘pecs’ to be a little

bit, just yeah, just to have that extra perk for them. Because I like the perks some women give to me, so if I'm demanding certain, or anticipating certain pleasures in their body then I have to assume they feel the same way.

He listens to what women find attractive in men and will happily oblige them, as he does by keeping his hair long.

Tony became better looking with age, and is now at his "peak." He has a newfound sex appeal (which he was previously scared of) which he thinks was brought about by a mixture of dressing better, slimming down, and cutting his hair which in turn attracted women and led to his being further prompted by their reaction. "I guess I get more attention now from women than I used to, made me more aware of that, so I'm enjoying that." He can't really say what it was that changed for the better, and it's probably an interconnecting mix of being braver, letting himself be more attractive, and attracting women, all of which he clearly relishes. He shares a similar attitude to Neal: "The first thing you can assess upon meeting someone *is* looks. So you have to be presentable, then you can reel them in!" Currently single and dreading getting older, he wants to find the right woman and so puts a lot of emphasis on his physique and style - "When you're single, you gotta work a bit harder."

Luke makes sure that when he is meeting a woman he is more presentable than usual, and he hearkens back to his father's attitude: "He's definitely always been an ogler when it comes to women, and I think he feels the same sort of responsibility for himself - he feels like he should keep up his own body." He has been single for ten months, and is alternately insecure and exacting.

When I'm looking around I seem to be very picky about the way a girl *looks*, and everything being just *right*. And sometimes I stop and I think to myself 'oh, y'know, *who are you, man*, what are you, Robert Redford? Albert Einstein?' I get insecure that women will think 'hey that guy's a small, skinny, guy, or whatever. [I laugh] Sure! I'm just telling you the truth, right? A skinny guy without an imposing masculine figure, y'know.

Jack keeps his concerns over his body mostly to himself, but will talk to his girlfriend about them every couple of months or so. In his self-loathing teenage years he used his relationships with women to boost his self-esteem and prove that he wasn't physically a monster. Fortunately, now he doesn't have such qualms. Women in general influence his decisions about his appearance, and past lovers in particular: "my romantic partner has always had a huge influence on how I would try to present myself. I think women in general,... yeah,

if I'm honest with myself, I've always tried to dress nicely in front of women."

This sentiment is shared by Ethan, who throughout his interview mentioned only women as influences, from the saleswoman at GAP to his hairdresser. He was also grateful to a past playful and patient lover who had taken the time to explore his sexuality with him. She "...really showed me ways in which I could better express some other things via my body as opposed to just my response to stress! [or to] the strangeness of the situation!!"

Brian genuinely feels most positive after sex. He feels that sex is often about acceptance. "I think good sex is so important to one's self image. 'Cause when you're not having sex you don't feel accepted, and when you do have sex you feel very accepted." His relationships with his lovers are very important to him, and keep him feeling bodily confident.

Elsa was the only woman who said she felt at ease and good about her body in general and her breasts in particular, with a lover, but with a caveat: "with a *new* lover. Not anywhere past sexually a month." After that she thinks any compliments are solely to humour her.

For Joanne the men she dates influence how she feels about her body, and her current boyfriend is very comfortable with her weight and thinks she is beautiful, but will gently encourage her to exercise if she says she feels fat. She refuses to tell him her weight, because she's about 20 lbs heavier than he, but is physically at ease with him because she can talk of her feelings about her body with him. Of her previous boyfriends, about half have said to her something along the lines of "you're so cute, if only you could lose 10 lbs, 20 lbs..." which only served to make her feel more uncomfortable with her weight and less inspired to lose it. Unfortunately she feels most uncomfortable and "neurotic" with her body-image during sex. She told me honestly and haltingly how she felt:

If I feel fat, I won't get turned on. And um. It's a real sort of limitation because, um ...the guy I'm going out with now likes to have sex with the *lights* on and that's, y'know, hard for me. Because I don't feel that comfortable, with myself. So I sometimes still have problems, y'know, about reaching orgasm or what have you, really enjoying sex, when I feel sort of *that* large and oafish, things like that...

Beth is very appealing looking, and is a bit suspicious of men approaching her. "Men will sort of ask me out on the spot, and I think that's so *...odd*. What are you attracted to right away?!...To be so bold, and to just sort of think that they can *have* something because they like it." But she is happy to be attractive, and feels most so if able to keep up her fitness routine and

admits that her sexual and overall confidence depend on how she feels she looks. Her physical condition gives her a sort of power, she feels, much in the same way that Neal and Tony rely on that initial enticement to meet people. “But to make *sure* that I’m going to have the opportunity, to show them how I am, I feel like at first I have to look a certain way, just to sort of grab them and have them, then show them how I am, y’know?”

Friends and Acquaintances

Time and again people would cite the image of a friend or acquaintance as inspiration for how they comport themselves. Even those on the street around them would serve to give them ideas of how to dress or be, by example or by their reactions, rather than the images of advertisements. But this is a fine and tricky line to describe, as who can say if those on the street around us are not themselves so influenced by advertising in the media that flesh and blood are, in effect, one and the same as glossy cardboard pictures. We are subject to imitative desires - imitation has an important function in the building of social structure (Schilder 1950:243), and is necessary to provide a sense of social cohesion and togetherness. If Mauss saw the Parisian women imitate the gait of Americans through cinema (Mauss 1973[1935]:72), then clearly our (unconscious and conscious) capacity to emulate what we see is indiscriminating. But as we age we do try to choose our models for presentation, rather than just rely on the immediate ones in our presence. Did these Parisians consciously imitate the movies? Or did they start to walk somewhat like their friends had started doing?

Sometimes the imitation is blatant. Andrea is very influenced by her best friend, and they work out together, discuss their bodies, experiment with techniques of body control such as leg waxing. “[We’re] always looking at our bodies in the mirror and comparing and discussing, to the finest detail about what we like and don’t like and stuff.” This friend is Andrea’s sounding board and consultant. She goes with her to the hairdresser’s, talks with her about styles, and even if she’s not there when clothes shopping, Andrea carries an internal image in her mind of what she would approve of. Because this friend is obsessively meticulous about her own body, when she admires Andrea’s body, Andrea’s self- and corporal-esteem is greatly boosted. Andrea feels good around this friend, learns from her, as well as being influenced by others around her.

All of the women, except for Colleen, said that everyone around them influences their

self image. In the pre-interviews, Amy said how much she enjoyed looking at women, and found them more fascinating than men. She is no longer swayed by magazines and other style-promoting media, but by other people who *looked* as if they were up on the latest fashions.

If a woman has paid an extreme amount of attention to her appearance where everything is balanced and weighed and you know it's influenced by something she's read in a magazine, and she's been spending her life watching these magazines and in the right shops, at the right times and the right seasons, and those people I find enormously influential. To the point of 'well, she's got a nice ring, y'know,' and I'd spend the next three days looking for that ring. So I'm very influenced by the people who are influenced by the figures, not by the figures directly.

We don't dress in a vacuum, we want to both imitate those we approve of, and yet at the same time cut an individualistic figure. Maybe the best compromise is to become one who is imitated.

Joanne said how she is not only influenced by what others wear, but also by their physical body shape. She goes to the gym with girlfriends, and likes to be with people who both have a positive body image and accentuate the positive in others. Kira tries to seek calming friends, and has only a few with whom she talks about body issues, although she feels influenced by many. One convinced her to highlight her hair, and she talks about food and weight with another. She is aware of the importance of positive role models, and is herself a peer counsellor at university. She also benefited from being in therapy for a couple of years and felt with its aid she was finally able to 'come into her own' and start buying clothes that she liked, not those her mother would have picked for her. Andrea was also in therapy for a year because she was worried about the psychological impact being surrounded by sick people might have on her. She felt her elderly woman therapist was "just like the mother I've never had," and helped her feel positive about her body image and attractiveness.

Figures of authority influenced Colleen, such as her dance teachers, but also positive reinforcement from those she is intimate with. The dance world is exacting, though, and her peers would say, "you should try and emulate this person because they're the ideal," generally of famous dancers. Together with her friends she would go on diets, and at her ballet school what was known as the "fat list" would get posted in public - a weekly assessment by the teachers of the students who needed to lose weight.

Beth, in turn, found the world of dancers difficult. She described casual dinners in which the dancers spent "a lot of time talking about [their] body and what [they'd] like to change

about [their] body.” The dance students would be very critical of themselves, and very specific - complaining about their calves, or arms, or wherever their body seemed least perfect. During these interactions Beth would mostly try to bolster the other girls’ confidence, rather than be outgoingly critical of herself, but even after leaving the dance school, she was still very shy. Because she couldn’t verbally communicate her personality adequately to those around her: “I didn’t feel like I was showing anyone who I really was. They you start to pay more attention to how you show yourself on the outside, because it’s one of the only ways that you’re showing yourself.” She became very conscious of her weight and make-up because she thought “well, no one really knows me, they’re not going to think much of me if I don’t at least look a certain way. Which is horrible!”

As seen earlier, with Elsa’s different groups of casual friends she will present different stylistic facets of herself. Interestingly, amongst Montrealers, she defines what is appropriate by pointing out what one is scorned for *not* doing - “there’s like the whole, y’know, independent Montreal scene, where it’s like ‘you’re not wearing leather’....if you don’t have your eyebrows plucked, y’know, if you’re not wearing things that make you look good and look nice and together.” Elsa finds that both her friends, and the people she finds attractive walking by on the street, have an impact on her, inspiring both envy and dress ideas.

Neal lets people around him influence him, too, but in a passive way. He doesn’t look for ideas or reinforcement from friends so much as trusts that their silence means he’s not doing anything grossly wrong. But he does recall feeling some social pressure to buy certain clothes in high school.

However, Brian’s self-confidence is totally dependant on those around him, and he feels very influenced by people he meets, sees, and knows. But rather than imitate role models, he created his own sense of style by gaging people’s reactions to him. His ‘look’ is contingent upon other people’s feedback. During the course of his very social day he will flirt freely with acquaintances and strangers: “I find it will get me into such a high energy. And days that I don’t feel so hot, and days where I don’t get any sort of attention that way, are days I feel *so* uncomfortable - I think my nose is too big, my hairline’s too receding, my back hair’s showing, all these.” The positive feedback he receives from strangers is what helps him feel confident in his attractiveness.

Luke seems to let his girlfriends influence him (as he did with his ear piercing), but

asides from talking indiscriminately with his friends about his bodily concerns now that he is single, they don't seem to directly, or greatly, influence him. This is quite different from Tony who consciously conformed to what his group of friends in high school wore. Oddly, his interest in different clothing began to influence his interest in people - "I started to be more attracted to this type of clothing, the people fell into place." In this case, the clothes influenced the friends, and he started to choose to be with those who shared similar tastes. Like Brian above, he looks to positive reinforcement from those around him, "you look for approval whatever you wear, for whoever it matters." "Someone says 'oh, that's a nice shirt,' I mean, good! Bonus! If some says 'what are you doing wearing that?'...'what is that,' I'll be like, whoa, it doesn't happen."

For Jack, his girlfriend, her parents, his parents, media, and the hospital environment are what influences him, but, curiously, he doesn't specifically mention friends. Clearly they are important to him, though, since he does like to appear 'cool' in front of them, and will wear things to a social gathering that he thinks others would appreciate.

Ethan doesn't seem to be so actively influenced by those around him, yet he appreciates compliments from others, which may then alter how he regards himself. For instance, it was only after a woman complimented him on his hands that he began to realize that he has attractive hands. Likewise, after enough of his friends' joking about his being a 'skinny white guy,' that he realized that he had indeed lost weight from his athletic high school days, and was, in fact, skinny. In this way, reactions from those around him affect how he perceives himself.

5. Body in Context

Shifting in geographical space affected how people shifted their body image. My informants could see a great difference between the Montreal way of approaching the body, and that of Boston and Berkeley, and less surprisingly, of Asia and Africa. Within Montreal, different circumstances prompted different bodily responses. Where they were, globally or locally, affected how they dressed, their self-comportment, and even bodily confidence. Sometimes this was attributed to the country, the city, or a setting within. Other times it was recognized as simply being away from one's home element and the expectations thereof. Whichever the case, as any anthropologist will attest to, being elsewhere sharpens the focus on home, and the contrasts of strange lands served to elucidate the situation in Montreal. Wherever people went there were concerns about fitting in and being accepted (particularly if they were in an insecure situation) that conflict with the general desire to be unique and distinctive. As the social group changes, so does the individual.

Travel, Living in Other Cities, Physical Environment

In my pre-interview with Helen I was exposed to her experience as an English teacher in Turkey. In Montreal she wore jeans and casual clothing, but in Turkey she found herself wearing very feminine clothing.

When I was living in Turkey I completely changed the way I dressed and it was gradual, and when I came back I had no things in my wardrobe - like a flowery skirt that was very feminine, nothing I would have worn in Canada. A friend of mine couldn't believe this was something I'd wear and this was something I wore all the time, and it was much more feminine, much more. It was interesting to me that without knowing, I'd adopted the Turkish way of dressing much more...partly without knowing it, partly consciously, because I wanted to fit in and not draw attention.

Upon her return she quickly resumed her usual clothing habits.

When seventeen, Lyn went to France as an exchange student where she was impressed by the style of the women (so different from her small Wisconsin home-town). She became a Francophile and turned from her previous ways.

Y'know, you've got the kind of American rural way of looking, which is less... You're a teenager and you're wearing the blue eye shadow, lots of make-up when you're in high school, and hair spray, and, y'know, curling your hair every morning, and everything. And I'm not sure how much I did that before I went to France, but I do remember coming back, I wouldn't wear make-up except maybe mascara, which was unusual for somebody who went there [her high

school]. I would just leave my hair straight, instead of playing with it and trying to curl it or something ridiculous which it doesn't do. I was totally kind of negating what was presented to me as an option where I was.

Jack experienced different ways of living during his travels, which he attributes to affecting him and changing him a great deal. Three years ago he did volunteer work in Africa, two years ago in India, which was a particularly spiritual experience for him. Not only did he bring back clothes from these countries, he brought back ideals and religious philosophies about the body.

I really began to recognize the importance of other things besides myself, how I look and there were a lot of things that were important to me, and a lot of the eastern religions which I enjoy reading about believe that the physical body is just a carrier of your 'atma' in Hindu, or your 'Buddha' or bodhisattva' in Buddhism, things like this. So, the body's just seen as a carrier and focussing on your body is losing your spiritual focus elsewhere. Focussing on bodily sensations, overindulging in sex, overindulging in food, overindulging in anything physical like this is seen as a negative thing in that it changes your focus and you're focussing on your ego rather than focussing on your spiritual self....Both Africa and India, I've seen people that didn't have the luxury - I worked in rural villages in both places - I was working with families, kids, adults, that didn't have the luxury to be obese or to worry about body image because they had to worry about their next meal. And so that affects you.... You come home and it's like, worried about whether I have a love handle or not, and these people...It's a very large eye-opener for me.

Travelling, in general, was cited as making Elsa feel at her best - independent, confident and attractive. Because you can be anyone you want, "you are automatically more yourself than you ever are...and you appreciate who you are." As a stranger and a traveller she feels she develops an instant cachet and appeal to the natives. Except when she visits Vancouver and is with friends of her brother's, and feels compelled to 'do as the natives' and appear more hippie-like than is her inclination (as seen above). Ethan also enjoyed the freedom to be himself when far from home expectations. His purple hair, which caused a bit of a stir at medical school, was not an issue when he travelled the past summer to alternative medical communities in Vermont, because the people he met there were "neutral" to his identity, in part because they were often more "punkish" than he was.

The only person who said he didn't like travelling was Neal, essentially because, (although he finds airports erotic), he feels physically insecure in aeroplanes. It's partly due to the aspect of putting himself in physical danger, being completely out of control over what is

occurring that unsettles him. He also doesn't like being uprooted and unsettled, and prefers the comforts and routine of home.

All of the women medical students described their experiences living and studying in other cities. Joanne felt a huge disparity between how people treat their bodies in California and people's attitudes here in Montreal. California is an "extremely body conscious area of the world to live in," and being warm throughout the year, people don't wear much and "are very athletic, and women tend to be very slim and take very good care of themselves." She notices a like-minded body-consciousness in Montreal, but here people smoke cigarettes, and dress very differently from the casual, tennis-shoe clad Californians. They also talk about their bodies differently - in California women constantly talked about how they ate too much, and had to go to the gym to atone for their sins along the lines of, "I can't even believe I had that salad for lunch, it's loaded with calories, I gotta go to the gym, three hours." It grew quite tiresome for Joanne, and even though she would join in, now that she's in Montreal she talks like that even less. There is a height difference, too, and for the first time Joanne feels conscious about how tall she is when in the dating scene. Even though she loves the Montreal look, she was more comfortable with her body when she was living in Boston where women were heavier, and "have a lot more to say and tend to be snappy and quick and funny, that's sort of what women are valued for more, than here where I think physical attractiveness is really at the forefront."

Kira also lived in Boston which she found much more conservative than Montreal where she lived before, and now. Her experience was most shaped by the male-dominated environment at MIT where she did graduate work in chemistry.

I really felt isolated as a woman there and it was really, it was a terrible experience for me all around. But um, I felt I couldn't really be different, I felt I lost a lot of self confidence, I think, academically but I also didn't want to be different in any way. So when I lived in Montreal I wore a lot of makeup and a lot of jewellery and um, I stopped wearing any of that - I just wanted to look like a man, I wanted to look like everyone else, I wanted to wear clothes that kind of would just let me blend into the surroundings.

Andrea did her undergraduate degree in Kingston, Ontario and we discussed the difference between the two provinces (like how Ontarians wear sweatsuits in public). She was happy to return to Montreal and remembers being "blown away" by how attractive people were here, especially when she went to the local gym and saw people really caring about how they looked. Andrea looks down on people who are slovenly, yet says not all Montrealers feel the

same way: “I have a friend from Montreal who’s now living in Toronto. She’s so much more into that kind of scene, and she really hates how people care about how they look here - she just thinks it’s superficial, and that it’s just ridiculous.”

Work Place

The main difference between the medical students and arts students was not their personalities so much as where they worked. All of the medical students mentioned curtailing how they present themselves, the surface concerns of the body, at the hospitals for the sake of professionalism and the need to give way to authority. Most of them resented it. Some just accepted it as being the way things were. Concerns over the figure and form of the body also varied depending on the field of work. The medical students were exposed to eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa, in their work and among their peers, which was associated with a drive towards perfectionism. But it was for none of them currently a personal issue. The performers were also exposed, and sometimes susceptible, to eating disorders if they were in dance, or associated with those in dance, which meant something slightly different. In that realm anorexia was seen as more of a method to look good for the audience, which is akin to those who worked with film being hyper-aware of the camera’s scrutiny and thus contemplating plastic surgery. The edges of the body have been fetishized towards perfection and regularity for the performers, and I suspect amongst medical students the control of the body is more closely linked with an internal drive to perfection. In medicine your mind and method may be held up for criticism and evaluation, but not your body. Discipline is needed to study, and that same urge for discipline can be erroneously transferred onto bodily practices, but for a dancer the discipline is purely corporal.

The informants also talked about how in their chosen field their environment and peers affected their self-confidence, and in turn, how that was manifest physically. For the medical students the professional and personal were somewhat separate, but for the performers the division was blurred and it’s not so easy to distinguish the two realms. They only have to be concerned about professional dress when on stage, which is a small percentage of their time spent interacting with others in the field. The rest of the time they may *choose* to dress and be a certain way, but are under no obligation to do so. For those usually behind the scenes such as Neal and Brian, they never have to wear “stage” clothes, and their concerns with self-

presentation are more often independent of their work.

To first address the issues of presentation, Kira is older than most medical students, and says, “the culture of medicine and how it works in the hospital and the hierarchy” is new to her. She resents it, but goes along with it, and depending on her mood, may challenge it (but not to those who are very much her superior). Of the residents, “I feel like they perceive me as a second year medical student, which is kind of the grunt, and I get angry because I’m not being seen as a person. So I’ll sort of throw it some kind of ‘look at me for who I am,’ y’know, and uh, I get in a little bit of hot water for it sometimes.” Andrea is aware that with her personal brash style she could easily offend those at the hospital and tries not to. Joanne tries to appear competent and confident, and doesn’t want to dress in a sexually provocative manner that might make her patients uncomfortable.

So I try to minimize my looks there. I tend to pull my hair back, I was wearing very bright lipsticks for a while but I decided that wasn’t very appropriate for a hospital setting so I started wearing much more neutral toned down shades...I won’t wear short skirts, I won’t wear a blouse that dips down - you’re very close to patients, you’re leaning over them all the time.

Ethan was least impressed by the medical school regulations:

In the hospital I received numerous friendly advices to warnings to criticisms about my dress, especially from surgical types, but generally from everybody. And in keeping with my recent realization that medical school is the *army*, it’s consistent that they would want me to wear their uniform, or some kind of uniform, so that meant that my loud clothing and casual dress has been deemed unacceptable in the past. Which sent me out to buy some khaki pants, which I could live with more than dress pants.

He has been told in certain hospitals that he *must* wear a tie, and thinks that he is expected to look like a banker, whereas women are merely expected to “look sharp.” He has yet to hear of a woman being singled out for rebuke over how she dresses. “I’ve seen some of my female classmates wear very short skirts in the hospital, and I don’t think anyone has received a comment about that (which again has all sorts of reasons).” We compared this to the culture of the business world (or “upper echelons of the corporate death machine,” as Ethan prefers to put it) where there is a more rigid dress code for women (“cutthroat, yet sexy”) than in the hospital. As can be imagined, Ethan is more atypical than most medical students, who view him as “a colossal freak,” which at least means they’re not completely aghast when he does something like dye his hair purple - he is already so far beyond their normal boundaries that

anything he does is henceforth inconsequential.

Both Tony and Jack more readily conform in their hospital manner. Contrary to Ethan's experience, Jack feels that men and women are subject to equal expectations. Men should wear ties, and women must be dressed nicely to the point of semi-formality. Respectful of the stereotype, Jack shaves daily and dresses neatly (but not as much as the unspecified "they" would like), even if he doesn't agree that how he dresses necessarily reflects his competence as a would-be-physician. "I believe that if I'm not comfortable, then how am I going to be comfortable with this patient who needs a human being to be talking to them? Not just a person in a tie who has an authoritative appearance to them just because they happen to be dressed nicely." Tony is more reserved and proper around not only authority figures at the hospital, but teachers, the parents of friends, and people he's just met. As previously discussed, he compromises his inclination for body modification to what would be acceptable in his field. He is willing to do so, in order to easily rise into a position of power where he can then heed his inner dictates. Knowing how looks do influence opinions, he is wary of judgements passed on to him that could impede his success. "You do have to be diplomatic, try and please certain people just because of the position they're in, where you want to go...can't fight authority all the way!"

It seems that those in performance are more invested in judging their bodies in relation to their peers, rather than how they appear within a hierarchy. Your peers are also who you are competing against for your work. Measuring up one's body against one's peers is comparable to measuring up within your profession, whereas in medicine the drive necessary for academic achievement gets imposed upon the drive for bodily perfection incidently. For Joanne her weight is a source of anxiety in her personal life, but not at all in her profession, yet medical students are renowned for a higher than average concern with bodily perfection, as manifest in the propensity for eating disorders. An actor's body is important both personally and (sometimes even more so) in the career (the personal is professional). Elsa's bodily esteem is pertinent in class as well as at parties. She feels very conscious of her body because she spends every day with five beautiful women in her theatre training, and feels acutely aware of not being beautiful. This is especially keen during the class where they analyse their work on film:

All the things I hate about my face are just like emphasized by ten, and then having the film teacher tell people flat out in the class that they were pretty and

that they would have to deal with what that means in the media, and me not being one of them. It's y'know, one of those things...and you see yourself up there and you look *terrible*.

She is used to being given role of "The Best Friend" because she doesn't look like a typical leading lady, and she feels like she is constantly trying to fit herself into the shapes required for the roles. It boosts her professional (and personal) self-image greatly when she is offered a role in a play of someone who is supposed to be pretty, or if she gets film work. "Something that proves to me that someone else out there - other than a lover or a friend, like someone impartial - will say 'that person is attractive enough to have them in this,' and it doesn't happen very often!"

Beth and Colleen have a lot to say about the dance world and the demands it puts on their bodies, each for different reasons. Beth, because she is now removed from that pressure directly and has certain insights into her training years that come from distance (and ultimately being let down by those in her discipline), and Colleen, because she had recently done a project herself in which she interviewed dancers about their eating disorders. As an academic I am used to communicating in the medium we all most blatantly communicate in - words. But as Beth says, in dance the verbal falls away "because you don't *speak* to people in that world, you're really just a body that moves...you start to equate everything with *your body*, everything!" The teachers become your source of feedback, and your body exists only in relation to them - where you stand, where you're placed, if they look at you, walk by you, anything that indicates what they think of you. And Beth, who was a confident adolescent, became shy and insecure, a process which she attributes in part to how some of those in authority abused their role and would be mean just for the sake of it, which led her to assume that she herself must have been to blame: something was wrong with her, she didn't look good enough, or wasn't strong, or disciplined enough. Another aspect prompting a loss of confidence may have been a tumultuous home life, and leaving it at an early age, which she says led to a feeling of abandonment. At fifteen years old it is difficult to have the emotional maturity to know how to ask for emotional support from a distant family. It was about this time when she decided she was going to lose weight, partially in response to an audition in which she was told she really should, and in her determination to transform herself would faint now and again. She lost weight quickly and started to receive mixed, yet clear, messages from her dance school - she heard from friends that

the staff was worried about her, but got no direct attention other than to be cast in prominent roles. “They’re *concerned*, but you get *all* this attention. Because suddenly you’re beautiful, suddenly you’re ‘wow,’ everyone wants to work with you, everyone wants you to be in their shows.” This double standard was again obvious when a fellow student was severely anorexic and forbidden to dance in class because she was at risk of suffering a heart attack (it was a common practice to tell a dangerously thin girl to sit out until she gained five pounds). But when a film crew wanted to make a documentary of the school the staff chose the anorexic girl to play a significant role - quite a privilege for one who was supposed to be too unhealthy to attend class. “Simply because she was *so* thin, and they thought this was great, as much as they were...saying ‘you’re too thin, you’re not allowed to dance,’ they were *encouraging* it.”

Beth had auditioned for different schools in Canada, and felt more encouraged at some, but at the most famous one was made to feel horrible. Beyond not accepting her, they had harsh criticism, telling her “you’re never going to be a great dancer, your feet are too small,” and that her back was problematic and she wouldn’t be able to dance more than a few years anyway. At another school where she was also rejected they were nonetheless encouraging, by telling her she was beautiful and should keep auditioning elsewhere, just that they prefer to take younger dancers. As between schools, there are differences between types of dance. She recognized a paradox among classical dancers, which is as follows: “Apparently they’re so concerned about their body and they just treat their bodies like hell a lot of the time!” Ballet dancers tend to smoke a lot, and abuse drugs, whereas those who practice modern dance are very healthy and concerned about their body to the point where they won’t even drink coffee. In “that art form you *embrace* your body, and in ballet you sort of abuse it.” Beth is much happier now, but her closest friends are still in dance and she sees their insecurities and self-criticism all too often and clearly. It would be hard not to be self-critical in such an environment where your body is under constant scrutiny by those in power.

Colleen is no less aware of the pressure of dance school, but seems to harbour fewer bitter feelings than Beth - indeed she feels at her best when she’s dancing, training, singing, and pushing her artistic goals. She remembers the teachers constantly reinforcing weight loss by praising thinness effusively, encouraging the students to emulate certain dancers because they were a physical idea, and rendering public the very personal. Colleen was never herself on the “fat list” posted at the end of the week, and she would respond best to positive reinforcement

saying, “it was worse when the weight issue was brought up by the teacher because the more I thought about it the more I’d eat.” She was obsessed with food, and although she claims to have never had an eating disorder, she used laxatives and would alternately binge and purge.

I tried to purge, unsuccessfully, to bring the food back up, the easiest way was to flush it out the other end...I went through various bouts of that, but that just sustained my weight. I gained a bit too, y’know, eating binges...When I wasn’t dancing, like holidays...I was like ‘all right, don’t need to get into a bodysuit’ and I’d eat as if like, I wouldn’t be able to eat tomorrow, I was like ‘I’ll eat everything I can today and I won’t eat tomorrow’ and then, it never worked out that way.

A further removed view of how dancing affects body image is that of Luke’s, who dated a ballet dancer for three years and felt quite aware of inner turmoil.

[She] spent three hours, six hours a day in front of a mirror, constantly being told she’s out of shape and her body had to fit *this* particular image....I was dealing with that sort of thing on a daily basis for three years, her constantly feeling insecure and, unhappy with her own body because it didn’t fit a very, very precise ideal.

He astutely points out why performers are more subject to obsess over their bodies: “artists define themselves by their art. If they feel their instruments are not up to scratch it gives them a ..twisted sense of self.” He himself feels at odds with his instrument by having the sweet high singing voice of a countertenor and the energy of a power-voiced heldentenor (if not a “bruiser of a hockey player”). He must engage in subtleties and discipline even when performing angry scenes that would normally require a deep, guttural snarl: “instead I’m having to portray anger and frustration in this sort of semi-disembodied voice and that can prove to be difficult.”

Luke also is very aware of the connection between the performance image and the performer. His singing voice is at odds with his masculinity.

A large part of the appeal of countertenors is that you’re got a physical reality that is incongruous with the sound that people are hearing. So people are sitting in the audience listening to a guy who’s clearly masculine, clearly an adult male, uh, making a sound that is somewhat androgynous, *if not* feminine....What I find difficult sometimes is when I come off stage relating to people who have heard me sing and wondering if they’re taking me seriously as a ‘guy’...

And so he is initially reluctant to invite a date to come and hear him sing. “I feel uncomfortable with the idea of inviting them to hear me sing *right away*. I want to get to know them first, just so they’re not totally freaked out by the whole thing.” Sadly, he has to worry about his stage persona getting confused with his real self, even though off-stage his voice is in a masculine

range.

Ethan is the only one who can comment on how both performing and medical school affect his body. After a good performance he feels “sharp and relaxed” and “walk[s] taller without even thinking about it.” Unfortunately this does not happen often at school.

The institution of medical school is predicated in my opinion on making you feel insecure, as the lowest rung on the ladder....they actively try to intimidate you and make you feel stupid and worthless because you don't know something that you would know in a couple of years... But I must admit there have been occasions when I've felt confident in a medical setting but that has nothing to do with the medical aspect and more to do with my general confidence.

But Ethan was reflective on some of the positive derivatives of medical school education. He was honestly worried that he would always perceive a woman's nakedness as sexual invitation, even in a medical setting. After attending a birth he was relieved to find that this was not so.

I've witnessed some deliveries in the last couple of months. And I'm happy to report that I don't feel... 'smutty' or turned on, at all. Y'know, seeing a woman with her legs spread up in stirrups with a baby coming out, it's just...It's different. And I'm glad to see that my conditioning has not been so screwed up that I would fail to see this as different, y'know?

The only direct effect that medical school has on its student's body is the time constraints. Both Ethan and Joanne are putting off becoming fit until after their degrees when they will have more time to devote to themselves. Also the eating habits of time-pressed students are never the best to begin with and if they are working in hospitals the access to healthy food is even worse. Joanne is also worried that her future doctor's salary will lead to temptation and a loss of control, for she will be able to afford any tasty food she wants.

Even though not performing in the strict sense that those in the arts may be, medical students have their own internal performance anxiety. It's an easily imagined extension that the women medical students “have to do everything the best, so they also have to be the skinniest.” Jack and Tony could both think of a half dozen women off the top of their head who have had serious problems in this area. When Kira goes to the gym she is startled by the number of medical students there who have obsessive worries over their weight, and has thought about how that could affect their compassion for patients. “A lot of them are at the gym and they're weighing themselves, and they weigh nothing, they're skeletons! It really is a sad comment on who's going into medicine, and how they'll deal with patients, and their acceptance of other

people as normal variants of what the healthy body should be.”

Jack estimated the percentage of medical students with some sort of eating disorder at 100%, and those with anorexia at 20-30%. A study done in 1985 revealed 15% of female medical students had a history of bulimia or anorexia which met the medical criteria (Herzog1985), and I was unable to find a more recent study to compare this, and Jack’s estimate, to. The psychological profile of a medical student, Jack thinks, is remarkably similar to an anorexic. The stereotype of an anorexic is of a controlling, over-achiever, perfectionist who is obsessed with performance and always trying to impress, please, and do things for other people. He talked of his experiences working with anorexic patients:

One of the girls I worked with, left an everlasting impression on me, another anorexic on our floor, she would always say ‘she’s so much skinnier than me,’ and it was almost a competition, she had to be the skinniest, and she had to be the ‘best’ at it. And they’re tremendously controlling, tremendously manipulative, and uh, when you think of medical students they’re controlling every aspect of their life, they’re..they’re studying *all the time*.

There is a moral component to this disease as well. “The anorexic avoids the shameful world of eating, while simultaneously achieving personal power and a sense of moral superiority through the emaciated body. Their attempts at disembodiment through negation become the symbol of their moral empowerment” (Turner 1990:163). Jack finds *anorexia nervosa* the scariest disorder of his work. When I asked why, he replied “because it’s a social disease, that takes on a physical manifestation” and explained to me how it starts off as a distortion of body-image and results in a physical disease with chemical disorders in the brain. Much has been written on this disease in psychological texts, and perhaps more should be written from an anthropological view, given its possible cultural roots. There is also a need for updated statistics on the percentage of medical students with anorexia or bulimia. This way, if the diseases were on the rise among the population, medical schools could address the problem before these young women (and men) became doctors and were in a position to influence the body-image of others, as well as for their own health and well-being.

6. Mythology and the Media

The greatest impediment to a person's taking full part in his society are not his physical flaws, but rather the tissue of myths, fears, and misunderstandings that society attaches to them. To understand why this is so, it is necessary to consider some of the central themes of American culture, especially our attitudes toward the body. The body is so important in American symbolism that most of us, including anthropologists, do not even realize that its care and nurture have changed from practicality to fetishism. (Murphy 1990:113)

In 1965 Susan Postal examined the folk tales of two different cultures (Kwakiutl and Hopi) for insight of their attitudes towards body boundaries. "The method is essentially that of content analysis of texts - folk tales, myths and autobiographies - which aims at identifying those recurrent 'themes' or 'motifs' revealing attitudes towards body (or self) boundaries" (1965 in Polhemus 1978:123). She links these boundaries with ideas of safety and protection. The Kwakiutl themes include attitudes towards clothing and adornment, bathing, health and well being, which serve as additional 'surface barriers' of protection, and identity. The surface boundaries are also reinforced in tales of control over incorporation (such as in disapproval of gluttony or digestive inabilities), and self-extension (such as flying, being able to be noticed) proving mastery over self-image. The Hopi, in contrast, were more focussed on inner-body motifs, such as good hearts, control, and skill as evidenced in feats of running; and that of self-disclosure thus revealing the inner strength. Similar analyses of orally transmitted themes can be done in the current Montreal culture of the young, listening for recurrent motifs.

I am very interested in the notion of boundaries. Essentially, my work looks at the interstices between a culture's myth and attitudes towards bodily boundaries, margins, and how that plays on presentation and identity. The surface of the body is where the individual self and social self meet, reinforce each other, and perhaps battle.

What are our unspoken corporal beliefs, what in our culture do we use as tools for reflecting our image back to us? One of my questions towards the end of the interview was: "Are there cultural values that you would say influence how you think of yourself and your body? If yes, how are these values communicated? Do you feel that there are common 'myths' concerning the body?" These are not easy questions to answer, and often we discussed the idea of cultural beliefs and myths before they would answer. They had to think carefully when asked specifically for examples of myths in our culture - often they could come up with some reply, but not always. However, throughout their interviews I found other references to

prevailing cultural ideas and beliefs that were what I was hoping to obtain. I was not using the term 'myth' in a rigorously anthropological manner such as regarding creation stories, but in more of a lay person's understanding of unfounded beliefs. I later realized that my purposes might be better served by the term 'discourse,' rather than myth, owing to my rather amorphous way of defining myth, which is more akin to the French *recits*. When my informants struggled with the question I talked about how there could be certain tenets within our community that people adhere to, even though there may be no factual basis to these cultural assumptions, or lore, if you will. Ideas and ideals seemingly originating from thin air. The transmitters for these inexplicit 'moralities' were cited as being from others, from advertising media, family, or wherever else came to mind. In the end, all of my informants save one were easily able to answer in the spirit of the question, and many gave cogent and astute readings of values.

I then asked questions about how the media affects them. I see media as a conduit of myth, one of the facets of how a culture communicates within itself - reinforcing ideals, offering role models, exemplifying a norm. I have had to be careful in my interviews not to let my biases about media influence people's answers. Oddly, many will talk about how influential media is, but for others, or how they see others, but it doesn't seem to have as deep a hold on how they see and portray themselves. Most prefer to believe they are not directly influenced, albeit assume they must be somehow.

One complexity I have run into is the paradox of influencing factors on the individual's body. When I ask directly what influences them I am most likely to hear about the roles that their friends and family have played in their lives, as seen above. However 'the media' (by which I refer to the fashion industry, movies, advertisements, television, magazines, etc.) is often cited as perpetuating myths to do with the body, such as promoting thin fragility to women and strength and machismo to men. When I ask about the role media plays in their lives concerning the choices they make, I am told that it is a huge factor in how they see and present themselves, but in an all pervasive and indefinable way - 'the media' is cited as the grand influence for us all. But I suspect none of my informants, who strive for originality, would like the thought of being so unoriginal as this: "The mirroring body finds itself to be predictable as it reflects that which is around it. The medium of the mirroring body is consumption; based on consumption, the body becomes as predictable as the objects made available for it" (Frank 1991:61).

But the media would not exist without people to endorse it - be it advertisements that must render a product appealing, or a situation comedy that must appeal to us for it to continue to run. People create media messages for other people. It is a direct creation, after all, not some robot that has run amok and now taken us over. So does it perpetuate an out-of-date value system, or that of a dominant culture, over another? Or does it try to keep up with our desires, our wishes to see ourselves reflected, and contemporary ideas - to wit, the increasing use of visible minorities. Do magazines extolling the latest fashion intelligently debate its virtues or follies, or just blindly follow, or worse, insidiously appear to be critical while lulling us into a false unwinnable debate?

The media is accused of having a strong hold on our collective cultural psyche like a Foucauldian controlling social force. But it is more accurate to say that we control the media and it is effective because we have designed it to appeal to, and reinforce, our cultural values - a tool for us rather than a dictator of taste and values. When the media is blamed for our poor body images are we shooting the messenger? Is it that advertising "helped to create a world in which individuals are made to become emotionally vulnerable, constantly monitoring themselves for bodily imperfections which could no longer be regarded as natural" (Featherstone 1991:175)? Yet ultimately, the success of media relies on its ability to tap into the public's fantasies of their own body image.

As a woman, I am reasonably aware of what messages mass media directs at women in general, (although I wanted to know how other women interpret these), so I was especially curious as to how men would answer my questions concerning the media and cultural values. Not to my surprise, receding hairlines were fretted over, but to my surprise, body hair was too. As cited earlier two men would happily elect for body electrolysis.

My informants have shown that they are not just simply duped into taking media at its word, but that they are often selective, aware of its manipulative purpose, and even sometimes use media as an outlet for escapist fantasies. They don't take magazines at face value, and are knowledgeable about technical remodelling of images and discern them from reality. They are intelligent consumers and the allure of escapism both attracts and repels them.

What the media does is sell a fantasy, an illusion of easy control, and people are aware of that, yet still tempted. Perhaps it is a willing temptation, a let-yourself-get-caught-up-in-it, swooning sort of a temporary madness, a momentary escapist belief - 'hmm, my life would be

ideal if my lipstick never smudged' or, 'if I wear the right jeans the perfect mate will be mine.' I think a certain comfort is offered by the escapism of advertising and television. And so the act of escapism itself becomes a commodity. As editor Poster paraphrases Baudrillard's stand on consumer consumption:

What are now produced are desires which are signs, not material objects....The commodity is less a real thing than it is a sign of itself, because it is the sign we desire....Consumer objects are like hysterical symptoms; they are best understood not as a response to a specific need or problem but as a network of floating signifiers that are inexhaustible in their ability to incite desire. (Frank 1991:64)

If a piece of media is too threatening to our self-image or sense of stability it would be shunted aside in favour of more pleasing images. There are exceptions to this, of course, such as the much lauded and controversial Benetton ads which graphically depict human suffering.

When media is persistent in offering images that my informants feel excluded from or sensitive about, this is when they rail against its injustices with varying degrees of articulation, suspicious that it plays a big part in shaping our opinions and lives. But no matter how pervasive its influence may be, personal experiences were poignantly cited as leaving the larger impression. Brian, the most media-aware and popular culture literate of my informants, was still probably more influenced by a childhood car accident which left him wearing a dental head-gear/neck-brace for two years during which he was deemed ugly and relentlessly teased ("Brian-Bumper cars"), than by advertising.

Media Cited

The forms of media that came up most often in the informants associations were fairly varied, and yet surprisingly consistent. Anyone interested in speculating on clothing companies should invest in The Gap or Calvin Klein, as they are at the fore of people's minds. The informants mentioned billboards, ads on the sides of buses, movies, T.V. shows, magazines, current music culture, the nebulous fashion industry, sometimes specific models or T.V./movie stars, and one reference each to Barbie dolls and newspapers. Some of these were mentioned in a positive light, like Joanne saying how she likes The Gap brand of clothing because of how it fits all sorts of body types, and how she tries to buy magazines like *Shape* that inspire her to be fit in a healthy manner. She also had an awareness of the historicity of popular images and

said how she likes to go to art galleries and see the fuller female figures portrayed that were once considered sexy and beautiful.

When people talked about media that influenced them or others, often what was obliquely referred to was how they were influenced by others' *reactions* (real or imagined) to media. Such as Joanne watching men's reactions to glossy images of sleek women, or Amy looking for a ring that she saw a woman wear who *looked* like she read fashion magazines. Those who mentioned musical culture referred to how the audiences of certain types of music had a certain style. For instance when Colleen pierced her belly button before a Tori Amos concert she wasn't doing it to personally impress Tori Amos, but the others who came to hear her. Tony was the most musically aware of my informants, and drew a parallel between his musical taste and his style of clothing.

Occasionally specific people in the media would get named, such as T.V./movie stars (Courtney Cox, Robert Redford), models (Antonio Sabato Jr., Claudia Schiffer), but more often generic ideals such as women fashion models, or male Chippendale strippers, or 'sexiest man in America' polls. These were all mentioned (by both men and women) as nearly unreal people and annoying ideals to which they feel they are being measured up against. Sometimes shows or movies would be cited as positive examples, such as the T.V. program *Friends* for fun clothing styles, or on a less superficial level, the movie *El Postino* was mentioned by Luke as giving a wonderful example of friendship, people respecting and being comfortable around each other.

Beth was a nice example of someone who both used the media and felt suspicious of it. Specifically, she found herself drawn to the fashion advertisements that portrayed women as drugged-out and helpless, in what has been called the "heroin-chic" look. She is intrigued by them and feels guilty about it: "A part of me would love to escape and like to escape into that world of just like, 'okay, everybody take care of me, now, everybody!'" and that it's "appealing to be kind of *weak*, or looked after or something. I hate to admit something like that!! 'Cause it goes against everything I kind of stand for and believe in!" This escapism is an important part of advertising and media in general (more people go to movies to escape the everyday than to enrich it). More generally, she feels "it *obviously* puts incredible pressure, y'know, whether you recognize it or not, it's an unfair image of women." She felt this pressure most personally when she was going out with a boyfriend of many years, "he has a very rigid, like, type. It's very

specific, y’know, and he likes Baywatch!!” Now, she points out that her ex-boyfriend isn’t like that *because* of media, but that the added cultural reinforcement of shows like Baywatch (a T.V. program about scantily clad lifeguards) don’t make her feel more kindly towards the media. She feels not influenced by media directly, but perhaps rather by those who she perceives as influenced by media. Her ex-boyfriend was highly critical of those who were not conventionally beautiful, which she feels was made acceptable by media reinforcement.

Colleen felt that all media affects everybody, whether they know it or not, and not only the consumers but those in the business. She pointed out that the more successful a star, the more weight they would lose in order to advance their career, and cited the actresses Courtney Cox and Sandra Bullock. Minnie Driver is another who comes to mind, as does Alicia Silverstone, a young actress who did the unthinkable - she *gained* weight (still well within a normal range) and received much criticism for it. Colleen was one of the ones who railed against how women in magazines are “airbrushed, all stick thin,...[you] rarely see the cellulite,” but after the interview we were talking about ballet and she pulled out a book of famous dancers whom she clearly wished to emulate for their grace, and also their completely smooth, fatless body lines.

Kira found that the media puts pressure on women for being slim, which despite her better judgement, and what she advises as a peer counsellor, she “...buys into it hook, line, and sinker.” As she says, “Here I am, ‘oh shoot,’ my day’s ruined because I’m three pounds heavier than I was last week!! Nobody else is going to notice!” Even though she doesn’t watch T.V., rarely goes to the movies, and would like to think of herself as impervious to the media, she still bemoans “...but I know it’s not true.” She sees evidence of people buying into this every time she goes to the gym, and also struggles with it herself. A friend of hers came to mind, one who constantly buys fashion magazines:

She really doesn’t have a conception of what she looks like, what her body is like....she kind of lives in her head, and she doesn’t want to deal with that part because I think she’s really displeased with it on a fundamental level, and I think that probably comes from reading *Cosmo* and thinking ‘I can’t have a, whatever-it-is, body mass index of 18,’ y’know. No normal physiological human being can!

Joanne describes the general media as putting forth this relentless image of women which is impossible for the vast majority to obtain. She finds this ideal deep in the American

psyche, as seen in fourth-grade girls on diets. Looks are what women are valued for, and not their intellectual and emotional contributions. This is also passed on orally independent of mass media. “Women can be very critical of other women, that way. Can really be sort of almost more critical than *men* can be sometimes about other women, the way they look, sort of push them even further towards ideals.”

I think a lot of it is images, just physical images, billboards, T.V., magazines... I think in terms of watching guys reactions to those images, uh.. ‘uh! look at her what a babe, *Sports Illustrated* coming out,’ y’know, guys flocking to the newsstands to buy it also secondarily emphasizes the importance of these images. I think that’s pretty much the biggest way.

Again, it’s not the media directly, but what it reinforces amongst others who may be judging her.

But despite these negative feelings, Joanne also chooses the media that she consumes, and she prefers to buy magazines such as *Shape*, which motivate her to work out because of the healthy images they show. Those magazines are

...more positive and they also stimulate me more to go work out. They’ve got good recipes in them, I like the recipes, um, especially because they take normal recipes and slim them down...they’ve got good exercises in them, I find it’s a much more positive way to... - you can see it’s much more attainable to look at the women. For the most part, they also have some very slim women in there. But to look at the women in there, you can admire them for their athletic qualities as well as their slimness.

There is a general idea that mass media is a bad, or at least rigidly normalizing, influence. Yet people use it for their own devices in helpful manners when it comes to the personal examples.

One of the more clearly articulated thoughts as to how media affects the individual was said by Andrea:

The media definitely has an impact on me, the same way that being in a room of beautiful women has an impact on me. Just that sort of comparison thing. And choosing, noticing things that people are doing that I think looks good, and also not wanting to do what every single person on T.V. is doing.

In a way, something like television broadens our community. Not only can we compare ourselves with our neighbours, but also with the popular sit-com stars. Perhaps this can be positive, such as when Joanne is inspired to work out when she sees fit, healthy women, or when it impels Andrea to define herself as unique from the mass-produced crowds. Or it can have a negative effect, as with Andrea, who feels most insecure and self-critical when she is

around beautiful women (particularly if they are ex-girlfriends of her boyfriend). The media can serve as an intensified real-life experience.

For Brian, who believes the media influences him highly and subtly, he is conscious of his overall milieu, and notes what all those around him wear. This includes television and advertising, and he freely admits that his “look” of jeans, T-shirt, boots, and black jacket is a stylized version of what he sees. He hasn’t figured out the “who and why” exactly of his media influences, but says there is enough “floating around” to make him recognize what is “good” and deemed attractive.

Interestingly enough, Neal feels that the media affects his perception of others more than of himself. He won’t compare himself to images of attractive men, much as when he sees a handsome man, he just appreciates him, rather than feel envious. But “with women definitely I’m a total slave to the beauty image/generated media image of the woman, ‘cause, well I’m not a *total* slave, but I very easily, I buy into it. I like it. It makes me aroused, it makes me erotically aroused... it fires that beauty faculty.” In part because of his own willingness to compare women thus, he surmises that the media bothers women more than men, and that it is more “insidious” and “frustrating.” “That me, who’s a pretty well-educated guy, who has...quite an open mind, cannot shake it. I can’t shake it!..[but] I can’t say I’ve really tried.”

Luke also feels that women fare worse than men when it comes to comparisons against the media. Although his own insecurities are piqued occasionally by “not fitting the image of the ‘Guess Jeans’ guy,” he was intimate with his ex-girlfriend’s struggles with perfection. He does admit to not knowing, however, if this is representative of women, and hopes that it isn’t. For him, the problem lies in how the amount of images we’re exposed to daily with movies, posters, television, etc., is so big that it creates an exclusionary norm. The variety of human shapes and figures is outnumbered by the sheer magnitude of the offered stereotype, and so we measure ourselves against an artificial norm. He admitted to going through a period of watching pornography, and questioned its representation of human experience by thinking to himself, “so unless a woman is *screaming*, then she can’t be having a good time. What? Totally ridiculous!” He has a friend who still consumes a lot of pornography, and Luke believes he has a twisted sense of sexuality because of it. His friend still measures sexual experience in terms of how closely it fits the pornographic ideal and actions. It is the same problem recurring because of an abundance of one-dimensional images to the exclusion of a varied reality.

But note that for Luke, there is a schism between what he believes others experience, and his own experience: “my values regarding my body-image come very much from the home. I mean family values or whatever.”

Where the media may have the most influence is upon those who didn't have as strong a family influence as they could have. Without the community and kinship support that some societies enjoy, such as extended family and far-reaching kinship ties, or a close-knit community network, a break in the nuclear family can leave young people unsure of where to turn for advice. North American society tends towards fractured families and literal and figurative distances between relatives (I suspect this is in transition and a variety of cultural coping mechanisms will eventually sprout where others wither). When the family is deficient, the young person has to turn to other cultural resources to fill in the gaps. Mass media, T.V. shows, music or literature can fill this vacuum as the handiest resource to turn to for guidance in these situations. The media with the most currency could step in first, to the detriment of subtler, more helpful ones, so it is the brashest, loudest of them that becomes the substitute. In a way, the media fills a role as a social ‘safety net’ when other social nets fail, which could explain why we encourage its existence, while criticizing it. If we worry about the effect the media has on young mouldable minds, it is perhaps because as a society we are all too willing to let it mould the minds when we couldn't be bothered. Of course this is still a lesser influence than the realm of real interaction - one's parents and peers - but it could serve to reinforce culturally common notions without a balanced alternate that a stable home life provides. Many of the informants, such as Luke and Neal, seem very aware of the media's influence in the grand scheme, but don't seem too adversely affected by it. They just don't heed it as seriously as those who weren't in strong family backgrounds.

Jack simply feels that “nobody's immune” when it comes to the Orwellian media influence. His scathing, politically correct condemnation of the media is proportionate to how much he embraced its images as a teenager. “I was the epitome of media affected body image.” I think Jack felt particularly influenced by media's images because of his intense insecurity about how little he fit the teenage ideal due to his acne.

When in his teens, Jack was unhappy and in a difficult family situation. His parents were divorced, his siblings were split up between the two households, and he admits to being heavily influenced by images perpetuated by mass media. In the pre-interview with Amy, it was very

clear to her that she turned to media as an example of how to behave in our society when her parents were inadequate role models.

My parents went through an incredibly difficult, horrible divorce. I was very close with my father and our relationship essentially dissolved, and um, ah, I had a very weird relationship with my mother. Um, and I was very sort of confused about anything and I never got any guidance as oppose--with respect to 'well this is how a 'lady' behaves,' this is what sexual relationships are about, never had any of that. So I was very guided by T.V. and T.V. images, I mean to a *extreme* degree. And um, perception and other peoples' perception of me were enormously..important. Enormously important. And I needed a lot of that, I was very, extremely social in those days, extremely social. I'd know everyone in the school..any..just...it was an entirely different...

As mentioned earlier, Amy's sense of worth was literally measured by the expense of the clothes she wore upon leaving the house. O'Neill's words from when he was discussing the consumer body may be apt here: "In fact, there is reason to believe that *we need more than ever to reinvent the family* as a responsible unit of action regarding the welfare of its members in matters of education, consumption, and general health" (1985:117).

Tony supposes that he is influenced by the media in that he has strict ideas of what kinds of clothes look 'right' on certain people, but in terms of what he finds beautiful, "it's a very personal thing," and not to be presumed that the media influences such questions of taste. But he does consider how the media imposes an added importance to the body image, and how people react:

It's just become, with people going to the gym and stuff, younger and younger population... There's like 14 year old kids going to gyms now, where 30 year old men would, and everyone in between. And, uh, they're pushed on getting steroids, pushed on other stuff, yeah, it's like, not even good steroids. It's like with women you have eating disorders, with men you do too, but not to such as great extent, but there's this whole other area of abuse which people don't realize. But again, it's just to achieve this ideal of fitness.

Ethan found himself unable to consider any specifics about the media or general cultural images as being overarchingly influential. He just finds himself puzzled about how perfectly intelligent and attractive women can be so insecure about their bodies, even when they claim to know *why*. Assuming it could be the pervasiveness of media over years, he also wonders at how since there are *positive* role models depicted as well, why don't they have the same impact?

The performers seemed to be more aware of the impact of image upon observers (as Luke is with a potential date), perhaps because they are most often exposed to the prejudices

of media generated representations. And working in the media market herself as an actor in both theatre and film, Elsa is very aware of the peddling of images to a large audience. "...and myths about also what you find attractive.... what a type is, I can't understand that. It's a total myth, y'know. 'I only go for that 'type' of person' or 'we need this *type* of person for this photo shoot' or 'you can't do this because you're the wrong *type*.'"

Myths and Media in Discourse

Elsa was the first one I interviewed to put succinctly that there is a "myth that every body could look like any body." If only one just worked hard enough, the ideal body could be theirs. This idea was echoed by many informants. But the problem with this idealism is, as Elsa says, "not everybody, every *body*, can look like any *body*. Everyone has their own shape, y'know, and if you're only healthy, if you're only in style, or if you're only like this, you could look like a model, you could look like this if you were a 'real' woman....there are just so many myths surrounding females." Elsa feels acutely that there is a gender bias in the media.

Neal was wonderfully able to talk about myths in our society, unquantifiable beliefs. He inadvertently brought up one when he talked about the dangers of long hair leading to reduced hair, and even though he has long curls he was for a while prejudiced against other like-maned men, thinking to himself, "what are they trying to prove?"

He doesn't feel personally affected by cultural beliefs, other than he chooses not to wear a skirt, and to dress nicely for interviews, but suspects that if he were overweight or had blemishes and scars he might be more affected. In other words, if he were less acceptable to the cultural norm, he would feel the pressure even more. He does note them in general. For instance, how we see the aging body as no longer functional and thus considered not beautiful, how bodies that are clean are considered attractive, and if perfumed and well groomed, even more so. He plays up to this when he shaves so as not to look bedraggled in front of his teachers, so as to appear more competent and calm. He wants to appear as a respectable contrary to the stereotype. "Artists and academics are potentially professions of comment and criticism on society: they display a carefully modulated shagginess according to the responsibilities they carry" (Douglas 1970:102). The further we distance our self from our natural unwashed and shaggy state the more able and culturally acceptable we become.

He was also aware of the myth of "If you do 'x,' 'y' will happen." Certain actions are

supposed to lead to inevitable results, like if you diet, you will get thin in all the right places. He points out certain 'shoulds,' such as men should be athletic, women, slim, and that attractiveness is related to function. For instance, a skinny body is a healthy one, a fat or old or ugly body an unhealthy one, and hence less useful. He feels that there aren't myths so much as manipulations and fantasies that we want to believe. Like if we eat certain foods our bodies will perform better, and most blatantly in advertising, where if we drink a particular beer we will become more sexually appealing - no one really believes beer will make them more attractive.

Neal is not particularly ruffled by the idea that a beautiful person is a better person, and he has a nice historical perspective. "A beautiful body is a better body is the myth, and beautiful bodies have been different through out the ages. I'm sure people felt the same way 500 years ago, it's just they were different bodies." As soon as people developed the faculty of judgement, and could establish a sense of beauty, they exercised it. This comes from the "first humans with enough brain power to establish a sense of beauty for themselves, what meant beauty. So as soon as they saw that, as soon as they found that faculty in them they would make judgements on who was around." According to Neal, really very little has changed. "I don't think it's any different today than it ever was, I just think it's, it's more spectacular! The generation of the myth is more spectacular because it's in our faces so much with mass media and all that. But it's no different. What they're playing on is the same thing that we've had for centuries, hundreds, thousands of years."

But the advent of technology has changed our perspectives, along with the methods of circulation of values, although I would agree with Neal that our basic need to impose a hierarchy and ascribe values has remained stable. The standards of beauty may have changed somewhat, but not so the need to find certain objects or people beautiful. Judgement is a basic requirement of culture. However, our society is more engaged with the visual sense than before, thanks to advances in technology. According to Glassner, people used to trust most what they heard or touched until the advent of the printing press made the sense of sight central to people's lives. "As people grew more sight-conscious, they became more concerned with how they themselves looked, and popular treatises were written about how to dress and carry oneself"(1988:27). And then in the mid 1800s the photographic negative came into use, and the mass production of photographs began, "and pictures of the powerful, beautiful, or famous began to serve as models for how to look and behave" (ibid.:27).

By the 1920s, pictures had altered the way in which people looked at that body. The body in a photograph is immediate, posed, frozen, unlike the live body with its constantly changing profile. Under the influence of photography, the instantaneous impression was born, exemplified in the changing fashions of the period (ibid.:28).

But there is a world of difference between the meanings of the visual instruction required to read, and that acuity which is needed and encouraged for looking at photographs. Furthermore, the rise of photographic images would have supplanted the more interpretive portraiture as true representations of people.

As well, Schwartz pointed out that the increased availability of eyeglasses around the turn of the century contributed to the hierarchy of the visual. This “meant that the visual blur with which millions of Americans had lived was no longer acceptable” and the sale of eyeglasses increased thirty-fold between 1880 and 1929 (Schwartz 1986:163). Since our sight was no longer blurry, our silhouettes could no longer afford to be, either. And so visually fluid media, such as television and film, gives us yet a further example of how to walk and move through space. I wonder if styles of diction changed with the introduction of the phonograph and ‘talkies’?

Brian mentioned the idea of weight and size as being important in gauging one’s worth as a myth. He has met plenty of women who were either larger or smaller than the ideal who were more connected with their sexuality than some who were ‘ideal.’ He, too, rails against the common bodily doctrine.

I think it’s a huge myth that if I end up looking like Remington Steele, my life is made. My life isn’t made. Although there have been a few studies where if you’re better looking you have a better life and that might be true, on the personal level I just don’t find that attractive. So the whole size thing is big.

He is also envious of how women are allowed more variety in exhibiting their sexual nature, and feels men are limited to just one, although I mentioned to him that it just may seem that way from his perspective.

Luke dislikes how the promotion of exercise is focussed on the aesthetic benefits rather than the health ones, and how this then creates the need for the reassurance that if you work out you will attain a certain paragon of beauty. There are no variations offered for ideals of beauty, but indeed the popular images increasingly resemble one another. We are told “if you work out you *will* develop this body.” Luke declares this media-generated ideal as “not true, people are

built differently!”

But I also think if you watch T.V., if you watch sitcoms, or whatever, uh, there’s definitely this idea if you don’t look a certain way and you’re not working out all the time..um..then you’re not.. not a good person, or whatever. And if you don’t look like the people on the T.V. when you’re doing it, then it’s not worth it, or something. What makes me uncomfortable is the idea that the health benefits of working out are separated from the... aesthetic ones, y’know what I mean? So if you don’t *look* good when you’re working out, then it’s not worth it.

At the same time all of this talk of makes him thoughtful: “it’s a frightening thing to think that *maybe* there is such a thing as ideal beauty. That people are constantly denying because so few people meet it,” and he speculates on the possibility of an ideal, gender-neutral, beauty. He finds the make-up he wears for performances makes him more attractive, yet feminine. He notices that “*beautiful* women look very similar to *beautiful* men....If you take a beautiful man for instance, on a soap opera, and you take away his jaw and you slim him down a bit, he would be a beautiful woman. *Same* fine features, it’s the same width between the eyes, it’s the same sense of proportion!” Luke wonders if there is “some sense of proportion, some ideal that really does exist which is more beautiful than something else.”

As a contrast, Tony happily admits to working out for aesthetic reasons, “it’s not so I can have a strong heart, it’s so I can look good!” He mostly talked about ideals of beauty in culture which he associates with happiness. For instance when confronted with the ideal male body he finds himself thinking, “if I looked like that, I’d be happy.”

Doing something for health *or* beauty constitutes a dilemma for some of my informants. It is as if we work out only for one reason or the other, and the best, morally correct, reason is because it makes us feel better, healthier, etc. A bit of guilt creeps in when an action is performed solely to make us beautiful. Beth feels the pull “sometimes when I do certain things I wonder if it’s an ‘appearance’ thing or just because I like the feel of it...because, y’know, it must be both.” She has two women friends, one of whom is gay, who are very critical of women who look after themselves to look nice. Apparently they both have short hair and a pierced nose. Their aesthetic choices indicate a double standard, because short hair, at least, needs to be maintained regularly to keep it so. Beth wonders if the impulse to look good comes from men around her, or herself. “Because it starts to feel like your own needs. I have no problem with feeling, like making yourself look beautiful, or want to look nice, or want to feel

nice. I think men *and* women should be able to do that if they want to and still be themselves and be natural.” Artifice is fine, as long as it’s true to the self.

Elsa feels even more of a threat from working to look good, because as previously noted, she is “very, very conscious of rape,” and won’t wear fitted or revealing clothes for fear of inciting unwanted gestures. She likes to think that a lot of women are similarly worried and “dress down” so as to be not appealing and hence provoke harm. Considering that rape rarely occurs under these circumstances (a woman is much more likely to be raped by someone she knows), I was a little surprised at the force of Elsa’s feelings. This was reminiscent of the sort of puritanism which is designed to keep women in their place, rather than for safety’s sake. Threat towards women is also inherent in her disgust at the played-up youth of the models in fashion advertising, over “pictures of little 13 year old girls...it’s sick...girls who haven’t even discovered sexuality yet are like...y’know poster models that men [masturbate to]” and “little school girl outfits, babydoll shirts...It’s sick!” Her vehemence towards the media mongers seems to be only paralleled by that of her fears.

Again, even though Elsa seemed to find family and friends her biggest influence, she was very critical of the control of the fashion world, who she accuses of choreographing people’s tastes. “Every era they just pick and choose what’s attractive this time. There’s no basis in anything real at all. It has nothing to do with who people are, or how they feel about themselves, or how attractive they are.” She feels she meets attractive people all the time who are dismissed by others because they don’t fit the media’s beauty ideal. Again, it is perceived that others are much more influenced than she is, a common thread in a number of responses.

Jack summarizes the cultural discourse as one of over-consumption. We are encouraged to indulge in great amounts of food, drink, and by extension, drugs, (all in part to alleviate boredom) which leads to all sorts of social problems. He doesn’t “think there’s a person in our society that’s immune to this poor relationship with food that people have in general.” We are inspired by ideals of material possessions and the epitome of the “American dream, where it’s very important to go to elementary school, go to high school, go to university, get a good degree, good job, start a family, raise kids, retire in Florida, live happily-ever-after with a whole bunch of things that we don’t really use.” He also noted the sexual inequality of cultural values, citing that whilst it is ‘cool’ for a young man to have a lot of sexual partners, a teenage woman would be deemed ‘sleazy’ for the same actions. He feels that what he finds attractive in women

is influenced by the general media, he likes their thinness, as opposed to the plumper ideal espoused by the Renaissance era. The cultural ideal for men is also fit, with well-defined muscles, hairless, and Latin-looking, and authority dresses in a smart suit. For him, one of the worst things about media is how it gives an edict on how to live, and discourages people from thinking for themselves, listening to their intuition, or heeding their spiritual side. But he agrees that there is an overlay of influences in one's life, including how one was raised, and the values communicated in the household.

Ethan had more to say about general ideas of sex in the culture, talking at length about how men snap into an active, 'take charge' mode when uncomfortable during sex, whereas women fall into a passive role. He finds men have a very visual sexual response, and that women have a more relaxed attitude about sex and are unlikely to "rush it along" if uncomfortable, something he attributes to men. I'm not sure if this is applicable as a cultural generalization as it seems to be such a specific personal experience. But he does honestly talk about his previous (to medical school) apprehension of women's genitals. Their extreme mysteriousness unnerved him, which he attributes to cultural, societal, and mythological beliefs as well as personal ones. He also sees women, and gay men, as having greater choice in personal stylistic expression than straight, professional men. Nonetheless, he contradicts himself by noting how women are expected to look "proper" as soon as they leave the house - he knows very few women who will allow themselves to appear at all dishevelled in public.

7. Boundaries of the Body - The Surface and the Soul

Unfortunately, due to space and scope limitations, I am unable to put forth an in-depth analysis and exposure of my findings on repulsion and fascination. I will, however briefly expound on some of what I heard.

People definitely saw a correlation between the surface of the body and the person's character, which would come up throughout the interviews. When Brian talked about the temptation of plastic surgery he still felt that "the inner self will dictate the outer self in the end...Ultimately I feel that when the inner self is feeling more content and contained and whatever else the outer self will follow suit, by far." Informants took elements of someone's appearance as an indication as to what kind of person they were, for better or for worse. For instance, obesity was seen as a representation of a lack of control, and an interesting tattoo indicated an interesting person. Their personal fears and aspirations reflected traits they wished to either avoid or emulate.

Repulsion, the Grotesque, and Fears

The question "what grosses you out?" (although a bit unorthodox) was asked in order to elicit responses concerning transgressions of bodily boundaries, discipline, and physical control. My question on fears brought forth similar responses so I will deal with them concurrently.

Not surprisingly, what people found most unattractive tended to be what they either feared becoming, or once were. For example, Jack can't stand people who are obsessed with their appearance, just as he was during his painful teenage years. "People that are overly obsessed, people that don't take care of themselves *at all*, or somebody that is obsessive and is exercising three times a day...I shouldn't say that - but y'know, absolutely, always looking at themselves, making sure their hair is perfect, that's, for me that's a little much." Jack was one informant who openly talked about how he felt that he himself was grotesque as a teenager. He felt so far beyond the comfortable norm, due to his serious acne problem, that he was constantly trying to get reassurance that he wasn't grotesque.

I was never single, and I would always have deep emotional relationships, tremendously enthralling relationships and uh...very bumpy rides because I was always pulling people close and saying, 'I need to be reassured that I'm not this grotesque person,' then push them away because I felt so grotesque I didn't want to see them.

Amy also finds those who are obsessed with their looks to be repellant, along with those who aren't at all concerned with looking after themselves. And like Jack, she felt grotesque as a teenager, and all of her obsessing with her looks was solely an effort to not slide deeper into being something even more grotesque. Yet unlike Jack, she had no visible traits that would have marked her as outside of an attractive norm. On the contrary, she is lovely looking now, and I have no doubt she was when younger, too. Her brother had a rowing machine (an 'erg') in the basement of their house, and she would make frantic use of it.

I used to erg until I simply could no longer move, and then would fall off the erg, and pull myself off up the stairs [laughs] to the first floor bathroom, and y'know, just kind of lie over the brim of the toilet seat, y'know, yeah and this was an *accomplishment*. This was good, I was, now, that was fine, now I could go to sleep. But if I didn't do that before I went to sleep every night, I was y'know, truly grotesque, and I would wake up in the morning far more grotesque than I was the evening before. Y'know, [laughing] it was just, um, so there was a never a feeling of accomplishment, there was, I was just pushing away a degree of grotesqueness, I was just escaping that.

Jack tried to turn to others for reinforcement that he was not grotesque, where Amy tried to achieve that by her own actions, both with limited success. It is noteworthy that these were the two informants who mentioned the most upheaval in the family and consequently turned to the media ideal for guidance.

Excess in either direction from an established norm is disliked, both physically, and in terms of how this reflects a transgression of control (either as a lack or as an obsession). Allison James, who has researched children and youths, has shown how those within all age groups, up until adolescence, strive for conformity or the perceived norm. Obvious difference is recognized and frowned upon.

[The] complaints adolescents make about their own bodies are always through reference to excess: too tall, too short, too fat, too thin. Bodies must not deviate from a median upon which they themselves have tacitly agreed. Those who are perceived to differ too much from this symbolic mean are ruthlessly identified and named... (James 1986: 162)

Many people said that others who were too fat or too thin bothered them (although fewer women mentioned too thin as something that grosses them out). Ethan, Neal, Jack, and Brian all said that they found women who were too skinny to be very unattractive (and I hope they were not just being sensitive to the interviewer's feelings). The medical students who worked with anorexia found it understandably disturbing, reacting to the extremity of the anorexics'

delusions and beliefs.

One account of an anorexic illustrates how they can have an extreme need to define their margins:

We prefer ourselves this way, boiled down bone, essence....Not reduce, *clarify*. I know exactly what I look like, without hyperbole. Every inch of skin, each muscle, each bone. I see where and how they connect. I can name the tendons and the joints. I finger the cartilage. When I eat, I follow the food as it digests, watching the lump of carrot or rice cake diminish, until finally, elimination. This is what sets us apart....Anorexics differentiate between desire and need. Between want and must. Just to know where I begin and end seems, in this day and age, a remarkable spiritual achievement. (Grant 1995 in *Elle* 10/1995:80)

Luke, we remember, was bothered by his dancer girlfriend's obsession with thinness, yet mentions obesity as a repulsion:

I think when you see excessively obese people...um..I am, 'appalled' is not the right word because that implies some kind of anger or frustration, but I'm disappointed at it, saddened by it because I think it shows, um, uh, externally some problems that are happening internally emotionally. Because I don't think you get *that* obese and *that* out of shape without neglecting your body. Without consciously neglecting to take care of it. That grosses me out. That makes me sad.

Colleen and Joanne were particularly bothered by obesity, although where Colleen had only scorn for those afflicted, Joanne was more compassionate because of how society discriminates against them. As mentioned, she also has a personal fear that when she becomes a doctor and has a healthy income she will develop an unhealthy appetite and lose control:

I'm just going to be surrounded by really good food - and I know it would be very easy for me to lose control and get reallyreallyreally fat. That's another one of my worries. One of these days when I'm going to have a whole excess of money and just be eating at restaurants all the time, goodies around all the time, that I could really just balloon out to huge astounding proportions! And that would be really awful!!

Colleen, on one hand, is revolted by fat kids "stuffing jelly doughnuts in their mouth" which represents to her a lack of discipline. This image sounds too stereotyped to be true, and reminds me of Jack who said he hated seeing people "who don't take care of themselves," as seen in the section on facial hair.

She fears getting fat when old (her mother is overweight), yet admits to having very little will power. "I don't just go on a diet when I feel that way. It's like 'oh, it doesn't matter, have another bag of chips' (laughs)." At the same time she is equally bothered by anorexia,

although she admires control, and finds bigger women appealing: “funnily enough what I strive for myself, which is a thin, fat-free, lithe, muscular body is not what I’m attracted to. I really love a voluptuous woman, y’know, and I think that’s *very* sexy.”

The medical students had a nice range of stories and biases based on their chosen profession and experiences in school. Both Jack and Tony in particular hated it when people abused their bodies, either through drugs, “over consumption,” or lethargy, exhibiting near scorn when talking about it. All of the medical students had gone through some desensitization during their studies, Kira would occasionally feel woozy at the sight of blood, Ethan felt grossed out by mangled hands (he suspects because he values his own as so much as a musician, and has been complimented on them often - ironically he broke his own recently and now has a pin under his skin), Joanne by smelly feet, but they are all much less disturbed by these issues now. Some medical students may be more disturbed by the fact that they are not so easily disturbed anymore. As Kira noted, “it’s pretty shocking, I think, to see a person so exposed. There will be times when I’ll have my hands inside another person’s body in a way that just isn’t natural at all. And there’s something very alarming about that.” Likewise Jack said, “...it just doesn’t seem normal to walk out of a surgery where you’re just like holding somebody’s intestines in your hand and to go eat...and be able to talk about the surgery right afterwards!!! It should bother me but it doesn’t!” And some times they wouldn’t be able to get used to medical things, like Kira is still bothered by the unpleasant smells in the hospital, and Tony is unable to view gynecological procedures calmly as they make him “sick...ill...queasy”:

...it’s just, the miracle of birth is a pretty messy affair, and I’m just like, I’m just there, hands in there, gettin’ the hands on the baby, just like...*smell..and blood..and everything* comes out, like everything, and it’s just all over you! and in front of you and all over the place, and it’s just not that pleasant. I don’t know *how* people go into it. I don’t know how men go into it especially, you spend your whole day there... I’m starting to get used to it, so that’s alright, but the gynaecology stuff... I assisted in like, thoracotomies where they like, cut open a guy’s ribs and take out a *lung*... that I had no problem with it. Then gyne. surgery, god, just in the clinic they do like, larcoscopy, like a microscope/binoculars visualize the cervix and there’s this special instrument they cut out a piece of it..and they really *scoop out a good chunk*, a spoonful, and I was just like ..ohhh, uhhhghgh. They do like, a dilatation and curettage, like, endometriosis, therapeutic abortions, whatever, they take this thing they open up the cervix, and they take this *scraper* and they scrape the inside of the uterus, like *scrkkrkkkkkhhkhk*, and all this goop comes out, and I’m just like..I’m going to be sick!..the simplest little surgery!

Kira said that her experiences in the hospital made her fear “growing old and growing old alone,” and added how she is now more concerned about finances so that, if need be, when old she can create a situation where she has proper care and keeps her dignity intact, which is related to how she worries about losing her faculties: “incontinence is a big fear having seen it in the hospital, that’s really something that’s...it’s really central to our sense of dignity.”

Non-medical students also had fears about their health, Neal is an avowed hypochondriac, and both Beth (who prefers not to talk about it) and Luke worry about cancer (Luke more understandably so as his father was very ill with the disease). Neal even feels very uncomfortable if he’s in a fast car or an aeroplane because he can imagine the damage done to his body all-too-vividly should something go wrong. It’s partly due to the aspect of putting himself in physical danger, being completely out of control over what is occurring that unsettles him.

Amy had worked in a hospital for a year, and as a result says, “I greatly fear many of the things that happen with old age, um, I fear grotesque obesity, I fear, y’know, um, double and triple chins immensely, things like, y’know, you’re overweight and you’re ninety.” In her case exposure and familiarity did not lessen the fears, but served to pique them.

Tattoos and body piercings were generally mentioned in both sections - that which attracts and that which repels. As Luke is bothered by body and facial piercing, yet he likes tattoos a lot, and those with them. Stephanie and Tony (obviously as he sports them) say that if someone has well done tattoos it is a sign that they are probably an interesting person worthy of getting to know. Brian likes tattoos but gets physically uncomfortable and squirms when talking about body piercings, especially of the “fragile nipple,” yet he was not disturbed by a friend’s external metal pin holding his broken arm stable. This may be connected to his revulsion to trachea tubes which bother him because they evoke an “idea of an open sore on the body, being exposed to what’s inside the body.” He’s very sensitive to shaving scenes in movies, too, as he is horrified at the idea of being cut there (but not of bleeding, he distinguishes). Neal is squeamish about piercings, and Jack doesn’t like them, in excess, either. All of the above mentioned *too many* tattoos as a turn-off.

When asked of fears or worries often the women held up one’s parents, directly or indirectly, as a bodily example to be feared. Like Andrea who feared developing her mother’s ‘monstrous bum’ and Elsa who deplored how her mother’s body was aging, as hers will too,

one day. Beth hated that her mom is tempted by plastic surgery, and Kira disliked her stepmother's nose-job. The only man who was close to that conundrum is Jack, who is turned off by excessive use of make-up and worrying over one's body, both of which his mother does. Elsa was the only woman who mentioned her dad (whom she usually identifies with) and how she avoids hairy lovers, because they are too much like her father for comfort's sake.

All of the men mentioned too much make-up as unappealing, and some of the women (Amy felt "intense sadness" for those who felt they needed so much) and although they liked people to be stylish, even if in their own unorthodox manner, being *too* much in vogue was also deemed unattractive, as was too plain for Neal.

Falling out of shape was a fear for all, although each had different standards of fitness. Neal, Jack, and Brian were concerned over hair loss, but not so much over growing older. But for Tony, who also fears hair loss, "getting old's scary!" which reflects how he wants to distance himself from the elderly in his work.

As noted before, Jack cannot stand those who are beyond the bounds of normality, such as those who are dirty, half-shaven, runny-nosed, chain-smoking bar patrons, or punk rockers with four rings through their lips. But he makes a politically correct distinction from those who are dirty in his society, and "kids in Africa" who are dirty from dust, or those who are dirty from working in the fields. Brian (as well as Tony) dislikes those for whom grooming and hygiene are not a priority - the mentally handicapped and people who work with computers were two groups he mentioned, and are those he considers ill-socialized. As an aside, I told him about a friend of mine from the Philippines who has a twenty, or so, year old sister who is mentally handicapped. Because of how this young woman was socialized and taught how to look after herself, when she moved to Canada she was as offended by the lax standards of other mentally handicapped adults as Brian is. He suggested that perhaps that was because they were forgiven for not attaining the cultural norm. For him, grooming suggests being involved socially - those who do not need to interact with people show it through lax clothing and manners. Conversely those who are *too* neat and tidy are also suspicious, which could be why Ethan is grossed out by "people who look like bankers." To many, neglect of upkeep was a sign of ill-socialization. I'm reminded of the Kayapo for whom "to be dirty, and especially to allow traces of meat, blood or other animal substances or food to remain on the skin, is considered not merely slovenly or dirty but actively anti-social" (T. Turner 1980:115).

Bodily traits that are not necessarily dirty, but nonetheless out of place, were mentioned. Elsa is bothered by crooked teeth, hair growing out of ears, and thick necks. Ethan, early in medical school, mentioned birth defects such as extra body parts or missing body parts as disturbing. Andrea was irritated by short upturned noses, evidence of a bad nose-job, very thick, “meaty” lips, or when someone has “really *skinny* limbs and really thick trunks!”

Attraction

What people were attracted to often corresponded with their fears. They feared getting out of shape, and so appreciated it in others. Men talked about what attracts them in women, and some women of men, but of women also. Ethan said he appreciated men’s bodies, but talked more of women.

Three men apologetically talked about their knee-jerk reaction to a stereotypically pretty woman (slim, large breasts, wearing form-fitted clothing). Ethan said that “T and A” was less important to him than as a teenager, now being initially attracted to women for an obvious lively mind, but that when he is insecure or tired “I’ll often stare at women’s breasts, women’s butts and sort of really, um, I dunno, look at them in a kind of in the kind of way I always did when I was a teen! It’s like a reflex, I knew even when I was teen it exhausted me and there was something not right about it, I didn’t know what it was.” Jack refers to this attraction as falling “prey to.. - y’know, a thin woman in a skimpy something definitely attracts me. Do I like that it attracts me? No! But if I’m honest, it does.” Neal was less apologetic, probably because he knows I know him well, but still refers to his interest as “politically incorrect.” “Sexy..um, slender, well groomed, shaved armpits, y’know the kind of women that make you think they’re probably wearing sexy panties, um, that really gets me, all that. I do like a nicely turned out woman. Y’know, in a very politically incorrect way.”

Tony, who seemed to me to be the one most concerned with finding a partner, was also most specific about his requirements - a woman has to be 5'5" (the right height to fit under his arm when side by side), dark (like a light-complexioned Indian women), really slender, long hair, nice features, fit, and, as he guesses for everyone, “nice eyes, nice teeth, nice smile.” Brian, too, mentioned eyes and smile as important. Luke is not too discriminating - he’s attracted to “*allll* types of women,” as long as they eat properly and respect their bodies.

Many of the women said they were attracted to that which was different from

themselves. For Elsa, this means very thin men, although she complains that she then feels fat compared to them. Colleen likes voluptuous women, both Beth and Cathy would love to look completely different for a short period of time, just to see what it would be like. Cathy, who is dark haired and eyed, fantasizes about wearing blue contact lenses and dying her hair blonde. Beth said, "I often see people, who look very different from [me], with *dark* hair, *dark* skin, and really exotic looking, and I think 'wow,' for just a week! I would love to be like that! Be that different sort of person!"

No men said anything like that, which could mean they either have less imagination, or (more likely) are more comfortable in their skins. If they are comfortable with their body image they would have no need to imagine what it would be like to be else-wise, or wish to change themselves. Men did see themselves as able to alter their body, but perhaps yearned for it less.

8. Conclusion

Findings

The study of the body and cultural relationships within a North American culture is unusual in the field of anthropology, and thus it was difficult to find comparable works for parallel guidance and theoretical direction. Throughout this project I turned to familiar anthropological theories of the body, as well as to ideas in other social sciences and psychology, and used them to aid the work at hand.

The first part of this thesis looks at the practices, hopes, and anxieties pertaining to the margins of the body of young adults living in Montreal. In it we have seen how they have all sorts of concerns about their bodies, some expected, some unexpected. My informants' willingness to share very intimate details of their private thoughts astonished me. With current hindsight, I would have liked to have explicitly asked what their aspirations pertaining to their bodies were. Although that came out in some interviews, I would have liked to have heard everyone's future plans and wishes.

The next part of this thesis examines some of the influencing factors in forming the body-images and bodily values of the informants. For me, one of the surprises in my findings was how often family was cited as the first and foremost shaper of bodily values. With age, this influence was superceded by that of peers, acquaintances, and social expectations, generally in a healthy and natural manner. Nonetheless, many of them cited their families as having a deep and lasting impression on them, which is all the more surprising since I did not ask any questions specifically about their families. Of course they are going to talk about how the media influences them, after all, I asked them. But even concerning the media, I was expecting some of them to have role models from popular culture, whereas few had deliberate role models at all. The media had a complicated position to play in their lives. People felt it had an influence, but could rarely name a specific one, yet could easily name how their friends, peers, family, and lovers shaped their bodily experiences (interestingly, men mentioned their lovers often, and as a positive influence, whereas fewer women mentioned lovers, and when they did it was more often with mixed feelings). I now believe more than ever that a strong family system, or community, is the best antidote for media's sometimes negative images. When the most self-image distress occurred it was usually coincident with a rupture in the family proceedings. With the reassurance of family reinforcement gone, environmental factors became even more important, such as the media for Amy, or the ballet school environment for Beth when she left

home at a young age. Anthropology needs to include family dynamics in studies as more than just kinship terms, and as the important filter through which the dominant ideology affects the individual, as shown in this research. In his work on bodies, O'Neill was one of the few social theorists who looked upon the family as an important cultural stimulus and urged that it take on a greater role of responsibility.

The worst quality cited about media is its lack of diversity and variety of the human form. Yet I became fascinated with how media could be used by my informants, for a fantasy outlet or for inspiration, which is different from the simplistic view of how media throttles one with images. People can sometimes filter the portrayals they are exposed to, but there is so much to filter through and the media is omnipresent in an urban setting, it's as if the media expands your community. I think the media can make one feel like she is in a room full of beautiful women who are her boyfriend's ex-girlfriends, as Andrea said. At the same time as I wish to feel the media is a secondary influence which only serves as a reinforcement to our already settled beliefs, I have come away from this body of work more aware of just how much the media can shape our beliefs and values, yet thankful that people are able to analyse, critique, and subvert it for their own purposes.

Their physical condition is very important to my informants - fitness, health, appearance. This could be partly due to not only the emphasis on such matters in our society (particularly the fashionable atmosphere of Montreal), but to the fields the informants are in. The medical students are acutely aware of the impediments of ill-health and the value accorded to a professional image and demeanour, and those in performance are keenly aware of the importance of appearance and of a well-functioning body. Each profession's belief system heeds the body in one way or another. It must be remembered I chose these informants for the importance the body holds for them, after all, and possibly other sub-groups in Montreal would be less concerned with their physical conditions.

Individualism is what everyone strived for, but within the ascribed limits of their social circle and working within their cultural framework. As we can see through Jack and Amy's experience with feeling grotesque when they were younger, to deviate too far from the norm (or to believe you do) is hugely detrimental to one's self image. At the same time, wariness was cited when observing those who were too 'normal' or boring, and everyone said they eschewed mainstream fashion (no matter how closely their own style fit one 'type' or another). People

wanted to stand out, but in such a manner as to receive approval from those around them. Their body image and sense of attractiveness was contingent upon the reaction of those around them, as well as a sense of bodily well-being achieved through eating healthily and exercising regularly. A sense of guilt over, say, having just eaten a bag of potato chips, or skipping a day of exercise could adversely affect the self-image, even though the actual effect is practically non-existent.

If the body exists, as Foucault notes, only through discourse (Shilling 1993:198), then it is necessary to look at the popular discourse of english-speaking Montreal concerning bodies, and how my informants situated themselves within it. They saw themselves as independent of, but working within, the cultural discourse - aware of how they differed or adhered to general ideals used as a yardstick of measurement. To explore discourse is crucial, but slippery, so I aimed to place bodies in their discursive context using two of Frank's typologies most suited to my research - communicative and mirroring. Frank's notion of the communicative body is practical, but in part because its definition of the body as being perpetually in process gives one the most leeway - it's an anti-theory theory, or at least a fluid one. My informants did see their bodies primarily as communicative and narrative, yet also reflective of the culture around them as in the mirroring body. But by no means mindlessly so - they were very aware of the dilemmas and subtleties of consumption, unlike Frank's typology which doesn't allow for this. My informants spent their time and money in various ways beyond attending to the basic needs, such as on going to fancy gyms, shopping for clothes, or entertainment. Since money (and time) is at a premium for any student, they were perhaps more conscious of the choices they made than someone with plenty of both might be. Consumerism may have been in part fantasy-play for my informants, but they were discerning and analytic enough to be fully aware of that.

To explore the importance of the adornment and shaping of bodies among Montrealers I turned to Terence Turner's classic description of how, among the Kayapo, the body's surface is a meaningful frontier of self and society. His theory is apt and easily transposed onto the practices of this urban North American culture. As well, it appeared in this study that the body is not only a surface upon which people describe their identities to others, but their bodies also ascribe their identity to themselves. People use their bodies as tools to express their identities, and believe that somehow the self is written on the physical. As Andrea poetically said, "I guess I don't view the body as skin and muscle and nerves, stuff like that, I view it more as the,

like, what it's expressing, the soul behind it." At the same time, the body and its abilities can shape the soul. Although Andrea adorns her body to express herself to the world, she feels constrained by her body at times,

Just the fact that I'm a tall person and that I take up a lot of space, but at the same time I'm kind of a clumsy person? So it's like I have this body that I think *should* be able to do a lot of things, but somehow I can't seem to coordinate it, like really get to where I want to go with it. I think it's the feedback thing though, I think that my body's unnecessarily who I am, but somehow it's distorted who I think I am.

What was interesting was the discordance that many people felt between their physical presentation and how they saw themselves. Body image, as Schilder noted, is fickle and hardly congruent with the immediate body. Ethan would keep believing he was shorter than he was, Luke at times that he was smaller, Brian still sometimes felt like a small scrawny kid, and Kira still occasionally feels like she's "dragging around this vestigial self draped in size 16 clothing and pastels and Kelley green!" The imagined body-self is dependant on many factors (like mood, clothing, or environment) and most were pleasantly surprised when they noticed that their outside presentation was closer to their internal ideal than they thought. But Joanne has the opposite problem,

I definitely have an inner self which sort of thinks of itself as slimmer than I actually am. I'm often surprised when I look in the mirror and .. 'that's really that big?' That's frustrating in a way because I do have this discordance between how I view myself and how I'd like myself to be and how I physically am.

Nonetheless a certain fluidity of the body's status was acknowledged and welcomed by all, and it seems that a healthy body image is always shifting. Everyone had mentioned changes for the better over time in how they felt towards their body and a change in bodily status often heralded or presaged a change in life. Even amongst others than my informants, and in past studies, I have heard time and again how people change their hair when wishing to change how their life is going (sympathetic magic perhaps?), or when entering a new phase (leaving or entering school, parenthood, moving between cities) seen as a new beginning. Also changing clothing styles, or starting a new regime, creates the same effect. It's as if a personal change must be evident externally for it to be really so, as a signal to the observant world, or as reinforcement to the self, that change has occurred. Like how Brian changes his facial hair when he doesn't feel life is going the way he wants it to (p. 52). We have control over only so

much, and the least we can do is try to control our bodies, if not our destinies.

This aspect of control or discipline, bodily and otherwise, is talked about in Bordo's writings on the meanings of the body, and my informants' statements at times reinforced her work on how it is believed that control over bodily margins can indicate a superior moral or emotional state. She sees this controlling behaviour as a logical manifestation of the anxieties and fantasies promoted by our culture and, while recognizing health benefits from control, advocates an awareness of our motives. My informants struggled with these issues, and questioned their diverse motives for undergoing different forms of body discipline, such as when Beth mused about the justifications of an action performed to either look good or to feel good (p.111). There is also room in this interpretation for the desire for control as a reasonably natural human trait which is, in turn, echoed by our culture. We like to think that success in one realm will assure success in another, which is evident all over the world in how say, people will carry out rituals before an endeavour, believing (or hoping) that mastery in the former will lead to achievement in the latter. Western bodily control can be about health and longevity, wanting to look and feel your best, and perhaps hoping to prompt future successes or changes. One of the largest unfounded beliefs my informants felt that the media put forth was that by engaging in an activity, the desired result is guaranteed. Sadly, bad things happen to good people (and worse, some would say, good things happen to bad people), and if you jog daily you may still succumb to perpetually flabby thighs or to a heart attack. But it is human to try.

One of my more startling finds was the temptation of many to alter themselves physically through means of plastic surgery. Although none in the group had done so yet, many were clearly planning to, or fantasized about it, or were at least aware of it as a possibility in the future if their body became too unruly. As a result of this, my own biases towards the procedure have mellowed. Curiously, I found that the body is considered more malleable than the face, or at least amongst those who are happy with their faces and not their bodies. Joanne saw her body go through more changes than her face, and thus couldn't imagine changing it through surgery, and Beth (who is certainly fair of face) feels likewise. I once heard it said that the face is more likely than the body to be deemed attractive because we're more accustomed to it. We look at our faces in the mirror far more than at our bodies, and so familiarity breeds acceptance, much like how it is advantageous for a politician's face to be plastered all over the community before an election. Exceptions to this are found in Jack's account, in which he saw

his face go through dramatic changes because of his acne, and with Elsa, who is not terribly happy with her face and hopes it will slim with age like the actress Jodie Foster's did. One factor that was easily and cheerfully mutable to all was hair, that which grows on their heads, anyway. Body hair was a different matter, with many of the men wishing to get rid of their perceived-as-too-much body hair, where women more casually plucked, shaved, electrolyzed, and bleached.

The overarching distinctions I kept foremost in mind when thinking about anthropology of the body and how to classify my informants' bodies within discourse and their everyday subjective experience are those of Lock and Scheper-Hughes' - individual, social, and political. However, by virtue of their being interrelated, it is difficult to tease them apart when sometimes it would be handy to be able to do so. When, for instance, is the desire to lose weight political (as in adhering to an overarching regime), social (as in conforming to an desirable societal norm), or individual (as in wishing to feel healthy)? It is useful to be able to analyse an instance from different standpoints, but puzzling when trying to discover the motive for an action or state of being, as plural as they may be. Fortunately, their advocacy for a theory of emotions helps give the body its embodied quality, and brings us away from abstraction.

In some ways Lock and Scheper-Hughes' social body is too broad a category for my work, as it includes the body as symbolically representing nature, culture, and society, as well as being within its community. My informants think about their bodies socially as within relationships, such as either amongst family, friends and acquaintances, or lovers. Bodily awareness for my informants was characterized as distinct in these different social situations (and interestingly, when talking about the media, it was as if it were an extension of the friends and acquaintances category - a sort of peer pressure). These correspond with the main interpersonal spheres of influence that emerged in my interviews.

Commentary

From my fieldwork I set out to obtain an idea of how young anglophone Montrealers perceived, defined, and used their bodies in relation to their identity within their culture, and unearth what were the influencing factors in these decisions. Not only did I hear general ideas on what people found important for their bodily presentation and image, but I heard many in-depth and thoughtful opinions on the role the environment plays in their lives. The richness of

my data surprised me, as did the openness of my informants. I was anticipating some intriguing statements and intelligent answers but the quality of our dialogues, along with the very personal statements, happily surpassed my expectations. My sample was small, but I feel captures the flavour and some breadth of young english-speaking adults in Montreal, as well as contributing to a view of those in other urban North American centres. There is very little anthropological work in this area, and the interplay of social discourse and the practices concerning the bodies of individuals within a modern urban setting, such as Montreal, deserves more attention, particularly in light of increasing global urbanization and shifting populations. The detail and depth of these interviews point to the potential wealth of information in further similar fieldwork, and thus a comparative body of work could be developed.

The contradictions that arose in our talks indicated to me how multifaceted the relationship to our bodies is. Fragmentation of body image is usually discussed as negative, as in Martin's study on women's bodies within a health framework. Not having a holistic, embodied sense of one's body can be hugely detrimental, as in schizophrenia, to take an extreme case, but it seems like for most people schisms in values and sensitivities emerge constantly. Their bodies, along with their self-image, were constantly in a state of flux and growth, as plural as the relationships by which they defined themselves. No one felt comfortable in their body all the time, and would feel aware of different parts of it at different times, feel taller or shorter or fatter or slimmer, changing from situation to situation. As well, the body's limitations in form or ability - such as clumsiness, size, or a temporary disfigurement such as acne - shaped the personal image the informant had of themselves. Their sense of embodiment is not a constant, nor are values consistent. People would worry about their health, and condemn those who do not look after their bodies, while lighting a cigarette. These contradictions in actions, beliefs, and moment-to-moment living are part of what human bodies are about. Bodies change, attitudes change, people mature, experience joy and depression, and through these shifts it would be impossible to have a smooth transition from one bodily state to the next. No wonder people occasionally experience their bodies as fragmented, yet more importantly, most people don't have much of a problem with this. Aware of the learning curve of life, and reasonably confident in the abilities of their bodies, my informants endured the occasional discomforts of coming to terms with one's body. Two of my informants, who I saw some time after the interview, expressed concern at how much differently they felt they might answer some

questions, given another chance. Within the span of a few months enough had changed in their lives to make them feel and act in a new way bodily, perhaps only slightly, but significantly. Possibly other informants felt this way too, but hadn't a chance to tell me.

For better or worse, our bodies are our own, and we learn how to grow into them and with them. Our bodies are important to our sense of well being, but the factors that shape that strong sense of self are many. Family, friends, acquaintances, strangers, and their reactions to us, all have a role to play in the forming of our bodily identity, as well as the shape, health, and well-being of the body. The community gives a forum in which to do so, delineates our boundaries which we can acceptably play with, and the media helps carry our messages and values.

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