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**AN EXPLORATION OF ISSUES THAT MIGHT
SURROUND AND AFFECT YOUNG WOMEN'S
EATING BEHAVIOURS**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Nursing
at Massey University**

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2001

ABSTRACT

Body size issues are particularly problematic for young females and their receptivity to nutritional information is different from other groups. Adolescence is a unique period of development both socially and emotionally. It is often an age of great stress for girls who may increasingly rely on comparisons with others to evaluate their image and their general opinions of themselves. Appearance is often the main motivator for young people to modify their diet.

The incidence of obesity and eating disorders reflects the reality that current healthcare practices are perhaps not effective. The purpose of this study was to explore the issues that might surround and affect the eating behaviours of young women. This research aimed to provide health professionals with a greater understanding of how food choices and eating patterns of young females are influenced. The results of the research will contribute to raising awareness and understanding of the issues young women have about the relationship of food to body image.

A qualitative study was undertaken using a feminist approach. Through the use of personal journals as a form of data collection, this research gave a group of young women the opportunity to illuminate their own experiences. The use of journals is new in this area, however it proved to be effective for this age group of 14-16 year olds. The data was analysed using thematic analysis.

The findings from this study demonstrate that current constructions of femininities within western culture require young women to focus on their body appearance, and the cultural fixation on the thin 'ideal' feminine body is causing considerable pressure for many young women. The ideal body is one that many women cannot achieve despite a great deal of effort. However, nurses and other health professionals support and promote notions that suggest a slim body can be achieved through individual hard work and effort. Idealistic notions state that a young women's body must be thin in order to be attractive, beautiful, 'normal' and thus accepted in our culture. Medical and social beliefs about what constitutes an acceptable female body means many adolescent girls who do not fit into the criteria of a so-called 'normal' body have therefore developed a sense of anxiety and hatred of their body. Even girls who are underweight are also

encouraged to focus on their appearance and are subsequently developing an intense body dissatisfaction as well. Health professionals are involved in promoting techniques that are damaging the overall general health and well-being of many young women.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If it were not for the support and help of many, this thesis would not have been completed. I would like to title this section 'Without you'...

Without you

I thank the fifteen young women who participated in this study. The information that you enthusiastically wrote in your journals was appreciated. I would like to thank the staff of the two secondary schools that kindly gave their time and effort. 'Without you' this work would not have been possible.

To my friends, and family (you know who you are). I would like to thank you all for your encouragement, support and love. 'Without you' all, I would not have been able to complete this thesis.

To my supervisor, Professor Jenny Carryer. Thank you for all you have done! Words cannot express how much you have helped me throughout this whole process. From the beginning, you have encouraged and supported me. 'Without you', this work certainly would not have been finished. THANKS!

To the one other person who was with me at the beginning of this journey, but is no longer with us. A special thank you for believing in me. 'Without you', I would not have had the strength to begin this. Arohanui.

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