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JUDGING A BOOK BY ITS COVER:

The narrativity, materiality, and performativity of successful slimming

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Psychology

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New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

Slimness is associated with physical attractiveness, and fitness and health. Given that one in three New Zealand adults is overweight and one in four is obese, a desire to lose weight is common, especially for women. But weightloss, and particularly maintaining a reduced weight in the long term, is very difficult. Of people who lose a significant amount of weight, 95 percent are likely to regain the weight lost within five years with most relapses occurring soon after losing weight. My research explores the stories of nine women who have defied these odds and maintained a loss of over 25 percent of their body mass for over five years.

In this thesis I have used a multiple-methods approach to draw out my participants' stories of successful slimming. My diverse methods involved engaging in a series of four one-on-one, unstructured, conversation-type interviews with each participant. During these interviews, participants were asked to produce material objects such as photographs, pieces of clothing, diaries, and medical records to facilitate storytelling and discussion. Each participant also created a graph of her weight plotted over time, which was informed and elaborated by the objects she brought, and punctuated and further extended with annotations about life events. The timeline helped focus attention on how weight changed over time and the connections between weight change and meaningful life experiences and events. Creating the timeline also extended and enriched storytelling, and encouraged each participant to become a researcher of her own life. As an aid for drawing out stories and visualising lived experience, the process of creating the timeline (*timelining*) has become a useful new method for arts-based graphic elicitation.

Continuing with arts-based methods, I have used an ethnodrama, *Wishing at a Wedding*, to present my research findings of the everydayness of successful slimming. My decision to explore Performative Social Science was premised on an awareness of the limitations of orthodox forms of research representation, and my respect for my participants' motivation to take part in this research in order to help other women transform their lives. Performative Social Science forms such as ethnodrama are used to pique emotions, interrogate and disrupt long held prejudices and beliefs, and reach and edify wider audiences. In performative works the burden of interpretation is on the audience and there is potential for a broad and varied range of understandings. Because the voices of authors and theorisation can be thought to be sidelined in performative works I have also presented my research findings in a conventional

academic form; a scholarly book chapter called, “Defying the odds—Successful slimming”.

To further explore the broad and varied range of understandings elicited by performative works, opinions on the play are presented in the form of a magazine article, written by a member of the audience who *attended* the play, and an excerpt from a blog, written by a playwright. These different ways of explicating research findings invoke polyvocality. Polyvocality has been used to provide a variety of alternative positions or standpoints from which to view my research findings and enrich understandings of the world of weightloss and the day-to-day complexity of successful slimming.

A metaphor of an expert tightrope walker performing (extra)ordinary feats of balancing is proposed to understand the *ease* with which successful slimmers maintain a reduced weight, and also the *fear* they face of slipping and falling from their narrow path of weightloss success. I argue that successful slimming requires obsessive moment-by-moment, day-by-day, year-by-year focused discipline and commitment. It is not a simple matter of eating a little less and moving a little more.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rex, this is for you. To say thank you could never be enough. You tolerated the woman I was before embarking on this endeavour, suffered with me through to its completion, and continue to put up with the woman I've become for it has certainly changed me. You are my hero. You have always believed in me—you have my heart.

Thank you too to my children Timothy, Amy and Susannah, I know you thought this was just another fad, an aberration that seemed to go on a bit longer than many of the others, yet you always encouraged me—Xanny, you especially.

A big thank you to my supervisors Kerry[1] and Ann[2]. You knew I could, and would, do this project when I thought I couldn't. Without your patient advice and enthusiasm this thesis would not have been this thesis—how could it have? You have turned my world inside out and I will always be grateful—it's been a long and windy road.

A special thank you goes to the extraordinary women in this study who candidly shared their personal experiences with me—no words can ever adequately express my appreciation.

This thesis is a narrative—it's a story that needed to be told. So finally, my last thank you goes to my audiences—there have been many. You patiently listened when I needed to talk and you talked when I needed to listen—all stories need an audience.

[1] Professor Kerry Chamberlain, Massey University
[2] Associate Professor Ann Dupuis, Massey University

Table of CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ..... *i*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... *iii*

List of FIGURES ..... *xi*

CHAPTER ONE **1**

INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH AND THE THESIS *1*

What's the story? 3

The scope of the research 4

My research questions and aims 6

The shape of the thesis 8

CHAPTER TWO **11**

THE TOPIC *11*

Size matters 13

The tyranny of thinness 14

Fat as a feminist issue 15

The weight of stigma 17

Obesity and overweight 20

Categories of overweight 22

The categorisation problem 23

The weight on health 24

Weight and morbidity 25
Weight and mortality 27
Losing weight 28
Dieting 30
Summary 32
CHAPTER THREE 33
METHODOLOGY 33
Introducing narrative 34
Narrative and identity 37
The structure and form of narrative investigation 39
Time as a feature of narrative 40
Meaning as a feature of narrative 41
The social feature of narrative 43
Visualising narrative form 44
Narratives and interviewing 46
Eliciting stories 47
Photo-elicitation 48
Graphic elicitation 49
Epiphanies and a creative method 51
Data collection 52
Data presentation and analysis 53
Dramatising data 54
Performative social science 55
Ethnodrama 56
(Un)Conventional representation 58
Summary 59

CHAPTER FOUR..... 61

METHOD..... 61

The participants: Nine (extra)ordinary women..... 62

Alice..... 63

Becky..... 64

Charlotte..... 64

Diana..... 65

Elizabeth..... 65

Fiona..... 66

Guinevere..... 66

Heidi..... 67

Ismene..... 68

Multiple methods and multi-sensorial engagement..... 69

Procedures..... 69

Interviews and doing things together..... 70

The timeline: A quintessential prop..... 71

Photographs and objects: The power of things..... 78

Notebooks, letters and journals: Writing matters..... 85

Stories and talking: What did they say?..... 90

Making sense of multi-sensorial texts..... 93

Coding..... 95

Analysis, and (re)presenting research differently..... 100

Creating the characters and scene..... 103

Summary..... 108

CHAPTER FIVE..... 109

RESULTS AND FINDINGS..... 109

PART ONE: An Ethnodrama..... 111

Wishing at a Wedding 112

SCENE ONE: Wedding day morning 115

SCENE TWO: Earlier that day 132

SCENE THREE: Getting ready 136

SCENE FOUR: During the reception 148

SCENE FIVE: After the wedding. 158

PART TWO: A book chapter 163

Defying the odds: Successful slimming 165

CHAPTER SIX 181

DISCUSSION 181

A conventional perspective 182

A performative perspective 183

An adjunct to performance 185

The Magazine Article 187

A spotlight on slimming 187

The Playwright's Blog 193

Jo's World 193

Summarising vantage points 199

CHAPTER SEVEN 203

CONCLUSION 203

Challenging successful slimming 204

Challenging research method 208

Challenging research presentation 210

The End 212

APPENDICES **213**

Research Participant Recruitment 214

Appendix A: Advertisement 214

Research Information for Participants 215

Appendix B: Project introduction sheet 215

Appendix C: Information sheet 218

Appendix D: Interview schedule 221

Consent Forms 223

Appendix E: Consent form A 223

Appendix F: Consent form B 224

Appendix G: Consent form C 226

Timeline Examples 227

Appendix H: Diana's timeline 228

Appendix I: Alice's timeline 229

Appendix J: Becky's timeline 230

Appendix K: Charlotte's timeline 231

Publications: 232

Appendix L: The Power of Things 232

Appendix M: Timelining: Visualizing experience 252

REFERENCES **273**

List of FIGURES

Figure 1: A series of graphs representing the three rudimentary narrative forms and a complex Romance literary trope (Source: Gergen and Gergen, 1986).44

Figure 2: A visual representation of a Romance weightloss narrative..... 45

Figure 3: Summary of participants' details, and weightloss information, occupation and physical activities..... 63

Figure 4: Fiona's timeline..... 73

Figure 5: A section of Ismene's timeline showing her "wiggle in the line"..... 77

Figure 6: An image of two pages from Diana's 61-year-old baby development booklet..... 82

Figure 7: A page from one of Heidi's "stark" food diaries..... 83

Figure 8: "The red photograph" that for Alice represented her victory over fatness..... 84

Figure 9: A coding table with verbatim transcript, researcher comments, and code names..... 96

Figure 10: A piece of Playscript in an early stage of development..... 99

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH AND THE THESIS

> *"Imagination is more important than knowledge.*
> *For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination can embrace the entire world"*
> --ALBERT EINSTEIN

Unhappy with efforts to curb the rampaging obesity epidemic in the United States of America (USA), prominent bioethicist and researcher Daniel Callahan (2013) proposes pushing an edgy strategy to promote weightloss. Before presenting his suggestion he concedes that the causes of obesity are many and varied; they are complex and inter-connected. He lists age, gender differences, genetics, cultural acceptance or indifference, sedentary habits, poor diets, and the "too often neglected … luxuries we possess" such as food processers, escalators, golf carts and cars (2013, p. 35). Callahan also acknowledges that the equally many and varied strategies proposed to help people lose weight fail abysmally. Yet, he says *he* has the answer. Drawing on his experience with stopping smoking, Callahan extols the value of being shamed and beaten up socially in helping him curb his nasty habit. Misled into thinking obesity is in some way analogous to smoking, Callahan's edgy weightloss strategy is simple: "ginning up" stigmatisation by heaping a dose of shame on overweight people (Aleccia, 2013, p. 1). This blithe naivety, which some (e.g., Campos, 2004) might say amounts to unethical irresponsibly, is not uncommon when exploring weight and weightloss.

My personal battle with weight has instigated this PhD research project. Unable to maintain a significant 40-kilogram weightloss, which is not unusual (Byrne, Cooper, & Fairburn, 2003; Elfhag & Rossner, 2005), I wanted to know how women, who have succeeded where I have failed, manage to stay slim. However, as is fairly common for PhD endeavours, my curiosity took me on an unexpected and convoluted journey.

My journey began with my keen interest in dieting and weightloss. With stories about losing weight often spanning many years and in some cases involving a lifetime, a narrative methodological approach suited my research goals well. Fortuitously, I was already captivated by the useful value of storytelling and narrativity (the process of presentation and interpretation of stories) to uncover lived experience. However, finding a way to encourage uninhibited storytelling and narrative production became a challenge. It presented me with an opportunity to delve into creative and innovative research methods and led to the development of a worthwhile research method called *Timelining* (Sheridan, Chamberlain, & Dupuis, 2011).

I had found my forte. It was exhibited in a passion for novel research methods and a propensity for arts-based creativity. Developing an innovative research method was just the beginning however. It pushed me, not unwillingly, towards creative forms of data analysis, presentation and representation. Part of this was a route to the lesser-known realm of performative social science, for why should creativity stop with method?

Performative social science, which uses performative vehicles such as drama and dance to explicate and broadcast research findings, had found a new devotee. Described as a science-art hybrid (Leavy, 2010), performative social science, with the premise of spreading research news and findings further and more effectively than more conventional academic forms of representation, suited my newly found creative bent. My expedition towards playwriting began. Plays, based on research data about the everyday, involve setting ordinariness on a stage. They put everyday life, with the boring bits taken out, onto a pedestal, thereby making it extraordinary, and available for all to appreciate.

Callahan's critics say he had to have lacked "contact with actual free-range fat[3] people" to make the suggestions he made (Aleccia, 2013, p. 1). The insinuation being that he was distanced from the ordinary people he was talking about. Keen to avoid this in my examination of my topic, I knew I needed to get up close and personal with my research participants. I was determined to delve into their experiences of losing weight as deeply as I could. Consequently, I chose to investigate the extraordinariness of dieting and staying slim by exploring the commonplace ordinariness of lived experience and to do this by using extraordinary methods.

While seemingly banal, there is nothing mundane about ordinary everyday experience. Indeed, Sherlock Holmes (Doyle, 1995) would warn against complacency

[3] Fat is an adjective used to describe a body with *"excess"* girth in relation to so-called average sized bodies. Like obese and overweight, plus size, big, fat and fatness are descriptors that suggest corpulence, largeness and heaviness (Jutel, 2001).

here, showing time and time again that exploring ordinary everydayness or usualness is the route to uncovering the mysteries of the unusual and extraordinary. I suggest that my route, which I will present shortly, is apt because successful long-term weightloss certainly is extraordinary (Elfhag & Rossner, 2005).

I wish a literary thread to wend its way through this thesis for I value the capacity of metaphor to shed light on complexity. To set this moving, I will briefly touch on stories and storytelling below before elaborating on them in detail in Chapter Three. The introduction to stories is followed by a discussion of the scope of my research and an explanation of the structure and shape of this thesis.

What's the story?

Who does not remember as a child being captivated upon hearing the well-known *once upon a time* – first four words of stories and fairytales? These words pull anyone who dares into a wondrous world of fantastic journeys and adventures. Once upon a time continues today to introduce timeless heroes and heroines whose experiences enable us as readers to escape the stockades of our own lives. We watch and listen as our heroine experiences joy but also sadness, success and failure. As the storyteller's story is told, we are transported through time and across space to become a part of the hero's life. We experience things that are sometimes completely new or at other times seem all too familiar.

All stories are a unique partnership between the teller and the listener, for without one or the other the story does not exist. Stories are universal. They are the very fabric of all human existence and we create our world and ourselves through stories. They are told about us even before we are born; they mould and shape who we are as we live; and they continue about us long after we are dead – there is an important connection between stories and time (Ricoeur, 1984). Storytelling is a way of knowing (Worth, 2008). Stories tell us *what it is like* and are founded on empathy and the sharing of our world and experiences with others.

Ostensibly, this thesis is a story about women's stories about weightloss. Even the obesity epidemic has been called a story: "a modern-day story of sloth and gluttony" (Gard & Wright, 2005, p. 6). My thesis is also a story about exploring creative, arts-based research methods and representation. While it is easy to be distracted by method, if asked if this is a treatise about method with weightloss experiences used merely as illustration, versus a project about the very elusive success of long-term weightloss, my answer is the latter. My respect for this topic and especially for my participants demands it be so.

My goal is to tell stories of weightloss myths and legends, of heroes and villains, of trickery and illusion, and to follow the bravest heroine as she transforms from a fat, *ugly* duckling into a slim, *beautiful* swan. This thesis is about losing weight, and about beating all the odds to stay slim. My question is, "what is the story; how do some women succeed at dieting and slimming while countless others fail?" Storytelling is all-important here, and the best way to understand a story is to tell it.

The scope of the research

Once upon a time in old religion, a threat of darkness covering the earth, impending flood, or locust infestation enabled leaders to control and manipulate a naive multitude. In more modern, supposedly more enlightened, times similar weapons or clubs are still brandished threatening everything from a Y2K bug causing aeroplanes to plummet from our skies, chemical warfare, a swine flu pandemic *and* a global epidemic of obesity. These frightening scenarios, wielded by leaders in medicine and science, politics and big business, and relentlessly perpetuated and paraded by media, are tactics of guilt and fear.

With hindsight we laugh at the naivety of suspecting a sun eclipse to herald impending doom. Yet, some of us refused to fly on New Year's Day 2000 (Hoffman, 1999). Others, frightened of an impending swine flu pandemic, sought vaccinations and stocked piled supplies of Tami-flu (Moss, 2005). Should we question why? For instance, should we ask why, and what forces so many of us to be on a diet? And why it is not okay for a fat person to sit in McDonalds and enjoy eating a burger?

For some people being obesely overweight is objectionable and even repugnant; children as young as three years old have a problem with it (Cramer & Steinwert, 1998). Research has shown that people would rather walk away from a happy marriage, give up the possibility of having children, be depressed, become alcoholic, and alarmingly, lose a limb or be blind than be obesely overweight (Chen & Brown, 2005; Schwartz, Vartanian, Nosek, & Brownell, 2006). An abhorrence for obesity is very evident and unashamedly, obese people are considered an acceptable site for prejudice and discrimination or fatism if you will (Oliver, 2006; Puhl, Andreyeva, & Brownell, 2008).

In this thesis I discuss our concerns about obesity and tackle our obsession with weight and body shape. I think it is timely to ask what an obesity epidemic implies and explore its foundation. Along with critical authors (e.g., Campos, Saguy, Ernsberger, Loiver, & Gaesser, 2006), I too ask why obesity is labelled as a disease and a global epidemic and question why it is banally discussed as a "public health crisis … a time

bomb waiting to explode" with an urgent need for a "war on obesity" (p. 12). It is argued that this war on obesity is really a stigmatising "war on fat people" (O'Hara & Gregg, 2012, p. 41).

Touted as a disease, the health crisis of obesity is a disease like no other. It is difficult to imagine small pox, influenza or HIV/AIDS being paraded the way obesity is. The stories of people who are obesely overweight invade our homes and infiltrate our lives on a daily basis; obesity is big news, big entertainment, and most certainly big business. It is important not to forget who gains by labelling obesity as a disease.

> *"The existence of an obesity epidemic offers enormous commercial, financial and power-maximizing opportunities for at least seven groups: the medical profession, academic researchers, the public health sector, the government health bureaucracy, the pharmaceutical industry, the fitness industry and the weight-loss industry" (Basham, Gori, & Luik, 2006, pg 43-44).*

We, as individuals, invest a good deal of time, money and energy trying to avoid obesity, yet failure to succeed is blamed on us rather than on an industry that fails to provide solutions or admit that a cure is impossible (Boero, 2007). Should it be concerning that the emphasis is on reducing weight, a lucrative industry, rather than on examining and providing solutions for other less lucrative co-contributors to obesity such as genetic susceptibility (e.g., Yang, Kelly, & He, 2007), environmental factors (e.g., Black & Macinko, 2008), or socioeconomic status (e.g., McLaren, 2007)?

At the outset however, I should point out that this thesis is not about obesity *per se*. An understanding of the features and ramifications of obesity and overweight is important for my research because escaping or avoiding obesity frequently motivates a desire to lose weight (Basham et al., 2006). Rather, this thesis is about losing weight and maintaining weightloss, which for many is a fruitless endeavour.

Despite over 40 years of dieting and trying to be slim, our bodies are heavier and bigger now than they have ever been (C. L. Ogden et al., 2006). In spite of the best efforts of government, the medical profession, weightloss and fitness industries around 50 percent of women and over 60 percent of men in New Zealand are overweight or obese (New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2004). The health risks associated with our expanding waistlines and weight excesses are purported to be dire, and impose a $460 million economic strain on our health care system (New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2009). Hence, weightloss and weight control are imperative.

While weight is an issue for both men and women (Monaghan, 2008), my research focuses on women. Western culture imposes narrower aesthetic ideals on women than it does on men, so body image and slimming are especially concerns for

women (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012; Germov & Williams, 1999). Studies in the USA find that women are five times more likely to feel bad about their bodies than men, and twice as likely to be dieting (Oliver, 2006). An overwhelming 89 percent of them report that they would like to be slimmer and approximately 44 percent are actively engaged in trying to lose weight (Basham et al., 2006; Bordo, 2003; Garner, 1997). Women also tend to be penalised more than men are for being fat in terms of education, employment and income (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012; Saguy & Riley, 2005).

Moreover, in their *role* as mothers and caregivers and responsible for family health, women are said to be in a position to *do* something about the obesity epidemic. For, even as early as 1830 weight watchers such as Sylvester Graham argued that, curbing food excesses "hinged on the participation of women" with battles needing to be fought "within the home, [and] at the table" (Boero, 2007, p. 44).

Unhappy with their bodies, women seek help from dieticians, personal trainers, psychologists, doctors and surgeons and engage in practices including portion control, behaviour modification, exercise, pharmacological appetite suppressants, and surgical intervention in an attempt to be slim. I have chosen to exclude surgical forms of weightloss practices in my research. Surgical intervention like bariatric surgery, which typically involves gastric by-pass or lap-banding procedures, usually entails prolonged medical follow-up and are often associated with significant long-term complications such as nutrient deficiencies (Waseem, Mogensen, Lautz, & Robinson, 2007). Also, surgical forms of losing weight, which have been researched elsewhere (e.g. see Thorsby, 2007), are quite different from behavioural forms of weightloss management. Wishing to avoid medical complications, I have decided to concentrate on behavioural forms of weightloss such as dieting and exercise, consequently women who have had surgical intervention to help them lose weight fall outside the scope of my research.

Irrespective of the form of weightloss process used, for the most part weightloss regimes fail to provide a desired long-term solution (Byrne et al., 2003; Elfhag & Rossner, 2005). It is this elusiveness of successful long-term weightloss that fuels my exploration of this topic.

My research questions and aims

"Ugh, fat people should just eat less and move more". Versions of this popular comment can be found on any one of a thousand on-line forums, in magazines and books including academic fora (e.g., Lean, 2005; Mad TV, 2008). A "quick fix" chant like this is a prescription personal-responsibility zealots claim will deal to the global problem of excess weight. It disparagingly implies that fat people are stupid and lazy. They are

stupid because the solution to their presumed problem is so simple, and lazy because this solution requires minimal effort fat people are not prepared to make. But, is it really that simple? If it is, and knowing that obesity is an undesirable state that people seek to avoid, why are so many people overweight and obese, and why is the incidence of obesity increasing?

The literature on obesity, overweight and weightloss is voluminous and sometimes conflicting. Researchers are haunted by paradoxes that challenge conventional thinking around the health risks of obesity, the health benefits of weightloss and that long-term weightloss is achievable (McAuley & Blair, 2011).

First, while obesity has long been *associated* with increased risk for various medical conditions such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, osteoarthritis and sleep apnea many people who are obesely overweight lead disease-free lives. Up to 50 percent of people who are obesely overweight are metabolically healthy (Shea, Randell, & Sun, 2011) and for some obesity can be "advantageous to survival" (McAuley & Blair, 2011, p. 779). Contrary to popular belief, being fat can be synonymous with being fit and is not always in need of curing (Gaesser, 2002).

Second, the well-established view is that losing weight improves health and reduces mortality. But weightloss does not necessarily provide a survival advantage and improve longevity. Evidence suggests that in some cases weightloss confers the opposite, and has been associated with increased mortality (Ingram & Mussolino, 2010). Also, there is no evidence that overweight or obese people who are otherwise healthy will live longer if they lose weight[4] (Harrington, Gibson, & Cottrell, 2009). Instead, recent research supports a *Health at Every Size* (HAES) focus on health rather than a traditional weight-loss-centred focus for treating overweight and obesity (Bacon, 2008; Bacon & Aphramor, 2011; Gaesser, 2003).

The third paradox concerns the understanding that reducing weight is easily achievable. In reality the amount of weight lost through dieting is usually modest and keeping the weight off is challenging (Anderson, Knoz, Frederich, & Wood, 2001). According to a US study that did not rely on personal assessments of weight (Crawford, Jeffery, & French, 2000), there is only a five percent success rate with long-term weightloss. This suggests that up to 95 percent of people who lose a significant amount of weight return to their initial weight and some even put on additional weight (Brownell & Rodin, 1994; Jeffery et al., 2000; Kroke et al., 2002; Sarlio-Lähteenkorva,

[4] This is not to say that weightloss would not be beneficial for individuals who are morbidly obese with obesity-related health problems such as osteoarthritis – these people may well benefit from weightloss (Gaesser, 1999).

Rissanen, & Kaprio, 2000). Ironically, dieting, and weight cycling, perpetuates the very thing it is supposed to cure: obesity.

The paradoxical understandings around weight tend to escape the general public who continue to try to lose weight and who are generally intolerant of people who fail (Puhl & Heuer, 2008). Obesity has been described as essentially incurable because it is resistant to treatment and prone to relapse (Taubes, 2008). It is certainly not a simple matter of eating less and moving more as the personal responsibility zealots frequently chant.

However, some women do succeed, albeit a very small percentage of them. While there is a reasonable amount written on the hatred and fear of fat (e.g., Bordo, 2003), authors (e.g., Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012) find that little is written that explores women's experiences of *being* fat and *losing* weight. Why and how women succeed is not adequately understood and little is known about the day-to-dayness of maintaining a reduced weight (Byrne, 2002; Sarlio-Lähteenkorva, 2000). For instance, how do these extra-ordinary women negotiate and manage problematic situations while maintaining an enthusiasm for constraint, and how do psychological, social, and environmental factors impact on their weightloss maintenance aims?

The complexity of weight and weightloss issues requires an in-depth mode of investigation and various authors have opened up different aspects of this topic (e.g., Ahern, Bennett, & Kelly, 2011; Byrne et al., 2003; Granberg, 2006; Sarlio-Lähteenkorva, 2000; Thorsby, 2007). My research questions on this topic are deceptively simple: *how* do successful slimmers lose their weight, and *how* do they maintain their slim selves year after year? I seek to answer these questions by exploring stories and talk about their ordinary day-to-day lives in the present, but also their lived experiences of the past. Having outlined the scope of my research, I will now outline the shape and structure of this thesis.

The shape of the thesis

As will become evident, paradoxes are a feature of my research. The shape and structure of my thesis is also paradoxical in that aspects of it are both conventional and unconventional. The thesis is bookended orthodoxically in that it opens with a traditional introduction chapter and ends with an equally traditional conclusion chapter, but in the middle it embarks on a creative journey.

My thesis has two distinct facets or components: the first is about my *topic* and the second is about my research *process*. My topic concerns the elusive success of long-term weightloss and successful slimming, and the process facet of this thesis is an

exploration of creative, arts-based research methods and an examination of different forms of (re)presenting research findings. The duplexity of my research topic and process is reflected in the shape and structure of this treatise.

In this thesis, I wear different hats and have different voices. I am the author of this thesis, but my *voice* is also *heard* as the researcher, a playwright, and even a member of an audience experiencing the research findings. I am *polyvocal*.

Beginning with a conventional introduction, Chapter Two backgrounds my research topic. It includes a discussion of the dominant discourses framing the obesity and weightloss debates providing important background and context for looking at what motivates a woman to lose a substantial amount of weight and keep it off. Since a decision to lose weight is usually motivated by health concerns or aesthetic desires (Jutel, 2005; Sobal & Maurer, 1999b), this chapter also considers the medical and popular discourses around health and beauty.

Chapter Three addresses the philosophical and methodological foundations for my research. The topics covered include a discussion of the value of narratives and storytelling to provide insight into unique lived experiences. In this chapter I also discuss the value of using material objects and graphic elicitation during interviewing as well as the value of performative social science as a creative, performative vehicle for representing research data.

Chapter Four, entitled *Method* is about what I did. The overriding feature here is complexity; it is about multiple participants plus multiple interviews multiplied by multiple methods. It is about multiple texts and multi[5]-sensorial engagement with participants. The chapter begins by introducing the participants who took part in my research and then outlines how the data were collected. I present my rationale for choosing the particular analytical processes I created, along with the rationale for shaping and presenting my research data into a piece of verbatim theatre, as well as a more conventional scholarly form of representation.

In Chapter Five my research findings are interpreted, and presented in two different forms. In the first instance they are dramatised through the dialogue, characterisation, costume, set, and plot of a playscript, which '*sees*' the research findings *embodied* through actors. In the second instance they are presented in the

[5] The prefixes multi and poly can be used interchangeably. It is possible for multi-texts to also be multi-voices by being defined as different forms of expression. In this thesis both prefixes are used. However, there needs to be a clear distinction between multi-vocality when referring to multiple forms of text, and the use of multi-vocality when referring to the use of multiple voices in an analysis or discussion. I have therefore chosen to use multi in relation to texts and senses, for example multi-textual and multi-sensorial, and poly in connection with voices, hence polyvocality instead of multi-vocality. Consequently, the word multi-vocality will be avoided in this thesis. Readers need to exercise caution when finding this term in the literature. It is uncommon to find research that uses both multiple texts for data generation and multiple voices for data representation in the same project as has been done in this thesis.

more conventional form of a scholarly book chapter. Presenting a results chapter in this way provides an opportunity to compare and contrast two quite different ways of representing research findings.

In Chapter Six my exploration of creative arts-based methods to explicate research is discussed. In addition to the play and book chapter presented in Chapter Five, two more perspectives utilising popular media are provided. Together these four different vantage points or views encourage a more diverse interpretation and a deeper understanding of my topic. The two additional perspectives are sought firstly, from a member of the audience who *saw* the play and who then writes a magazine article about the experience and secondly, from a playwright who writes an interactive blog: these are works of creative non-fiction. The play, the book chapter, the magazine article, and the blog offer opportunities for exploring different styles and textures of writing expression as a form of polyvocality. They are diverse vantage points from which to interpret data and facilitate a richer understanding of lived experience. Chapter Five and Chapter Six are unconventional and creatively interesting because the different pieces of writing presented all appear as if they have been clipped from the genre where they are usually found: they are stand-alone, self contained pieces of writing.

My thesis ends conventionally with Chapter Seven. In this final chapter the multiple aspects of my research topic and research processes are pulled together. I reflect on using creative arts-based approaches for doing research, and go on to discuss the value of conventional and performative forms of representing research findings. There is also a final discussion about the contributions this research has made to obesity research around the day-to-dayness of fatness, weightloss and successful slimming in particular.

There are just as many ways to represent lived experience, as there are ways to represent our world. The way *'news'* is reported depends on, for example, what the news is, and there is certainly a good way and a better way to get news across to an audience. Ostensibly, it is up to those who do the reporting to tell the news deftly and I appreciate that this is filtered through a prism of personal experience. I am entrusted with my participants' stories. But more importantly, they have entrusted me with the task of *telling* their stories in such a way that it will help women, who are like the women my participants were when they were fat, to become the slim women my participants are today. I suggest that the complexly textured piece of research creatively represented in this thesis does this job.

CHAPTER TWO

THE TOPIC

> *"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity..."*
> --CHARLES DICKENS, A Tale of Two Cities.

It would seem that New Zealand has a big, fat problem. After the United States and Mexico, it is the third[6] fattest nation on earth and the incidence of obesity is increasing (OECD, 2012). Everything from food marketing practices, the excessive consumption of certain fats and carbohydrates, sedentary lifestyles, sleep debt, decreased smoking, increased ambient room temperatures, and even assortative mating (where fat people choose fat mates and beget fatter children) have been proposed to contribute to our expanding girth (Keith et al., 2006).

Given that one in three adults is overweight and one in four[7] is obese (New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2011b), a desire to diet and control weight is common, especially for women (Germov & Williams, 1999). While firstly, this is because slimness is linked to physical attractiveness and beauty (Wolf, 1991), it is also because being overweight is espoused to have dire health (Fontaine, Redden, Wang, Westfall, & Allison, 2003; Guh et al., 2009; Manson et al., 1995; Olshansky et al., 2005), economic (Sobal & Stunkard, 1989; Swinburn et al., 1997), and psychosocial consequences (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Story, 2003; Puhl & Brownell, 2003a). Together, these consequences help fuel what has been termed *"a war on obesity"*. However, some argue

[6] These data can vary. In this instance they exclude nations such as The United Arab Emirates and at least ten others where the incidence of obesity is considerably higher than in New Zealand. O'Hara and Gregg (2012) suggest incidence statistics are sometimes conveniently distorted.

[7] Obesity is disproportionately prevalent in New Zealand with 43% of Maori and 64% of Pacific populations being obesely overweight compared with 23% of combined European groups (New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2009).

that this crusade is ill-founded (e.g., Campos, 2004; Gaesser, 2002), and others say it has a political agenda (e.g., Colls & Evans, 2009). O'Hara and Gregg (2012, p. 41) suggest that *the war on obesity* is really just a "war on fat *people*" (my emphasis) that leads to discrimination and oppression.

These differing views tend to push authors and researchers into one of two broad camps when it comes to how obesity and the obesity epidemic are constructed: "alarmists" or "sceptics" (Gard, 2011b, p. 1). The former overwhelmingly dominates the latter. There is also a suggestion that news media reporting on scientific publications about weight and health tend to dramatise alarmist views (Saguy & Almeling, 2008).

Alarmists, who include members of the substantive medical, physiological, and epidemiological communities, construct the obesity epidemic as a global health catastrophe. They predict that if left unabated, this crisis will result in the collapse of Western world health systems (e.g., Thompson & Wolf, 2001). When regarded as an issue of personal culpability, the epidemic is attributed to sedentary lifestyles, a reduction in physical exertion, and an increase in the consumption of low-cost energy-dense foods (e.g., Cameron et al., 2003).

Sceptics on the other hand are described as a "motley crew" (Gard, 2011b, p. 1) consisting of feminists, queer theorists, and critical social science and health theorists. They question alarmists' preoccupation with numbers, disliking quantification and the illusion of objectivity (e.g., Jutel, 2006). For some (e.g., Campos, 2004; Flegal, Kit, Orpana, & Graubard, 2013; Gaesser, 2002; Oliver, 2006) there is a mistrust of how statistics and research are interpreted and a concern that claims made about an obesity epidemic are based on bad science and contentious research findings, but also possible economic self interest. Others smell conspiracy. They argue that talk of an obesity epidemic is really about holding individuals responsible for health while more difficult issues like social and economic inequalities, discrimination, poverty, and so on are buried (e.g., Monaghan, 2008). There are also concerns about obesity paradoxes (McAuley & Blair, 2011) and the negative consequences or risks of dieting (Campos et al., 2006; Kroke et al., 2002), which are often ignored.

In this background chapter I will consider the foundation of some of the issues around which an alarmist and sceptic dichotomy of opinion on obesity and the obesity epidemic are based. The issues I will discuss are firstly, the gendered focus around body image and weight in relation to what Bartky (2010, p. 77) describes as the "disciplines of femininity". For instance, why are women, who constantly struggle to meet impossible appearance goals, much more likely than men to be dissatisfied with their body shape and want to be slimmer (Garner, 1997; Germov & Williams, 1999)? Secondly, I consider the motivation to lose weight and pursue a body of a particular

size and shape, and this leads to the third issue around the ramifications of excess weight and the stigmatisation of fatness. Next, I define and discuss the measurement and categorisation of the often-used terms of obesity and overweight, paying particular attention to the health sequelae of excess weight. However, while weight is suggested to negatively impact on health generally and is associated with numerous co-morbidities, I will concentrate on cardiovascular and metabolic diseases here because concerns about heart disease and diabetes tend to dominate literature and media discussions around fatness and the necessity to lose weight. Lastly and importantly given the topic of my research and the aspiration for slimness for most women (Bordo, 2003), I will look at losing weight *per se* with a focus on dieting and exercise.

Size matters

Across different cultures there is a wide diversity of bodily appearance, behaviour and demeanour, so a notion of a natural or ideal body is not tenable. The female body has been the subject of considerable study, especially in the area of women's health. Researchers have looked at how social and cultural discourses shape women's bodies, and their embodied experiences of such things as pregnancy and menopause, anorexia and obesity (e.g., Bordo, 2003; E. Harper & Rail, 2012; Longhurst, 2011; Orbach, 1978).

With reference to bodies, an old adage cautioning against *judging a book by its cover*, alerts us not to prejudge something based on its outward appearance for it may not reveal *the truth*. Yet, despite warnings, we continue to make value judgements based on what we see. The assumption is that a person's outward appearance can provide a good assessment of their inner workings both physiologically and psychologically. The body is seen as "a portal to the inner self" (Jutel & Buetow, 2007, p. 422).

Over a hundred years ago Lombroso and Ferrero (1895), who were proponents of phrenology, argued that a particular shaped forehead, nose, and facial angle could usefully predict a person's propensity to commit crime. With good reason, phrenology is now defunct and no longer considered science. It seems it is not reasonable to prejudge a person's character, mental capacity, value, or worth based on their skull and face shape: their outward appearance. And yet, while Lombroso and Ferrero's premises are now considered ludicrous, comparable judgements continue to be made around body shape and weight today.

With beauty being in the eye of the beholder, the implication is that perceptions of what is beautiful and physically desirable are personal and idiosyncratic. Various authors (e.g., Bordo, 2003; Tischner, 2013; Wolf, 1991) have discussed the cultural and

social construction of feminine beauty. Some suggest that constructions of beauty and attractiveness are wielded over a malleable public by magazine, television, and film media: industries that idealise thin bodies (e.g., Bonafini & Pozzilli, 2010; Greenberg, Eastin, Hofschire, Lachlan, & Brownell, 2003). But others support Foucault's (1975) suggestion that power is exercised from a multitude of points, including women themselves (Bartky, 2010). It is noted however, that a major challenge to looking at how fat women are portrayed in these media is that they are essentially absent (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012).

Fatness is the antithesis of beauty: it is the object of derision and contempt. In this, women tend to fare worse than men, for while fat men can be depicted as heroes on film and television, fat women are rarely cast in leading dramatic or romantic roles (Greenberg et al., 2003). Instead, they are often comedians and the butt of jokes, or cast as villains, or in tragic roles. Television programmes like *The Biggest Loser* (a deprecating pun) paint fatness as a huge problem for unattractive, weak-willed, and lazy *contestants*. It is a problem they cannot overcome on their own. Negative portrayals of fatness help shape viewers' perceptions of obese and overweight people and leads to an immutable image of what is attractive and what is not. In this way, some bodies are constructed as desirable while others are rejected as obscene. Big bodies have become unacceptable and loathsome.

The tyranny of thinness

Feminine beauty and attractiveness varies between cultures and across time. While being fat may be ugly and undesirable in some cultures, in others a curvaceous, shapely body is the more admired and desired form (Klein, 1996). For instance, being Rubenesque and voluptuous was considered physically attractive and beautiful in the 16th century, and fatness is valued by Azawagh Arab societies of the Sahara Desert, but neither is desired on Europe's catwalks today (Bonafini & Pozzilli, 2010; Popenoe, 2004). Styles of physical attractiveness seem arbitrary and readily changeable. The 1950s curves of actress Marilyn Munroe were promptly replaced by the waif-like appearance of fashion icon Twiggy in the 1960s. Yet, even though we may be aware of the fluidity of beauty standards, we go further today than ever before to narrowly define the *ideal* female form (Bonafini & Pozzilli, 2010).

Some feminists (e.g., Bordo, 2003; Swami et al., 2010; Wolf, 1991) argue that narrow definitions of beauty are driven by the slim ideals of the fashion and entertainment industries. The requisites of beauty and success are "trim, tight, lineless, bulgeless, and sagless" (Bordo, 2003, p. 32). These slim ideals of femininity are beyond

the reach of most women. It is not surprising, if not concerning, that such unattainable images of beauty and success are fashioned by industries who seek to sell particular services and products to *help* women achieve these elusive goals (Bishop, 2001; LeBesco, 2004; Pieterman, 2007).

Women suffer under a "tyranny of slenderness" (Chernin, 1981). Through rigorous discipline they try to meet unrealistic beauty ideals for fear of facing severe sanctions. For heterosexual women in a world dominated by men, sanctions could, among other things, include being denied desired intimacy and romance.

Bartky (2010) believes that cultural expectations have moved away from what women are allowed to do, to what women are allowed to look like. Needless to say, endeavouring to attain elusive aesthetic ideals keeps women occupied. In the context of a feminist movement backlash, it is suggested that extreme aesthetic ideals set about neutralising the political and economic gains made by feminism some 30 years ago (Bartky, 2010; Germov & Williams, 1999).

Fat as a feminist issue

The Cartesian dualism of mind and body being seen as distinct entities is often quoted in discussions looking at women's relationships with their bodies (e.g., Bordo, 2003; Weitz, 2003). Since Aristotle, women have been associated with "the body" part of the dichotomy, and men with "the mind". In this dichotomy the mind is considered superior and rational whereas the body is emotional and irrational and in need of restraint. Within this view the female body needs to be controlled and disciplined and it is the slim body that represents appropriate restraint (Bordo, 2003; Germov & Williams, 1999; Tischner, 2013).

Feminists are critical of the Cartesian legacy of mind-over-body and the increasing control of women's bodies through the power of medical and public surveillance (e.g., Bordo, 2003; Longhurst, 2001; Lupton, 2003). Such power, which is exercised from a male perspective, continues to construct differences between men and women in such a way that women remain inferior to men. Also, the concept of the male *gaze* whereby women are intimately aware they are being watched, works to create what Foucault calls obedient or "docile bodies" that "may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (1975, p. 138). He goes on to say that power, which is produced through discourses, operates in a multiplicity of ways and is everywhere. These discourses *create* individuals and this subjectivity is changeable, fluid, multiplicitous, and as Butler (1993, 1997) argues, performative.

With subjectivity created within and between contradictory discourses, some feminists argue that women can reflect on their subject positions and this creates room for resistance and agency (e.g., K. Davis, 1997a). However, Bordo (2003), who provides a considered reading of how power and domination impact on women's bodies, is very sceptical about notions of choice or agency, and she is not alone in this (e.g., S. Murray, 2008). Bordo asks feminists to remain wary of the pervasive repressiveness of modern body cultures. Although, she does acknowledge "possibilities of resistance" for women (K. Davis, 1997a, p. 11).

Fat as a feminist issue is not controversial: it is almost an axiom in the Western gender literature, although for a number of different reasons. I will discuss three areas of interest or perspective, which vary based on how the female body is conceptualised. The first concerns a patriarchal social order of male domination and female subordination. Here, authors (e.g., Orbach, 1978, 2006) see issues such as compulsive eating, binge eating, and dieting disorders attributable to the constraints placed on women's bodies through the patriarchal devaluation and subjugation of all things feminine. It is suggested that these psychological struggles are driven by sexism, racism, sexual abuse, and general weight-based bias, discrimination, and abuse (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012; Orbach, 1978; Saguy, 2012). The presumption is that when these psychological issues are dealt with, disordered eating and excess weight will cease to be a problem.

Secondly, authors are interested in why fat is a feminist issue because Western culture drives significantly narrower aesthetic ideals for women than it does for men. Women are more likely than men to feel badly about even their *normal* sized bodies let alone bodies that are overweight or obese. Of people who enrol in formal weightloss programmes, 95 percent are women (K. Bell & McNaughten, 2007). They devote copious amounts of time, energy and money to ways to fight fat and reduce weight. Women are also more likely than men to use more radical means to lose weight, like using appetite suppressing drugs, or invasive bariatric surgery (e.g., Thorsby, 2007). Over 85 percent of bariatric surgeries are performed on women (Boero, 2007).

Thirdly, researchers are interested in fat as a feminist issue because the possibility of gaining weight and becoming fat terrorises many women. The desire for thinness is so pervasive that some women choose to forgo pregnancy and having children for fear of getting fat (Garner, 1997; Puhl & Brownell, 2003a). The abhorrence for obesity and fear of becoming fat is argued as a reason why increasing numbers of girls and women succumb to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia (Bordo, 2003). There seems little doubt that desires to be super-thin are driven by, among other things, an influential, dress size conscious entertainment and fashion industry

(Bonafini & Pozzilli, 2010). Despite concerns about encouraging eating disorders in young women, designers continue to desire and use size zero (nearly invisible) models as aesthetic ideals. There is a clear imperative to avoid fatness and strive for thinness.

It is argued that men are somewhat invisible in the feminist literature around these weight issues. Bell and McNaughton (2007, p. 111) suggest that feminists ignore the experiences of men because of their "commitment to the notion of patriarchy as an overarching framework" in their research and writing. Consequently, this has led to the perception that men's weight concerns are either nonexistent or pale in comparison to women's concerns. Perhaps this implied bias has merit. It is not difficult to imagine that, besieged by images of sculpted Calvin Klein underwear models and G.I. Joe toys on steroids, boys and men too are developing body image problems that need addressing. But this in no way diminishes the body image and fatness issues faced by women. It merely emphasises a need for more research looking at men's weight concerns and experiences in an aggressively "sizist culture" (Monaghan, 2007, p. 70).

The weight of stigma

Foucault (2003) considered the body to be *the* site of ideological and political control and through a productive power he called *biopower,* individuals take personal responsibility for their own lives. Self-care is about avoiding disease. It is also about feeling good about our body's appearance and increasingly an activity Goffman (1959) termed the "presentation of self" to others. With Giddens's (1991) description of the body as a reflexive project of the self, personal responsibility encourages self-surveillance but it also prods scrutinising and criticising others.

Health is the new morality. When we see someone smoking we say, "smoking is bad for your health" but what we mean is, "you are a bad person because you smoke" (Metzl, 2010, p. 2). Through medical and public health discourses around asceticism and health, the onus is on the individual to strive for a *healthy* body and lifestyle. Consequently, people who smoke, are overweight, or fail to exercise are considered moral deviants (Shilling, 2003). Being a good citizen means not becoming a burden on a state funded health system (Basham et al., 2006; Tischner, 2013).

Some authors (e.g., Campos, 2007) have expressed concern about the level of sacralisation around health and the notion that we are under some moral obligation to optimise our health by always choosing *the healthy option*. A sense of obligation and moralising certainly applies to weight. For fat people the stigmatising ramifications of moralising are relentless. While the smoker can leave the cigarette outside after having

had a smoke, the fat person wears and carries their *stigmatising mark* with them everywhere.

Article one of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights…" (UN General Assembly, 1948). However, as O'Hara and Gregg (2012, p. 36) note, "millions of people throughout the world have their right to dignity breached every day via the health-sanctioned vilification of fat and fatness." People who are fat are viewed as sick, bad, weak-willed, self-indulgent, greedy, lazy, immature, sloppy, and stupid (Elfhag & Rossner, 2005; Puhl & Brownell, 2001).

Stigma is pernicious. It is worse than bigotry or prejudice because it breeds self-hatred and self-loathing such that the person believes they *deserve* the bullying they receive. Goffman (1963) and others (e.g., Puhl & Brownell, 2003b) talk about victims of stigma as having to cope with their "*spoiled*" status. Stigma reduces an individual "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). By stigmatising overweight and obesity and then labelling people as such, we relegate them to "the margins of society" and then condemn them for being there (Oliver, 2006, p. 15). Interestingly, while it is illegal to discriminate based on age, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, and numerous other grounds in New Zealand, it is not illegal to discriminate based on weight (New Zealand Ministry of Justice, 1993).

People who are fat face clear and consistent bias and discrimination in many important aspects of their lives, such as in inter-personal relationships, education, employment, and healthcare (Chen & Brown, 2005; Courtwright, 2009; Ding & Stillman, 2005; Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012; Puhl & Brownell, 2001; Puhl & Heuer, 2008). For example weight is a major factor when choosing a sexual partner even though proportionally the number of potential partners who are not overweight is low. Men tend to be more critical of weight in their partners than women, which may stem from the negative social judgments heaped on men who associate with fat women (Hebl & Mannix, 2003). However, unlike fat men, overweight women are viewed as less likely to have a boyfriend or partner, undeserving of attractive partners, and generally unskilled sexually (Boyes & Latner, 2009). Yet, both sexes least preferred obese partners over partners who had their left arm missing; were in a wheelchair; had a history of mental illness such as suicide attempts; or who had a history of sexually transmitted diseases (Chen & Brown, 2005)[8]. Weight is clearly a problem in relationships.

[8] These researchers used images of morbidly obese characters who represent less than five percent of the population. There is a big difference in terms of body shape between a person who is morbidly obese with a BMI of 45 and a person who is *just* obese with a BMI of say 30.

Fat women also fare significantly worse than slim women in areas related to education and employment such as interviews; assessments of attributes such as reliability, honesty, intelligence, and competency; advancement and promotion; and income (Puhl & Brownell, 2001). Conversely and interestingly, overweight and obese men were often rated more highly on these factors than their slim counterparts (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012). Being a fat woman is so pervasively undesirable that the mere proximity of an obese woman can have a negative impact. Hebl and Mannix (2003) found that male job applicants who sat next to, and associated with, a fat woman prior to their job interview fared worse than applicants who were seen with a slim woman.

By reflecting cultural biases, health professionals contribute to fat-stigma and are to some degree responsible for overweight and obesity being treated as forms of deviance (Germov & Williams, 1999). It is concerning that professionals such as doctors and healthcare workers, who specialise in helping and working with obese people, and who are aware that genetics, economics, and environment impact on obesity, nevertheless hold stigmatising views (Schwartz, Chambliss, Brownell, Blair, & Billington, 2003). Their entrenched and widely held prejudices impact on quality of life, especially for women. For example a woman may be reticent about consulting her doctor if he has reacted negatively towards large bodies for fear of having her medical condition dismissively attributed to her weight (Courtwright, 2009; Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012). Research looking at stories of abuse and bullying by doctors has found that fat women are often lectured about weightloss even when their medical condition is a bladder infection, a nosebleed or a broken arm, which has nothing whatsoever to do with weight (Joanisse & Synnott, 1999). Doctors can also under-treat medical problems in slim people because normal weight is associated with health and over-treat obese people because they are *assumed* to be unhealthy (Bacon & Aphramor, 2011). Such prejudices and biases ensure poor health outcomes on an individual level, and drive healthcare disparities for obesely overweight individuals generally (Courtwright, 2009; Hebl & Xu, 2001; LeBesco, 2004; Saguy & Riley, 2005).

The stigmatisation of fatness *per se* contributes to health problems such as depression, poor mental health, (Carpenter, Hasin, Allison, & Faith, 2000; Eisenberg et al., 2003) and hypertension (O'Reilly & Sixsmith, 2012). Consequently, Callahan's (2013) edgy strategy of *ginning up stigmatism* to encourage overweight people to lose weight is likely to be detrimental. Counterproductively, researchers (e.g., Seacat & Mickelson, 2009) find that stigmatisation deters exercising and effective dieting with the tendency being to eat more. Various authors have argued that it would better to work towards minimising the burden of fat-stigma on overweight people instead of blaming them for everything from a country's financial woes to environmental

concerns such as global warming (Puhl & Brownell, 2003b; Tischner, 2013). Tovar (2013, p. title) suggests we should "lose hate, not weight".

Obesity and overweight

"The time has come," the Walrus said,
"To talk of many things…"
"But wait a bit", the Oysters cried,
"Before we have our chat;
For some of us are out of breath,
And all of us are fat!"
--(The Walrus and the Carpenter by Lewis Carroll)

The issue of worldwide increase in weight and particularly the escalating prevalence of obesity have received increasing media and public attention. In 2006 the word obese was cited in seven Australian and New Zealand newspaper articles per day compared with only one article every nine days in 1996 (O'Hara & Gregg, 2012). This is an increase of over 6,000 percent. Along with this significant increase in use, there has also been a shift in the use of the word from being an adjective to represent weight (obesely overweight) to a noun representing an illness or disease entity (obesity) (Jutel, 2006; Saguy & Almeling, 2008).

There are essentially four quite different frames for looking at, and understanding, obesity and overweight (Saguy & Riley, 2005). The first, and perhaps least common frame is that obesity is viewed as simply a form of bodily diversity similar to forms of identity like gender, ethnicity, and age; or descriptors like old, blonde, and tall. Building acceptance of body shape diversity is an agenda of Fat Acceptance Activists and Health at Every Size proponents (e.g., Bacon, 2008; Campos, 2004; C. Cooper, 1998). They seek to increase social tolerance and reduce fat-stigma and discrimination. People who frame obesity as being about body shape reject the medical framing of overweight and obesity because it pathologises bigger bodies.

Secondly, obesity is framed as a form of risky behaviour. Lauren Berlant (2010, p. 26) talks about "Risky Bigness". The implication is that people are overweight and obese because of the poor lifestyle, food, and exercise choices they make. These choices put people at risk of developing the co-morbidities associated with excess weight. Framing obesity this way apportions blame on the individual: it individualises obesity. Encouraging the avoidance of risky behaviour is the most widely held view with regard

to treatment, which through this framing requires restraint and vigilance. However, supporters of this view (e.g., Fumento, 1997; Pi-Sunyer, 2002b; Wing & Hill, 2001) struggle to account for people who are slim irrespective of their *poor* lifestyle choices, or people who are overweight despite their *good* choices. It is also difficult to explain the high recidivism rates in people who are fervently committed to losing weight (Elfhag & Rossner, 2005).

Thirdly, obesity is framed as a disease: a medical condition that is outside an individual's control. Factors suggested to contribute to the incidence of obesity include such things as ethnicity (Wang & Beydoun, 2007), genetic predisposition (Bouchard, 2002), socioeconomics (McLaren, 2007), and obesogenic environments (D. M. Smith & Cummins, 2009). The medicalisation of body shape has changed obesity from a moral problem into a medical one (Sobal, 1995). In Western societies the medical profession has considerable status and power. Framing obesity as a disease warrants fat people being measured, monitored, and treated. *Treatment* is determined to be necessary when a body shape is over a predetermined healthy size. Consequently, individuals' fat bodies are categorised as *sick* irrespective of whether or not they lead healthy and illness *(disease)* free lives.

Fourthly, and related to being constructed as a disease, obesity is framed as an epidemic. Various authors (e.g., Flegal, 2006) have debated whether the term epidemic rightfully applies to obesity. Obesity is not literally catching or contagious: immunisation is not possible. Rather, the term epidemic tends to refer to the rapid increase in the incidence of obesity. Regardless of whether or not it is a true epidemic, authors (e.g., Gard & Wright, 2005) are critical of labelling it as such. They argue that the alarm and fear generated, which certainly are contagious, conjure up visions of a disaster that will "engulf us all" (p. 8). The news media are not blameless in this scaremongering. Justifying the use of inflammatory metaphors such as epidemic, killer, war, crisis, explosion, imminent doom, and a time bomb, Edgley and Brissett say they are necessary in order to galvanise an otherwise apathetic audience into action: it's the "only way to get anyone's attention" (1990, p. 268). Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that such language tends to tar overweight and obese individuals and make them victims in a war on obesity (O'Hara & Gregg, 2012). Interestingly, despite the continuing foray around the notion of an epidemic, there is now growing evidence that this so-called epidemic, represented by a rapidly increasing incidence of obesity, is now abating. The prevalence of obesity no longer appears to be continuing to increase at the same rate it was 10 years ago (Flegal, Carroll, Ogden, & Curtin, 2010; C. L. Ogden et al., 2006). The suggestion is that the obesity epidemic as such, is nearing its end (Gard, 2011a).

Categories of overweight

The words overweight and obesity are often used interchangeably to describe excess body weight. Overweight is more than a descriptive adjective, it implies a notion of measurable excess; an unfavourable comparison to some form of normal or standard weight. *Obese* and *obesity* are medical terms that have negative connotations. In a medicalised health context, overweight and obesity are distinguishable by the parameters of the body mass index (BMI).

The BMI is defined as weight divided by height squared (kg/m^2). So someone who weighs 80 kilograms and is 1.75 metres tall would have a BMI of 26.1. In this way bodies can be numerically classified and placed on a continuum from low to high BMI. The BMI continuum is delineated into four main categories: underweight, normal, overweight, and obese. However, these categories are somewhat arbitrary and have changed over time (Jeffery et al., 2000). Currently, the BMI categories are as follows: a person who has a BMI of less than 18.5 is categorised as underweight; a BMI of 18.5 up to, but below 25 is categorised as normal; a BMI of 25 up to, but below 30 is categorised as overweight and lastly a BMI of 30 and over is categorised as obese. The obese category has more recently been further broken down into class I obese having a BMI of 30 and over but less than 35; class II obese having a BMI of 35 and over but less than 40; and class III obese having a BMI of 40 and over (World Health Organization, 2000).

The BMI is used to make generalisations and predictions about health. For instance, according to the World Health Organisation (2013) the overweight and obese categories imply an abnormal and excessive accumulation of body fat, which is linked to an increased risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer, as well as increased all-cause mortality (Fontaine et al., 2003; Guh et al., 2009).

However, these assumptions and others around BMI categorisation and health are controversial and problematic, especially if researchers use varying reference categories or category cut points. For instance, the cut point for the overweight category has been variously set from a BMI of 30 down to 27 and then down to a more stringent 25 (Jeffery et al., 2000). Category changes like this mean that significant numbers of people move from one category into another. In the example where the overweight category cut point was lowered from 30 down to 27 and later down to 25 millions of people became overweight literally overnight.

Understanding movement from one BMI category to another is important because health sequelae are suggested to be dramatically different between categories (Fontaine et al., 2003). An appreciation of category changes is important when

comparing epidemiological research findings that span several decades: categorisation can cause problems.

The categorisation problem

Epidemiological and population studies have shown that the prevalence of overweight and obesity, which remained fairly constant from 1960 to 1980, has steadily increased from the mid-1980s onwards in most countries (Flegal, 2005; Flegal et al., 2010; Gard & Wright, 2005). A trend of increasing weight has also been observed in New Zealand (New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2004). It provides a useful illustration of why categorising weight is problematic.

From 1977 to 2003 there was a noticeable increase in the percentage of individuals categorised as overweight and obese in New Zealand. But average weight of women in New Zealand over that period only increased by 5.9 kilograms, which is less than 230 grams per year and for men it was even less at 170 grams per year (New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2004).

While there has been a significant increase in the number of people who are categorised as overweight and obese, their actual weight gain has not been substantial. Only a meagre weight gain can shift a person from one category into another. The vast majority of people in the overweight and obese categories are now at weight levels that are only slightly higher than those of their parents and grandparents, a generation ago. Consequently, as some researchers (Campos et al., 2006; Flegal, 2005) have suggested, categorising bodies into discrete BMI categories has contributed to the alarm around an epidemic of overweight and obesity. Rather than an alarming epidemic, we are seeing subtle shifts due to thousands of formerly *normal* category people gaining a modest amount of weight and shifting into the *overweight* category (Basham et al., 2006; Gard & Wright, 2005).

Importantly, the suggestion of exaggeration with regard to the obesity epidemic does not deny that weight has increased over the past 30 years: it certainly has. The entire distribution of BMI has shifted and it has also become moderately skewed (Flegal & Troiano, 2000; Friedman, 2003). This means that average BMI has increased, but there have also been larger increases in weight for the obese class II and class III BMI categories relative to other categories (Flegal, 2005; Freedman, Khan, Serdula, Galuska, & Dietz, 2002; Katzmarzyk & Mason, 2006; Wang & Beydoun, 2007).

The class II and class III categories of obesity represent approximately eight percent and five percent of the population respectively and significant weight increases here are concerning (Pi-Sunyer, 2002b; Wang & Beydoun, 2007). Whilst the overweight

and obese class I categories may not necessarily be associated with poor health sequelae or increased rates of morbidity and mortality, the higher class II and III BMI categories usually are (Campos et al., 2006; Flegal et al., 2013; Gaesser, 2003; Kim & Popkin, 2006).

Besides concerns around BMI categorisation, caution is needed when using the BMI as an indicator of excessive and abnormal accumulation of fat in adipose tissue or as a predictor of health. The BMI is a crude measure. It does not take into account differences due to age (Flicker et al., 2010), gender (Romero-Corral et al., 2008), ethnicity (Deurenberg, Durenberg-Yap, & Curicci, 2002), fitness or muscularity (Nevill, Stewart, Olds, & Holder, 2006). It is especially limited for individuals in the overweight category and it also misses people with concerning amounts of adiposity who fall in the normal BMI category (Romero-Corral et al., 2008). However, when it comes to people with BMIs over 35, the BMI does seem to be more accurate at predicting adiposity.

Advances in technology like computerised tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) enable more accurate measurement of fat and adipose tissue, but this level of technology is not practical for everyday health screening. Other measures such as waist circumference and waist-to-hip ratios, skin-fold measures, and so on are alternative measures of obesity and considered by some (e.g., Guh et al., 2009) to be better predictors of disease. However, these measures also have limitations and like the BMI, should be used with caution (Nevill et al., 2006; Romero-Corral et al., 2008; Van Pelt, Evans, Schechtman, Ehsani, & Kohrt, 2001). Regardless of its limitations, the BMI continues to be widely used in medical settings and in research (Jutel, 2006).

The weight on health

With endeavours to attain the ideal of femininity often viewed as frivolous or even narcissistic (de Souza & Ciclitira, 2005), linking these pursuits to health legitimises them (Metzl, 2010). It is suggested that weight impacts on health and this can be categorised in two ways. The first arises from the manifestation of fat on the body and what Orbach (2006, p. 67) calls “fat in the mind”. It involves the stigmatisation of fatness and the behavioural, socioeconomic, and psycho-physiological consequences of bias and prejudice. Fat-stigma contributes to chronic disease due to stress and these consequences are often underestimated (O'Reilly & Sixsmith, 2012; Puhl & Heuer, 2008).

The second form of impact on health is associated with excess fat *in* the body and among other things is due to metabolically active adipose tissue exhibited in illnesses

such as type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease. From an illness perspective, biomedical anti-obesity research concerns itself with the effects of weight and fat in relation to morbidity (sickness or disease) and mortality (death).

Weight and morbidity

Increasingly, long held beliefs predicated on anti-obesity research that excess weight is associated with dire health consequences, are being challenged (e.g., Jerant & Franks, 2012). *Health,* or more particularly avoiding illness, is a reason why people decide to lose weight. It is therefore important to understand what the *health* implications of excess weight are and whether *health* is a reasonable ground on which to encourage a person to lose weight.

A systematic review of the associations between weight and disease has attributed up to 18 co-morbidities to overweight and obesity (Guh et al., 2009). For women, some of these include breast, endometrial, ovarian, colorectal, and other cancers; cardiovascular and metabolic disease; kidney and gall bladder disease; asthma; sleep apnea; and osteoarthritis (Guh et al., 2009; Kim & Popkin, 2006; Olshansky et al., 2005; Pi-Sunyer, 2002a). A discussion of all these co-morbidities is beyond the scope of my thesis. However, because the literature on weight often focuses on the incidence of type II diabetes and heart disease as reasons why people should lose weight, a brief discussion of these two co-morbidities is warranted here.

Type II diabetes, which impacts on quality of life, is more common in obesely overweight people. Research suggests that a woman with a BMI over 30 has a 28-fold increased risk of developing the disease compared to a woman with a BMI of 21 (Kopelman, 2000). However, there is also evidence that being overweight or having class I obesity *per se* are not necessarily associated with increased morbidity (Jerant & Franks, 2012). Rather, the suggestion is that it is *gaining* weight that increases the risk of developing diabetes relative to maintaining a stable weight. This finding has implications for people who lose weight and subsequently regain the weight lost.

There is interplay with obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Research finds that people with obesity are prone to develop type II diabetes but the reverse is also the case since people with type II diabetes are likely to become obesely overweight and both are at risk of developing cardiovascular disease (Rana, Nieuwdorp, Jukema, & Kastelein, 2007). The suggestion is that obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancers are all *symptoms* of something else, like the consumption of refined carbohydrates, starches, and sugars (Taubes, 2008). Type II diabetes can be significantly improved through a healthy diet, limiting refined carbohydrates, and

engaging in adequate regular exercise (McAuley & Blair, 2011). Since this is entirely independent of weightloss, it suggests that more emphasis should be placed on lifestyle rather than focusing on weight or BMI (Campos et al., 2006; Gaesser, 1999). A connection to diet and exercise is not unique to diabetes.

High blood pressure (hypertension) and heart disease are presumed to co-vary with weight. There seems to be a relationship between increasing BMI and heart disease such that a woman with BMI over 29 has a 3.6-fold increased risk of developing the disease compared to a woman with a BMI below 21 (Kopelman, 2000). In saying this though, upper body fat is an important mediator here. A *pear-shaped* woman, one who carries much of her body fat around her hips and thighs, with a correspondingly low waist-to-hip ratio has a one-half heart disease risk compared to a woman with small hips relative to her waist (Kopelman, 2000). In this regard, waist-to-hip ratios and waist circumference measures are better predictors of both heart diseases and type II diabetes than BMI (Guh et al., 2009; Van Pelt et al., 2001).

Significantly, many obesely overweight people have entirely normal blood pressures and for those who do not, hypertension can be markedly improved through diet and exercise independent of weightloss (Gaesser, 2002). A connection has been found with blood pressure and weight fluctuation or yo-yo dieting however (Guagnano et al., 2000; O'Reilly & Sixsmith, 2012). Obese people are more likely to diet than slim people (Bish et al., 2005). With dieting often resulting in yo-yoing or weight cycling, it is argued that the association between obesity and high blood pressure may simply be due to obese individuals yo-yoing more (Gaesser, 2002).

The important point to make here is that the relationship between weight and health is convoluted and complex. The health and illness concerns around overweight and obesity are being questioned (e.g., Bacon & Aphramor, 2011; Gaesser, 2003). For instance, some researchers (Campos et al., 2006; Flegal, Graubard, Williamson, & Gail, 2005) point to evidence of rising life expectancy and decreasing mortality rates for heart disease seemingly going hand-in-hand with an increased incidence of obesity. Furthermore studies have reported evidence of obesity paradoxes, whereby increased body weight offers a survival advantage (e.g., McAuley & Blair, 2011; S. Morse, Gulati, & Reisin, 2010).

There is also increasing evidence that the co-morbidities purported to be associated with weight can be mitigated by diet and physical exercise (e.g., Gaesser, 2002; Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, 2006). Healthful food choices and physical exercise impact on health and are argued to be better predictors of health than BMI (e.g., Campos, 2004; Gaesser, 2002). But, while there is a relationship for instance between fruit and vegetable intake and disease (Bazzano et al., 2002), and obesity (Ledoux,

Hingle, & Baranowski, 2010), this relationship may be confounded by socioeconomic status. Healthful food choices such as fruit and vegetables can be expensive such that nutritionally poor and energy-dense foods are sometimes chosen simply because of price (Konttinen, Sarlio-Lähteenkorva, Silventoinen, Männistö, & Haukkala, 2012). Clearly, the relationship between BMI and morbidity, and health and losing weight is not straightforward or simple.

Weight and mortality

Much of the hype around fatness and excess weight is due to the construction of obesity as a *'killer'* disease. Obesity has been said to kill 300,000 people in the US each year (e.g., Allison, Fontaine, Manson, Stevens, & VanItallie, 1999). However, some researchers (e.g., Flegal, 2005; Flegal, Graubard, Williamson, & Gail, 2007; Gard, 2011a) have argued that this figure[9] is an exaggeration. More recent research using data sets such as the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (NHANES) has arrived at new figures. Taking into account pertinent factors such as physical inactivity, poor diet, access to adequate healthcare, and risky weightloss practices, Flegal et al (2005) attribute 112,000 deaths to obesity. They also find that people who are overweight but not obese have a significantly lower risk of death than people with a normal BMI. Rather, increased mortality was associated with the underweight and class II and III obesity categories (Flegal et al., 2005; Flegal et al., 2013). In other words, only after BMI reaches 35 and higher is there a meaningful increase in mortality. I suggest that these findings give people who are overweight and only mildly obese and their doctors cause to reconsider whether trying to lose weight is warranted, especially when weight *per se* is not necessarily causing a problem.

Ignoring evidence to the contrary, the popular belief remains that overweight and obesity are associated with ill health. We remain caught in a weight-centered health paradigm (O'Reilly & Sixsmith, 2012). Unfortunately, the notion of health independent of body size has yet to catch on. The pervasive underlying presumptions about slimness and fatness remain: slimness is more desirable than fatness; fatness increases health risks; long-term weightloss is achievable; and weightloss lessens morbidity and mortality factors. Having discussed the impact of weight on beauty and health, I will now consider how fat people can become thin. My discussion here will focus on women.

[9] This figure was originally taken from a study conducted by McGinnis and Foege (1993) who, despite attempts (1998) to correct the persistent misuse of their research, attributed the deaths to diet and inactivity patterns and not obesity. Nevertheless, this figure has become the seeming *truth* on which the "obesity kills" maxim is based (Gaesser, 2002, p. 76).

Losing weight

Prior to the 1900s, body fat was seen as a sign of robust health. It was a reserve that was drawn upon when food was scarce and saw people through the killer diseases of the time: pneumonia, tuberculosis, and influenza (Gaesser, 2002). But even in those days, excessive weight, or what approximates morbid obesity today, was considered problematic and required a weightloss regimen. More than two thousand years ago Hippocrates too (see Procope, 1952) had an opinion on the matter, albeit with a notable reservation:

> *"Those desiring to lose weight should perform hard work before food. They should take their meals after exertion and while still panting from fatigue. They should, moreover, eat only once a day and take no baths and sleep on a hard bed and walk naked as long as possible … Dieting that causes excessive loss of weight … is beset with difficulties."*

Dieting is about restraint and control (Crescioni et al., 2011). The female form has been restrained and regulated, manipulated and controlled in a variety of ways; this is not new. There has been foot binding, breast ironing, corsetry, and now more recently cosmetic surgery (Gimlin, 2000). To attain the slim ideals of female attractiveness and avoid the stigma of excess weight, women engage in a variety of weightloss activities: dieting (Germov & Williams, 1999), fasting (Johnstone, 2007), appetite suppressants (Davidson et al., 1999), exercise (Schoeller, Shay, & Kushner, 1997), cognitive behaviour therapies (Z. Cooper et al., 2010), smoking (Garner, 1997), and bariatric surgery (Thorsby, 2007), to name a few. Cultural expectations and social pressure make attaining an ideal weight an important social achievement; trying to lose weight is very prevalent (Sobal & Maurer, 1999a).

Each year, wanting to lose weight tops most New Year's resolution lists (Beckman, 2013) but these goals are usually ill-fated (Kassirer & Angell, 1998). At any one time, around 89 percent of women say they would like to be slimmer and over 45 percent are actively engaged in trying to lose weight (Basham et al., 2006; Bish et al., 2005; Bordo, 2003). These figures are higher than found previously (e.g., Garner, 1997), so weightloss pursuits are increasing. The prevalence of trying to lose weight also varies with BMI. Among women with BMIs over 25 but below 30, 60 percent are trying to lose weight, and among women with BMIs over 30 it is 70 percent (Bish et al., 2005).

Motivation to lose weight is often predicated on a belief that it will bring significant changes: changes for the better (Granberg, 2006). The desire for better

appearance is often the main reason women try to lose weight, but they usually offset this wish with more legitimate concerns around health. Health concerns are certainly the main reason people are advised to lose weight, be it by family, friends, or health professionals (Bish et al., 2005; Galuska, Will, Serdula, & Ford, 1999). Weightloss for health improvement is also a major government health initiative in New Zealand (New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2011a).

Women are twice as likely as men to diet (Oliver, 2006). Some feminists (e.g., Bartky, 2010; Bordo, 2003) argue that women diet to lose weight because they are ideologically duped by (hetero)sexual beauty ideals. They claim that dieting and working on the body are patriarchal disciplinary practices: dieting women are "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1975, p. 138). But, dieting women are also agentic. Women choose to manipulate diet and exercise in order to achieve desired weight and beauty ideals in the knowledge that pursuing these ideals will bring certain rewards. These are "enabling acts of self-transformation" (Heyes, 2006, p. 128). Heyes goes on to argue that actively losing weight can help women develop capabilities rather than just increase docility.

The usual expectation is that weightloss will bring about some form of transformation. Along with better appearance and health, women decide to lose weight in the hope of, among other things, finding a better job, more friends, a partner, and romance (Bordo, 2003; Granberg, 2006). The proviso is that success will only be achieved with sufficient self-sacrifice.

Saying weightloss success is reliant upon *sufficient self-sacrifice* conveniently releases the weightloss industry of responsibility should the *solution* they recommend not work (Boero, 2007). Blame for failure rests with the *recalcitrant* woman who sought help but simply did not try hard enough. Constructing weightloss success and failure in this way has psychological consequences (Bacon & Aphramor, 2011; O'Reilly & Sixsmith, 2012) and draws criticism (e.g. ethical concerns Holm, 2007). This position of personal responsibility also tends to ignore the significance of individual differences like genetic predispositions (Yang et al., 2007), physiological factors (Knudson et al., 2005), and all important socioeconomic factors (Wang & Beydoun, 2007), which are essentially beyond an individual's control, yet very appreciably impact on weightloss success (Crescioni et al., 2011).

There are many and varied ways to lose weight. In the 1950s and 1960s risky starvation-type crash diets were popular, as were interventions like jaw wiring (Gaesser, 2002). More recently, slimmers use portion control, meal replacements, exercise programmes, laxatives, appetite suppressants, purging, smoking, liposuction, and bariatric surgery among other methods to lose weight but on the whole, success

rates are poor (see Clifton, Noakes, Keogh, & Foster, 2003; Gaesser, 2002; Gard & Wright, 2005; W. Johnson & DeMaria, 2006; Johnstone, 2007; J. Ogden, 1992). There are also risk factors associated with most weightloss methods, which for the most part tend to be ignored (Gaesser, 1999). The negative outcomes of weightloss are rarely mentioned in the literature but it is notable that researchers are beginning to acknowledge the shortcomings of *treatment*. For example, cognitive behaviour therapy researchers concede that "it is ethically questionable to claim that psychological treatments for obesity "work" in the absence of data on their longer-term effects" (Z. Cooper et al., 2010, p. 706).

When weightloss is *successful*, there is little evidence that losing weight *per se* will increase longevity (Gaesser, 1999; Simonsen, Hundrup, Obel, Grønbæk, & Heitmann, 2008; Sørensen, 2003). Also, research looking at morbidity and whether losing weight reduces the incidence of diseases such as endometrial, cervical, breast, and ovarian cancer has had mixed results (Kulie et al., 2011). There is a suggestion that a small 5-10 percent weightloss for individuals who are morbidly obese with co-morbidities such as diabetes can be beneficial, but findings remain mixed (Dalle-Grave et al., 2005; De Vet, Nelissen, Zeelenberg, & De Ridder, 2013).

The recommendation is that rather than focusing on weightloss, effort is more effectively directed towards maintaining weight and preventing obesity with an emphasis on a nutritious diet and effective exercise. There is also increasing evidence that adopting a health-at-every-size approach to health is beneficial physiologically and psychosocially in contrast to programmes focusing on weightloss (Bacon & Aphramor, 2011; Dickins, Thomas, King, Lewis, & Holland, 2011)

Dieting

There is a plethora of diets. Some, like the grapefruit diet, the Beverley Hills or juice detox diet, and the ice-cream diet may not be taken seriously, but others such as Weight Watchers, and Jenny Craig diets certainly are. There is however, scant evidence that these more *legitimate* programmes such as Weight Watchers provide effective weightloss *treatment*. Furthermore, attrition rates are generally quite high, as is the probability of regaining weight (Jeffery et al., 2000; Tsai & Wadden, 2005). A three year community-based study in the US has shown that up to 95 percent of dieters who lost a significant amount of weight regained the weight they lost within five years, and most relapses occurred within one or two years of losing the weight (Crawford et al., 2000). It was also found that of people who lost weight, over 75 percent weighed more than

before they started their weightloss regimen (Jeffery et al., 2000; Klein, 1996). It seems that dieting often begets excess weight rather than the hoped for weightloss.

Dieting regimens are not without risks (Amigo & Fernandez, 2005). Several studies (see Basham et al., 2006) show that dieting can weaken body organs, impair lean tissue, impact metabolism, and increase vulnerability to disease when compared to maintaining a stable weight and not dieting. Also, weightloss and weight gain associated with weight yo-yoing, have shown increased risk of mortality compared with being even mildly obese and maintaining a stable weight (Amigo & Fernandez, 2005; Campos et al., 2006). Importantly, losing weight rapidly is very harmful (Ahmed, Flynn, & Alpert, 2001; Johnstone, 2007; Sours et al., 1981).

Regardless of advice to the contrary, women pursue slim ideals. Given that long-term weightloss is elusive, how successful slimming is done is not adequately understood. Various factors and strategies are suggested to contribute to success including frequent self-weighing (Butryn, Phelan, Hill, & Wing, 2007; VanWormer, Linde, Harnack, Stovitz, & Jeffery, 2012), establishing realistic weightloss goals (Byrne, 2002; Dalle-Grave et al., 2005), the importance of exercise (Anderson et al., 2001; Warburton et al., 2006), awareness of the energy composition of food and product labelling (Swinburn, Caterson, Seidell, & James, 2004; Wing & Hill, 2001), strong resolve and self control (Crescioni et al., 2011), vigilance (Green, Larkin, & Sullivan, 2009), and being "reactive and proactive with constant monitoring" (Sarlio-Lähteenkorva, 2000, p. 73), and of course patience, because weightloss is best done slowly (Amigo & Fernandez, 2005; Dalle-Grave et al., 2005).

A nutritious diet and effective exercise are widely postulated as important for health, fitness, and weightloss (e.g., Gaesser, 2002; Wing & Hill, 2001). They have been referred to as "the Big Two" in this context (Keith et al., 2006, p. 1585). There are general guidelines for healthful nutrition and exercise including expending recommended amounts of energy and eating suggested amounts of protein, carbohydrate, fat, minerals, and fluids (e.g. see, New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2003). Other *healthful* suggestions include such things as "walking an extra 2000 steps a day" (Lean, 2005, p. 1340), and eating less fat but more complex carbohydrates, including "eating more fruit, more vegetables, more grains, and more legumes" (Gaesser, 2002, p. 199).

When discussing how the successful slimmers on their often discussed National Weight Control Registry had lost weight and kept it off, Wing and Hill (2001) said that weightloss had to include dietary changes and increasing physical activity. But they conceded that they could not find "any particular type of diet modification … that is

common to these successful weight loss maintainers" (p. 337). In other words there is no one formula or right way to successfully lose weight: there are many ways.

Summary

For various reasons, many women are unhappy with their bodies and want to lose weight. But losing weight is not easy and the notion of "permanent weightloss" seems "an oxymoron" (Gaesser, 2006, p. 91). Given the high failure rate of weightloss regimens and the serious health ramifications of weight cycling and weight gain, it is important to avoid relapses and understand how to maintain a reduced weight. While factors such as diet and exercise, realistic goals, self-weighing, vigilance, and patience may all play a part in losing weight and keeping weight off, little is known about how these practices are incorporated into the everyday lives of successful slimmers. It seems reasonable to suggest that if we want to understand weightloss, and more particularly successful slimming, we need to look at the minutiae of the everyday practices of successful slimmers.

Weightloss is about the transformation of bodies. It is a process that is time-consuming: losing weight is best conducted slowly. Previous research (Sarlio-Lähteenkorva, 2000, p. 73) suggests that "the battle is not over after weight loss". The implication is that once weightloss is achieved, staying slim is a complex and constant struggle.

To explore how successful slimming is achieved I will need to talk to women who have successfully maintained a significant weightloss about their past experiences of losing weight and their current day-to-day practices of staying slim. Time has become an important element in my research. To explore the complexity of successful slimming I will need to use a creative and innovative research method, which will take the process of time passing into account. In Chapter Three I discuss the methodological underpinnings of my research before outlining the methods I will use to collect my data.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

> *"Progress in science is won by the application of an informed imagination to a problem of genuine consequence; not by the habitual application of some formulaic mode of inquiry to a set of quasi-problems chosen chiefly because of their compatibility with the adopted method".*
> --DANIEL ROBINSON, Paradigms and the Myth of Framework: How Science Progresses.

Construction of any kind necessitates a well thought out and carefully designed plan with more than a modicum of foundation and framework. Experience would suggest that without sound foundation, a structure stands somewhat precariously and is prone to flailing: a breeze of buffeting criticism capable of razing it to the ground.

Having introduced the topic of this research, I will now leave general aspects of obesity, weightloss, health, and beauty behind momentarily to discuss the theoretical foundation of *the method* used in this research to collect data. In this methodology chapter I discuss methodological issues, like the value of narrative and arts-based research generally, and go on to reveal how the methods used to collect data for this research project were arrived at. In the chapter that follows it, the Method, I explain what was actually done. Firstly, I discuss who the participants were; secondly, how the data were collected; thirdly, what procedures were followed; and finally, I provide a rationale for the methods used. These two chapters, Methodology, and Method, constitute a substantial portion of this thesis because exploring new and creative ways of collecting and (re)presenting research data have been a very important and significant aspect of my PhD process.

My decision to adopt a qualitative, interpretive research method of inquiry was never an issue since, as McLeod says, qualitative methods seek to "uncover the meanings embedded within a slice of social life". He goes on to add that they contribute to the "growth of understanding rather than to the collection of factual knowledge and

construction of causal explanation" (2001, p. 178). It is a potential for gaining insight into the subjective understandings, and meanings of individual experience promised by qualitative methods, which is of relevance for researchers in psychology and allied health disciplines generally, and for my research into successful slimming in particular. However, while opting for a qualitative, interpretive mode of inquiry was straight forward, my choice of methodology and method was not.

My research project required a methodology that sought to uncover meaning and perceptions on the part of the women participating in my research. Faced with a plethora of methodologies, each with their own theoretical underpinnings, I found it was not simply a matter of plucking *a* methodology off the shelf. Weighing up strengths and weaknesses, no one methodology suited the particular purposes of my research project. Consequently, it was necessary to draw on and mould several methodologies into *a way* of achieving the desired outcome. My route has been one of innovation and invention; there is a strong founding in narrative theory, but ethnography, performative social science, and ethnodrama also play a part.

Introducing narrative

> *"For we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative."* --(Hardy, 1968, p. 5)

Narrative is one of many research methods used within the different disciplines across humanities and the social sciences and it provides a powerful methodology for qualitative exploration. It is distinguishable from other qualitative approaches by its interest in the (con)sequences of lived experience. The influence of narrative has been felt in such diverse fields as literature, education, journalism, tourism, healthcare, history, computer science, theology, the arts, as well as psychology and many other areas, as researchers actively explore the complexity of human experience (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008; Bruner, 1990; Czarniawska, 2004; Emerson & Frosh, 2004; Frank, 1995; Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; Mateas & Sengers, 2003; Morgan & Pritchard, 2005; M. Murray, 1997, 1999, 2003; Polkinghorne, 1988; Radley & Bell, 2007; Riessman, 2008; Tamboukou, 2008).

There is a need for a narrative mode of investigation because human experience cannot be studied directly. It can however, be studied by looking at the ways stories are told and the way people represent their experiences (Denzin, 2000, 2010). Narrative

inquiry involves gazing back over the ups and downs of past experience to find meanings that may not be available in the present moment (Freeman, 2010). It can also stir emotions and provide insight into individual and unique human experience (e.g., K Gergen & Gergen, 1983; M. Gergen & Gergen, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative, very appropriately, captures the complexities of human meaning-making; there is nothing that captures it more intelligently, more sensitively, or more sympathetically (Andrews et al., 2011).

Definitions of narrative are found on a continuum from very broad, to cover just about anything concerning a person's life, to a rather more restricted definition concerning a specific past event with a particular set of structural elements (Riessman, 2008). There is no all-encompassing, simple definition of narrative. Aristotle in his 'Poetics' says; "Narrative is a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end", and Berger (1997) takes it to be a sequence of events over a period of time. Narrative goes beyond mere description. For instance, saying "my neighbour has a dog" is a description, but saying "my neighbour was bitten by her dog" is a narrative. For this project I will adopt Hinchman and Hinchman's (1997) definition and define narrative as: a sequence of events that are connected in a meaningful way; for a specific audience; in order to make sense of the world and a person's experience of it.

The term narrative is often used interchangeably with story. One convention makes a distinction between these two terms and uses narrative when referring to a cultural, community level of analysis and uses story when referring to the individual (Rappaport, 1993). Another convention suggests that narrative is both phenomenon and method of enquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; B. Smith & Sparkes, 2006) and that a distinction can be made between an individual's story as the phenomenon, and a narrative as pertaining to the outcome of a method of analysis. However, these conventions are not standardised. In this thesis, the conventions of using story and narrative for individual/phenomenon and cultural/analysis respectively are kept in mind and generally adhered to. But as is common in the literature, on occasions these words will be used interchangeably.

In Western culture, narratives adopt and conform to a recognisable structure. For example, "once upon a time" signals where the story begins and, "they lived happily ever after," signals the end. Stories are everywhere. Writer and poet, Muriel Rukeyser (Rukeyser, 1968), offers an affirmation of the significance of storytelling with, "The universe is made of stories, not of atoms" in her poem *The Speed of Darkness*. Narratives are (re)presented in biographies and conversations, diaries and drawings, songs and drama, emails and weblogs, mime and dance, newspapers and television, texts and tweets, paintings and photographs, stained glass windows and cartoons, poems and

letters, movies and fairy tales. With a potential for obtaining seemingly limitless numbers of stories, it is through the ordinary act of storytelling that narrative has a great deal to offer those who want to see how knowledge is constructed in our everyday world. McAdams explains a need for narrative thusly:

> *"If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insight into the meaning of my own life, then I, too, must come to know my own story. I must come to see in all its particulars the narrative of the self – the personal myth – that I have tacitly even unconsciously, composed over the course of my years. It is a story I continue to revise, and tell to myself (and sometimes to others) as I go on living."*
> --(McAdams, 1993, p11)

This description explains the value of storytelling in discovering who we are and McAdams (1993, p. 11) goes on to explain that it is through our personal stories that we discover what we believe to be "true and what is meaningful in life". However, our stories are not able to be wholly personal. Rather, the stories that we tell about ourselves are guided by the narratives and storylines already in existence[10], these are the so called master-tales or grand-narratives (Lyotard, 1979). Examples of grand-narratives are patriarchal dominance, political democracy, Christian ideology, natural science and positivism, and so on. These master-tales privilege some stories but silence others and they craft and shape who we are.

Narrative is "a point of intersection and crossover between the social sciences and the humanities" and it is where sociology and psychology overlap (Andrews, Day Sclater, Rustin, Squire, & Treacher, 2000, p. 1). Although initially not taken seriously, narrative has had a relatively long history in psychology. However, it has been the works of Sarbin (1986), Mishler (1986) Polkinghorne (1988) Bruner (1990) and the Gergens (1983) that are considered responsible for the more recent narrative turn in psychology: *narrative thinking* represents a significant development for the discipline. Narrative knowing is suggested by Worth (2008) to be a way of reasoning. Unlike traditional forms of knowing of *what* and *how,* narrative provides empathic insight and offers a way of knowing *what it is like.* Andrews *et al.* (2000) say that stories have important connections with the nature of experience, but unlike other language or discourse-based research, narrative does not leave out the important dimensions of

[10] Acknowledging the social construction of knowledge would seem at odds with a notion of a master-tale or grand-narrative insofar as the existence of a grand-narrative suggests that there is a story out there to be captured. This would surely be a positivist view. However, as Hendry (2007) says, it is not the narratives themselves that are important. Rather, it is the meanings a storyteller gives to them and why a particular story is told at a particular time that is even more interesting.

time and subjectivity. Narrative plays a crucial part in all human experiences and "offers a sense-making process which is fundamental to understanding human reality" (Hiles & Cermak, 2008, p. 149).

I believe we live storied lives in a story-shaped world: we shape the stories that we tell and are shaped by them. We are the heroes and heroines or protagonists in the stories we tell about our lives and ourselves. We create, recreate, and share stories in order to understand and make sense of our own lives and the lives of others. These social, storytelling settings and exchanges guide behaviour. For instance, we learn consequences from fictive narratives and dramas; like that fair damsels need to wait to be rescued by a capable, handsome prince; or that slimness is synonymous with health and beauty.

Our personal stories and the narratives (re)told by community and culture shape identity. Therefore, the fabric of who we are is constructed through language via the stories and narratives we tell and hear. We are our stories and our stories are us. It is claimed that the construction and maintenance of identity is a primary role of storytelling and narrative (Hiles & Cermak, 2008). As such, it is understandable that researchers (Crossley, 2000, 2007; K Gergen & Gergen, 1986; Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; McAdams, 1993; M. Murray, 2003; Riessman, 2008; Rivera-Fuentes, 2008; Sarlio-Lähteenkorva, 2000; B. Smith & Sparkes, 2006; Sparkes, 2008; Tamboukou, 2010) continue to be interested in narrative forms of inquiry in qualitative research in psychology.

Narrative and identity

Numerous tensions are evident surrounding storytelling and identity, and have been discussed by a number of writers (Andrews et al., 2008; B. Smith & Sparkes, 2006) with themes including: identity and narrative; ontology and narrative; and analysis and narrative. In this next section I will focus on the arguments surrounding narrative and identity since they form the main theoretical assumptions upon which my research is based, and will then go on to discuss how these theoretical assumptions inform both my data gathering method and the approach I have taken to analyse and (re)present these data.

The tension concerning narrative and identity, or in other words, narrative and *self*, begins with a debate about whether narrative *is* identity, or whether identity *is* a narrative. Some authors argue the former, that each of us (re)creates and lives a life-story and that this story is us: our identity (e.g., Sacks, 1985). Others argue the latter, that narrative does not come before identity, but rather identity is a life-story that

"provides meaning, unity, and purpose" (e.g., McAdams, 1993, p. 6). Rather than try to reconcile these tensions, I find affinity with the notion (e.g., Bruner, 1987) that narrative and identity overlap and are performed simultaneously: they infiltrate each other and are inseparable. While some authors are cautious of this view, suggesting it reduces and over-simplifies identity to the bounds of language and presumes a story to be capable of encompassing all that we are (Craib, 2000; Crossley, 2000), I agree with Squire *et al.* (2008, p. 9), who suggest that we must be mindful that sometimes the whole story is not obtained or the story obtained is not complete, perhaps because "experience and subjectivity cannot fully make their way into language". Regardless of the position taken, the consensus is that storytelling, narrative, and identity are intimately linked.

Narrative and identity are also imbued with complexity, flexibility, variability, multiplicity, fragmentation, and context-specificity (K Gergen, 2000). Identity and the concept of who we are is a reflexive construction, and the story that we tell about ourselves is constantly in a state of flux and is never finished. Sarbin (2005) discusses narrative and the "whoness" of identity as constantly changing, because who we are depends on who we are talking to. For instance, when I am talking to my daughter, I am a mother; and when I talk to my students, I am a teacher; but even without an audience I am always in conversation and negotiation with my world.

Identity therefore, like narrative, is performative and context-dependant; with no two contexts ever quite the same, narrative and identity are always changing. While this perspective of identity being created and recreated and constantly changing is well recognised, this should not imply a continuous state of chaos. In fact the opposite is suggested, with a storyteller having an inherent desire to (re)present themselves as purposeful, unified, and held together in a consistent and ordered way: functioning effectively psychologically and socially (Crossley, 2000; Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988).

However, there is a suggestion that instead of the *teller* wanting unity, rather it is the *listener* who requires a narration to conform to familiar conventions and desires coherence. So, by being aware of cultural and storying conventions or rules, an audience will fill-in-the-gaps and put together pieces of information that are missing or disconnected, and create a cohesive, sensical story for themselves (Sarbin, 1986). Consequently, coherence is achieved by the co-construction and performative aspects of identity and narrative: it is a negotiated endeavour between storytellers and their audience (K Gergen, 1997).

While a desire for cohesion may indeed be important, there are some stories and storytelling that are undeniably chaotic, perplexing and contradictory, incomplete and

ambiguous. For example, disruptions caused by trauma, illness and migration often lead to fragmented or broken narratives (Hyden & Brockmeier, 2005; Hyvarinen, Hyden, Saarenheimo, & Tamboukou, 2010). Consequently, if too much emphasis is placed on coherence an under-estimation of the complexity of storying and hence lived experience generally can occur.

These varying perspectives surrounding narrative and identity insinuate insolvable tension and complexity. However, no particular perspective of narrative takes precedence over another and while these tensions may lead to feelings of standing on unstable ground, they also afford a sense of freedom since there can be no right or better perspective. I am not interested in trying to resolve these conflicting positions: they are beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, like others (e.g., Squire et al., 2008), I think it more important to concentrate on doing useful and innovative work.

In the section that now follows, I explore narrative structure and form, and work towards establishing the theory and foundation upon which my innovative research method and analysis are based. My process has not been simplistic or linear. I have drawn on several different and sometimes seemingly disparate ideas and theories, and pulled them together into a workable, rationalised whole; much like pulling together (and maintaining a strong hold of) the separate strings of a parachute before leaping from an aeroplane. Each string plays an important role in bringing a skydiver safely to the ground. As an allegorical skydiver, I draw the strings of my research method together in this next section before leaping into my research. It is not until nearing the end of this methodology chapter that the reasoning behind laying out the methodological process as I have, will be clear. As will be seen, the skydiver analogy is apt.

The structure and form of narrative investigation

The breadth of what is considered narrative investigation straddles a wide continuum. However, one way to separate the form or type of narrative research concerns the difference between research focused on *event*-narrative and on *experience*-narrative. At one end of the continuum, the narrative approach is defined in terms of the representation of events, and centres on narrative as text, with little account being taken of the context in which the narrative was produced. The storyteller recounts an event that has happened in the past and the researcher tends to focus on the syntax or the structural analysis of narration (e.g., Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Mishler, 1986; Patterson, 2008; Riessman, 2008). When personal stories are looked at as event-narratives, some of the co-constructedness of story creation between the storyteller

and audience is often overlooked. There tends to be a focus on events in a narrative, with other, nevertheless significant talk, for instance addressing identity, perhaps being ignored. The event level of narrative interest has been identified as the *small* story (Bamberg, 2006) of narrative investigation as opposed to the *big* story of experience-narrative with researchers tending to pay attention to the micro-linguistic aspects of storytelling, although this is certainly an oversimplification.

The other end of the continuum finds approaches exploring experience-narrative, and is the more commonly used narrative approach. Here stories range in length from segments of interviews to life histories told over many hours, and may be biographical in nature. Experience-narrative researchers are not interested in the micro-linguistic minutiae of narrative structure, preferring instead to explore broader concepts and themes of lived experience like for instance the stories around everyday objects and ordinary activities such as letters, mantelpieces, TV talk-shows, and travel (Giles, 2003; Hurdley, 2006; Morgan & Pritchard, 2005; Tamboukou, 2010). The focus is more on the semantics of narrated experience, with the assumptions that narratives are "sequential and meaningful, (re)present experience, reconstituting it as well as expressing it", and that they demonstrate some form of "transformation or change" (Squire, 2008, p. 42). The focus is on stories having meaning in relation to other stories and in a particular context, and how this meaning is (co)constructed both as the story is told and also as time passes.

It should be emphasised that the differences between event-narrative and experience-narrative are, in application, not as clear as they first appear. Rather, researchers tend to extract elements from approaches that best suit their own research. Because my research seeks to explore women's experiences of weight over a course of many years, I lean towards an experience-narrative approach and choose methods discussed by researchers like Gergen and Gergen (1986), Murray (1999, 2000), and Squire (2008). Here there is a sense of *the process of life* and an emphasis on the chronological, sequential and meaningful, and social features of narrative. These three features are now discussed in more detail. Given that I have chosen an experience-narrative form for my research, event-narrative is left behind and the term *experience-narrative* will be referred to simply as *narrative* from now on.

Time as a feature of narrative

Temporal concerns are an important feature of qualitative investigation and narrative research in particular: there is "no aspect of human reality that is without temporal dimension" (Brockmeier, 2000, p. 51). Time and narrative are inextricably woven

together in that narrative is almost always about time and narratives require a perspective of time in order to be meaningful. Also, time is organised through narratives and narrative humanises time since, as Ricoeur (1984, p. 52) says, "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence."

Traditionally, time is viewed as arrow-shaped with a chronologically linear procession of past, present, and future. Storytelling about lived experience creates other ways of viewing time. These include circular, cyclical, spiral, static, and fragmentary dimensions or shapes of time (see Brockmeier, 2000) that are linked to the rendering and reshaping of lived experience through storytelling. While we live our lives forwards, we understand our lives backwards: it is a retrospective endeavour requiring reflection (Sandelowski, 1999). Stories that we tell about ourselves and others can change as time passes and as new situations and life experiences are encountered. A good example of how past experiences are subject to re-evaluation and how narrative can change with time is seen in Murray's (1997) research into women's stories of being diagnosed with breast cancer, undergoing treatment and eventually beating the cancer, and their renegotiation of their pasts. Therefore, rather than a simple linear procession, past, present, and future time are linked: the present can influence past experiences as well as future possibilities (Brockmeier, 2000).

Meaning as a feature of narrative

The second feature of narrative is that it is meaningful: there is a suggestion of a theme and the use of emplotment. Ostensibly, a plot is a narrative form: it is a sequence of events that makes up a story and makes it distinctive. It is argued that the statement, "The king died and then the queen died" is merely a chronicle, whereas "The king died and then the queen died of grief" is a plot with an explicit link between the two events in the sequence (Forster, 1963). However, this link need not imply causality *per se*. An expectation of causality is avoided by acknowledging that putting these events together provides a simple explanation and increases understanding (Polkinghorne, 1988). For example, that the king's death so pained and upset the queen that she herself also died. So now a causal law (e.g., see Ricoeur, 1984), that the first event is both sufficient and necessary for the second event across a range of different contexts, is avoided. Rather, it is the nature of narrative, and particularly familiarity with forms of emplotment, that encourages inference of causal links between events.

There are several ways to classify a plot: two require some elaboration here since they informed the creative story elicitation method of my research, which will be

described shortly. One way of classifying emplotment is using the four well-known Western literary tropes: comedy, tragedy, romance, and satire (Frye, 1957; White, 1973). In *comedy* the protagonists usually belong to a particular society or group. They initially obstruct each other but eventually, despite setbacks and funny complications, resolve their issues striving for harmony and a happy ending. *Tragedy* is the opposite of comedy and is an individual's plight. The protagonist, subject to the rational laws of fate, falls two steps backwards with every step taken forward. The classical 'fall from grace' and 'all is lost' scenarios are experienced but while the outcome is dire, those left behind learn from these tragic circumstances. *Romance* focuses on a protagonist's battle against the 'forces of evil': after prolonged searching, trials, and adventures, then love, self-fulfilment, success, and glory are earned. The assumption is that all things, including life in general, have a true and deep meaning which a 'true' heroine will reveal or be made aware of. Finally there is *satire,* which is the opposite of romance: the protagonist will never win; victory, harmony, and self-fulfilment are seen as illusions and absurd. Irony, often with the benefit of hindsight, casts a sceptical, paradoxical, and contrary view of situations, suggesting things may not be as they appear.

Another way to classify emplotment is by using Gergen and Gergen's (1986) progressive, regressive and stable narrative forms. Here, a protagonist's connectedness or coherence, and sense of movement with respect to a specific goal are important. Also, it is the relationships among various events that are of interest rather than the events *per se*. In a *progressive* plot, events are linked in such a way that there is steady movement towards the goal; in a *regressive* plot, events move the protagonist away from the goal; and in a stable plot, the protagonist stagnates or procrastinates with neither movement towards the goal nor away from it. These progressive, regressive, and stable narrative forms exhaust the options for moving towards a goal and are very simple, rudimentary plots. They are substantially less complex than comedy, tragedy, romance, and satire plots and can be used to deconstruct these more elaborate literary tropes. For example a romance consists of a series of progressive-regressive-progressive-regressive-progressive plots before attaining a goal of self-fulfilment and success. Here the plot is initially progressive as the protagonist moves toward the goal but a turn-of-events or turning point results in a heading away from the goal, another turn-of-events returns the protagonist on a path towards the goal, and in the case of romance, to eventually attain the goal. It goes without saying that the eventuality of turning points or change contributes significantly to a story's complexity and appeal. A dramatic turn-of-events can make stories interesting, even exciting; although too many can be annoying and upsetting.

A plot, and the salience of emplotment, influences the flow of action and behaviour of a narrative's protagonists. Conversely, a particular sequence of events and sentiment defines a plot. For instance, if a movie is described as a romantic comedy, a certain sequence and (con)sequence of events is likely. Equally, the event known as 9/11 and the death of Princess Diana are often referred to as tragedies. Hence, our familiarisation of plots and the structure and form of narrative, influences how we perceive and think, imagine and relate, and make choices and act. Evidently, when presented with two or three pictures or descriptive phrases depicting people, the tendency is to connect them together to form a story reflecting human sentiments, purposes, values, judgments and goals (Sarbin, 1986). Interestingly, in Western cultures we tend to have a preference for a romance narrative form: the attainment of goals and happy endings (Frank, 1995). Although not of particular concern, these factors should be kept in mind when using a narrative approach in research since an individual's knowledge of literary form can influence the story they tell (De Medeiros, 2007).

The social feature of narrative

The third key feature of narrative is that it is inherently social. *My* telling *you* a story is a two-way contract (Langellier, 2003): it is something I am doing *for* you but also *with* you. Telling a story is a performance produced for a specific audience. As mentioned earlier, storytelling and narrative are intimately linked to identity: instead of constructing a standard narrative suitable for all occasions, storytellers shape a story for a particular audience and to present a particular image. Butler (1990, 1993) provides a definitive discussion on performativity and *doing* identity. She suggests that "…the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed" (Butler, 1990, p. 195), which resonates with the social and performative features of narrative. Storytellers are constructed through the stories they tell and consequently, they manipulate their stories by exaggerating certain aspects of a story on one occasion and down-playing or completely ignoring these aspects on another occasion, in order to present a particular identity (e.g. see M. Murray, 1999).

While it is convenient to discuss the chronological, meaningful, and social features of narrative separately, in practice they are inseparably connected. For instance, time or a sequence of events and meaning, are interrelated: the meaning from one sequence of events could lead to a completely different meaning or interpretation if the sequence is rearranged. A narrative follows certain *rules* of emplotment and a plot relates events to one another. By sequencing events with a beginning, middle, and an

end, a plot organises time with past, present, and future arranged in a coherent way (Andrews et al., 2000), and storytellers integrate these features of narrative as they tell their stories.

As seen earlier, the relationship events have to one another with respect to a goal determines a particular narrative form. These rudimentary progressive, regressive, and stable narrative forms have been represented visually (K Gergen & Gergen, 1986) and provide a pictorial way to locate, sequence, and evaluate life events. The visualisation of narrative form requires further discussion because it has implications for my research method.

Visualising narrative form

Narrative forms can be very usefully plotted or graphed to represent a protagonist's experience of a series of events (K Gergen & Gergen, 1986). The graphical representation of simple narrative forms like the progressive, regressive, and stable plots illustrated below can be extended and elaborated to very effectively represent a more complex romance literary trope visually (see figure 1).

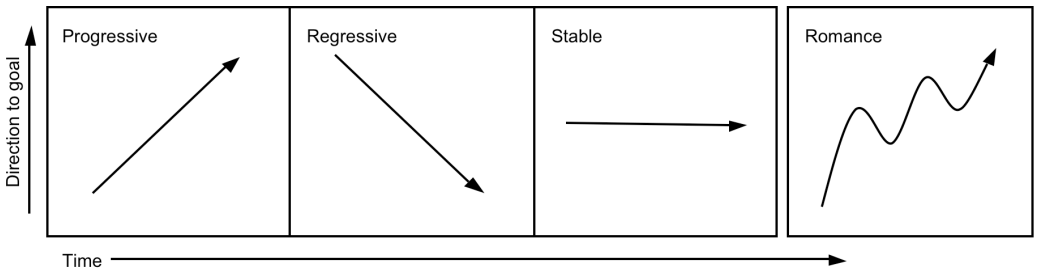


Figure 1: A series of graphs representing the three rudimentary narrative forms and a complex Romance literary trope (Source: Gergen and Gergen, 1986).

The *x*-axis represents a dimension of time, and the *y*-axis represents a dimension of a goal, together they relate to an action the protagonist is engaged in. The time dimension could span moments, hours, or a lifetime, and the goal or action could be anything from making a salad, feelings of anxiety, or losing 20 kilograms. It is a way of looking at *an aspect* of a protagonist's life and is especially valuable when time or change over time is of interest. Conceivably, several aspects could be plotted, layered, and interwoven to facilitate examining the complexity of lived experience like in narrative research looking at weightloss and successful slimming.

A woman who has successfully lost a significant amount of weight may tell a story about battling to stay on her diet. For instance, she could have faced obstacles like being tempted by *forbidden* food; or living in an area that had poor street lighting,

hindering her ability to exercise. Yet, she found a way to overcome these obstacles and fought on to reach her slimness goal: a romance weightloss narrative.

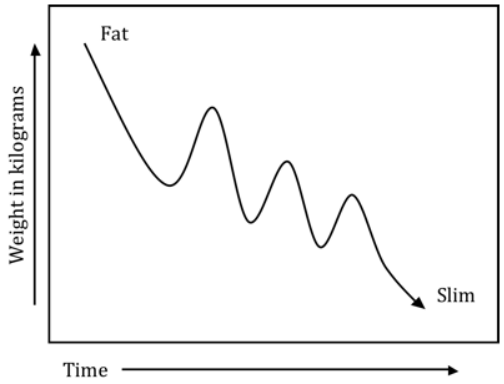


Figure 2: A visual representation of a Romance weightloss narrative.

Notice that figure 2 could be a visual representation of the woman's story about her journey to her goal of slimness. Visually representing and deconstructing narratives in this way can be insightful and has implications for research design, data collection, and analysis alike (see Sandelowski, 1999). It offers an interesting perspective from which to look at storytelling and narratives generally, and provides the foundation for my development of a rather novel method for eliciting stories. The value of visualising narrative form for my research project about fatness and weight change will be discussed in detail shortly.

In summary, storytelling is universal and omnipresent. It is intimately linked to identity such that we shape and are shaped by the stories that we tell and hear. As storytellers, we are the heroes and heroines of our own lives; viewing ourselves as protagonists who strive to overcome obstacles and reach a goal is a plausible way to examine stories.

Narrative research focuses on participants' point of view and encourages them to talk about themselves and their world in order to obtain insight, derive meaning, and acquire understanding about lived experience. Such endeavour predicates a particular form of data gathering. Participants need to be afforded an opportunity to provide constraint-free and detailed stories about their lives. Interviews that allow them to tell as little or as much as they wish about themselves and their experiences are a good way to draw out stories. In the following section I look at interviews generally, before arriving at an interviewing method and procedure suitable for this project.

Narratives and interviewing

There can be no doubt that "we have become an interview society" (Denzin, 2001b, p. 23). Most qualitative research involves interviews, and this affectionate propensity for interviewing is certainly understandable given the ease with which an interviewer can reach through time and across space simply by encouraging people to talk about their subjective experiences. *The interview* is considered as a vehicle for negotiating and creating meaning in a social setting (Kvale, 1996; Tanggaard, 2009). For research purposes, a method of introspective in-depth narrative interviewing using semi-structured and unstructured interviews is a good way to draw out participants' stories, gain access to their life experiences, and ascertain their understandings of reality and their place in that reality (Hiles & Cermak, 2008; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, 2000).

Two quite different metaphors have been used to describe a researcher's role during interviewing (see Kvale, 1996). The first describes the researcher as a miner digging and delving to unearth something of prized value. The second views the researcher as a traveller embarking on a journey, engaging the "locals" in conversation and attempting to walk in their shoes and see what they see. This traveller metaphor fits well with my constructionist position, and my goal to obtain in-depth description and understanding of a woman's world after having lost a significant amount of weight, and her experience of that world. Curiously, the notion of traveller's journey being guided or informed by maps also fits with my research method, as will be seen shortly.

Face-to-face or one-on-one interviewing, with a researcher recording excerpts of conversation and talk, is the most common type of interview method used in qualitative research. Often this consists of one-off interviews with people who have particular experiences or features in common, like men who are solo-parents, teenagers who are drug users, or slim women who have been obesely overweight. However, it is also becoming increasingly evident that more in-depth knowledge and understanding may be gained through multiple interviews, especially if participants are given an opportunity to reflect on aspects of the research (Neale & Flowerdew, 2003; Plumridge & Thomson, 2003; Shirani & Henwood, 2011).

Regardless of whether a single interview or multiple interviews are used, an interview conversation is not considered to be a dominance-free dialogue (Kvale, 2006). Rather, it is guided by context and constructed dialectically to deliver what a researcher seeks. It is therefore important to be aware that viewing a person in a certain light, for instance as an accomplished athlete or as a successful slimmer, encourages the performativeness of the multi–faceted negotiation of talk and

interviewing in particular (Ezzy, 2010; K Gergen, 1997; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Polkinghorne, 2007; Sarbin, 2005; Tanggaard, 2009).

Nevertheless, much can be done to reduce the one-sidedness of interviews and approach a dominance-free dialogue. Such freedom can be achieved: firstly, by having researchers enter each interview as 'not-knowing' regardless of their background, knowledge, or experience, and viewing the participant as *'the expert'*; secondly, by having participants engage in a creative, unstructured, interview design; and thirdly, by appreciating that no two stories can be the same and that each participant provides a unique perspective (Bagnoli, 2009; Hatcher, 2011; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Kvale, 2006; Laird, 1998).

When using an in-depth narrative research approach to explore the nuances of lived experience the interview design needs to be unstructured: questions should be open and free to develop and change as the participant takes the researcher on a journey. Hence, a request such as, "Tell me about when you were fat" would be more likely to draw out a nuanced story than would asking, "What did you dislike about being fat?" With respect to what a participant says, there can be no expectation of *a* right or wrong answer, nor the expectation of seeking *historical truth*. Rather, *narrative truth* is sought, with stories becoming evidence of meaning, and not evidence of the actual occurrence of a particular event talked about (see Polkinghorne, 2007; Spence, 1982).

Typically, when participants are interviewed and asked to talk about themselves or their experiences, they will provide accounts that fall into in a narrative structure (Frank, 1995), but storytelling abilities can vary enormously and are at times chaotic (Sermijn, Devlieger, & Loots, 2008). Certainly, eliciting talk and stories is not always a simple matter.

Eliciting stories

Talk can be general and abstract, or more focused and specific (see Sheridan & Chamberlain, 2011). However, talk has limitations and is clumsy when compared to the subtle distinctions evoked through smell, touch, taste, and especially sight (Harris & Guillemin, 2012; Miller, 2002). An obvious illustration of this is demonstrated when verbally trying to describe a change in body shape as opposed to seeing the size difference in photographs, or even more starkly in trying to describe the difference in smell between roses and carnations. Nevertheless, no matter how clumsy talk may be, it can convey the differences and subtleties of experience which other senses are unable to do. For example, it would be difficult to convey the romance of a sunset

through a particular fragrance, whereas a verbal description of the scene and the romantic feelings it arouses grants insight into the experience. Then, if the verbal description is augmented with a visual image of the scene, such as provided by a photograph, an extra dimension is added.

There is no disputing that talk and stories are capable of conveying the subtleties of experience, but the addition of an extra dimension provided by materiality adds something of value to a story. The suggestion is that, with the assistance of material objects, talk can become part of a multi-dimensional, multi-sensorial mode of representation and expression (Keats, 2009; Mason & Davies, 2009; Pink, 2004) and examples of these *added ingredients* include photographs, objects in everyday use such as clothing, letters and journals, drawings and paintings, and more.

Visual methods, where material objects are used to aid the production of talk, is not new (Collier, 1957). Anthropology and human geography have used photographs, diagrams, maps, and films for many years, and more recently sociology, nursing, psychology, and tourism have also used visual methods as research tools (S. E. Bell, 2002; Collier & Collier, 1986; D. Harper, 2002; Hodgetts, Radley, Chamberlain, & Hodgetts, 2007; Hurdley, 2007; Keller, Fleury, Perez, Ainsworth, & Vaughan, 2008; Morgan & Pritchard, 2005; Pink, 2001; Radley & Taylor, 2003b; Rose, 2007). Researchers have also incorporated a range of activities to encourage and deepen talk like the go-along interview (Brown & Durrheim, 2009; Carpiano, 2008; Irving, 2010; Pink, 2008; Radley, Chamberlain, Hodgetts, Stolte, & Groot, 2010) and the use of drawing and arts-based methods (Bagnoli, 2009; Crilly, Blackwell, & Clarkson, 2006; Wilson, Cunningham-Burley, Bancroft, Backett-Milburn, & Masters, 2007).

Photo-elicitation

The majority of visual methods research has focused on the use of photographic elicitation and is based on the simple idea of introducing a photo into the interview process. In most cases, photos are created specifically for the research (eg. Allen, 2011; Radley & Taylor, 2003a); however, already existing photographs retrieved from archives and collections, boxes, and albums and the like have also been used (Creef, 2004).

Photographs vivify, they are a way of making life and experience *real* by providing a glimpse, or visual (in)sight to those who have not seen the experience firsthand (Sontag, 2003). When combined with an interview, photographs help storytellers tell longer and more comprehensive stories, they act as aide-memoires by sharpening the talker's focus, and prod latent memories, as well as add richness beyond

the possibilities of talk alone (D. Harper, 2002). The definitive word about photographs is Sontag's:

> *"The force of photographic images comes from their being material realities in their own right, richly informative deposits left in the wake of whatever emitted them, potent means for turning the tables on reality – for turning it into a shadow. Images are more real than anyone could have supposed."* (1977, p. 180)

Objects, other than photographs, have also been used to elicit and enrich storytelling and have included such things as 3D body scans (Tarr & Thomas, 2011), artworks and letters (Bellof, 1997; Irving, 2009; Tamboukou, 2008, 2010), cherished objects in homes (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Miller, 2008; Noble, 2004), and even Lego (Gauntlett, 2007). As Appadurai (1986, p. 5) has claimed, "Things are the stuff of material culture and the meanings things have are inscribed in their form, their use and their trajectory". Adopting visual methods, and focusing on activities or objects that hold relevance for the talker, encourages narratives to be extended and elaborated upon by facilitating the exploration of content and dimensions beneath and beyond a participant's memories. Consequently, adding this visual ingredient into an interview setting to facilitate data collection will provide deeper understanding and insight, which has ramifications for research generally, and for my research project in particular.

Graphic elicitation

Graphic elicitation is an arts-based form of visual methods research, which usually involves the creation and use of diagrams and drawings to draw out stories. The method is less well established than photo-elicitation, with only a small number of studies reporting its use (Bagnoli, 2009; Crilly et al., 2006; Tarr & Thomas, 2011; Wienand, 2007; Wilson et al., 2007). Like photo-elicitation, the objects used for graphic elicitation research can be produced either by the researcher or, more commonly, by the participant. The diagrams and drawings created can represent anything from corporeal and physical objects to intangible perceptions, impressions, and relationships, and can stretch the creativity and innovativeness of researchers and participants alike.

These diagrams and drawings can act as a vehicle for focusing participants' attention during interviewing and help them better understand the scope of the research (Crilly et al., 2006). Graphic elicitation has been most valuable when used in

situations where there are literacy or language limitations (Gauntlett, 2007), where the subject matter is of a thorny or sensitive nature (Cornwall, 1992; Guenette & Marshall, 2009), with children and young people (Bagnoli, 2009; Wilson et al., 2007), and for time and life-event study (Martyn & Belli, 2002; Sandelowski, 1999). When used in participatory action research (Alexander et al., 2007; Cornwall, 1992; Kesby, 2000; Wienand, 2007), graphic elicitation methods can facilitate a more active role for participants. By being encouraged to "recognise their own agency" (Kesby, 2000, p. 425), participants can become more reciprocally engaged in the research and with the researcher: the one-sidedness of interviewing can be reduced.

All the strings to my *research parachute* have now been gathered together: they include the significance of narrative for looking at experience; the (re)constructed fabric of identity and storytelling; the co-constructedness, contextual, and social features of stories and narratives; the coherence and incoherence of storytelling; narrative's inextricable relationship with time; the value of narrative form and emplotment; the illustration of a protagonist's movement through time in relation to a specific goal; plotting a romance narrative of weight over time; and the usefulness of visual research methods like graphic elicitation to draw out stories. These strings scaffold and shape my multiple-method research.

By combining talk and stories with ingredients such as photographs, objects, and drawings, a multi-dimensional, multi-sensorial mode of data elicitation, representation and expression is created (Clark, 2011; Keats, 2009; Mason & Davies, 2009; Pink, 2004). Complex issues and the complexity of lived experience warrant investigation using complex research methods. I suggest that incorporating creative visual methods into a multiple-interview setting to help draw out storytelling will be invaluable for researching the complexity of lived experiences of fatness, weightloss, and successful slimming. When researching complex issues like these, there is always a lot to try to remember and keep track of, but also; without a complex method, much of ordinary everyday life could be passed over and dismissed as banal triviality. Involving photographs and objects and engaging in graphic elicitation are good ways to focus my participants' attention and help them access memories about the ups and downs of weight and the success and failure of weightloss endeavour. It also goes without saying that using visual based research methods to draw out stories around weight is very fitting because slimming and changing body shape is a very visual and aesthetic endeavour (Wolf, 1991).

My method, which is detailed in chapter 4, is complex and innovative. But while this has influenced the form and nature of the data I collected, it has also impacted upon my data presentation and data analysis. However, this was not realised until data

collection was well underway. The complex, creative method for data collection, and eliciting very deep rich data prompted the question, "Why stop here?" Consequently, a desire to explore creative avenues for data (re)presentation was formed.

Because the decision to explore a creative way to present my data and analysis arrived while the research was already underway, I have chosen to pause this methodology chapter momentarily to explain my decision processes with respect to data collection, data analysis, and research finding presentation, and the relationships between them. With hindsight, I see these decisions as a series of significant turning points or epiphanies. In the next section I will outline some of these epiphanies before returning to the methodological and theoretical issues around data analysis and presentation: namely, performative social science. Ostensibly, *pausing* here means this methodology section is a little disjointed, but this is necessary in order to make my processes clear. I also suggest that it demonstrates the nonlinearity, sometimes messy, nature of creativity and the pushing of boundaries in research.

Epiphanies and a creative method

Epiphanies, which are seen as dramatic turning points or moments of revelation or insight (Vannini, 2007), have connections to many aspects of my research. For instance, turning points are mentioned in connection with narrative form and emplotment, with the romance of losing weight, with journeys and struggle, and with life-experience generally therefore a brief discussion about epiphany *per se* is helpful here.

Although the facet of epiphany is only evidenced with hindsight, there are essentially four forms of epiphany (Denzin, 2001a). Firstly, a *major* epiphany, resulting from a key event that turns a person's life upside-down and changes it completely. Secondly, a *cumulative* epiphany, which is a breaking point event following a series of events that build on each other: the last straw. Thirdly, a more minor *illuminative* epiphany providing a sense of clarity or realisation; and finally, the *relived* epiphany resulting from reliving or going over a major turning point and realising the impact it has had since then.

A series of illuminative epiphanies have contributed to the innovative shape of my research method. These epiphanies are discussed under two separate headings: the first concerns data collection, and the second is about data analysis and presentation.

Data collection

The first of three epiphanies around data collection was informed by the visualisation and picturing of narrative form and literary tropes, and led to the realisation that aspects of a lifetime of experiences about weight could be illustrated and represented graphically. A timeline, created by plotting weight over time on a graph and adding layers of information about events, activities, and experiences by writing and drawing onto the graph, created an interesting, complex, and valuable *tool* for graphic elicitation.

Secondly, while photographs are often used to represent the success of significant weight-loss, the experience of losing a lot of weight can take many months, and in some cases years, to achieve. Therefore, the classic before-and-after photographs often used to represent successful weightloss could be unjustly misleading by truncating a convoluted and protracted weightloss journey into a stagnant instant. On the other hand, a timeline drawing could bring this complexity to life, and show the stuff that happens before and after, but also while and during, the photographs were taken. Photographs and timeline drawings seem to lie at opposite ends of a temporal continuum. Both bear witness: photographs capture a static instant in time, whereas the timeline pictures change and time passing, with an element of movement and journeying. Hence, they provide context for each other: both are interesting and valuable, and important for this research.

Thirdly, as points of entry into narrative, a timeline and photographs demand talk and explanation. Therefore, a list of interview questions is not needed; rather, the timeline and photographs would generate their own questions. For example, simply pointing to a section of the timeline would elicit a story, and given the connectedness of storytelling to context and an audience, several stories can be expected. One story could be told while drawing the graph; a different story may evolve as the completed graph is pondered over; another story may be drawn out when the graph is discussed in relation to other meaningful objects like clothing or jewellery; and yet another story could be elicited when it is shown to other people and explained.

Together, these insights and ideas shape a creative, multiple-methods approach for data collection. My method requires facets of graphic elicitation, photo-elicitation, and reflexive interviewing practices to be intertwined to become a single integrated blend of methods well suited to meet the requirements of my research: a quest for rich data. This is certainly warranted given the complexity of the topic. However, it has also encouraged exploring creative forms for data analysis and presentation.

Data presentation and analysis[11]

Put plainly, the decision to use a creative and complex way to represent my data simply made sense. A complex topic plus a complex method demanded complex (re)presentation. While this perfunctory one plus one equal two equation started the complex-data-representation ball rolling, questioning the limitations of conventional data representation for this research project was born out of the following concerns.

The first relates to academic forms of communication. I find that traditional research reporting is often specialised and that it tends to be reserved for a very small, rather elite audience of other scholars rather than being available to the general public. I see little value in this for my research project and would prefer my findings to reach as wide an audience as possible. Linked to this concern, I question whether conventional data representation is the best way to credibly, vividly, and persuasively tell my participants' stories.

A second concern relates to the co-constructedness of interviewing. Given that an interview is a "social setting for the proliferation of polyphonic dialogues, in which there are many voices and discourses that cross each other simultaneously to produce knowledge about personal narratives and social life" (Tanggaard, 2009, p. 1500), the singular voice of an author means that these polyphonic dialogues can be lost in the conventional (re)presentation of data.

Thirdly, with reference to narrative and identity, I have many selves: I am a student and singer, fat-woman and mother. While my identity integrates these different social selves into a coherent and dynamic whole, my different selves are also the parts or roles I assume and play each day. They are the different characters in my life's story, as are the clothes I wear, the songs I sing, and the way I gesticulate when I talk. My story then is "about characters who act, interact, desire, think, and feel" (McAdams, 1993, p. 118). These characters have a shape, a purpose, a presence, and a voice: they perform. In conventional data representation, this *performative* aspect, and especially the *interactive* feature of different selves or characters, is not easily seen (M. Gergen & Gergen, 2012). In narrative research, the story takes centre stage but I would suggest that embodied characters are more readily identified with and empathised with, but these characters are sometimes faceless in conventional data representation.

As illuminative epiphanies, these concerns pointed me towards exploring performative social science as a vehicle for data representation. I became keen to shed

[11] The sequence of events outlined and discussed here simplifies the process conducted. The epiphany concerning ethnodrama and the idea to coerce my data and analysis into a performance piece came some time after the interviews were finished. My convoluted and messy processes have been smoothed out in order to present a cohesive account for a reader.

a *new light* on an old problem and to overcome the limitations of conventional data presentation. I suggest like others (Ellis & Bochner, 1992; K Gergen & Gergen, 2014; M. Gergen & Gergen, 2012; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Phelan & Lane, 1998; Pollock, 1998; Saldaña, 2003, 2005a), that a good way to (re)present multiple perspectives on ordinary everyday experience with all its associated complexity is to bring data to life through characterisation and performative writing. This can be very effectively done under the umbrella of performative social science.

While these concerns have planted a performative-social-science seed, they do not provide sufficient grounds for veering away from conventional data presentation. Questions like: what does performance and performativity contribute to studying personal narrative that *cannot* be provided in any other way than through performance (e.g., see Langellier, 2003), warrants exploration. In the next section, I discuss the theoretical and methodological value of performative social science for dramatising data in research. I will also provide a rationale for adopting a creative, performative vehicle as a form of data presentation for my research project.

Dramatising data

Before discussing performative social science, a cursory mention is made of dramaturgical theory. When coining the sociological perspective of dramaturgy, Goffman (1959) proposed a theatrical metaphor to understand the performative nature of identity. For Goffman, social life mimicked a stage: he made a distinction between public or *front stage* performances before an audience; and private or *back stage*, the behind-the-scenes preparation that goes on when we are alone. He suggested identity is constantly remade as a person (inter)acts with others and that this social (inter)action is capable of analysis as if it were part of a theatrical performance. He also proposed that our acting roles are taken up based on a particular *role model*.

However, because this construes people as actors in a play with scripts or lines already written, it has been variously discussed and criticised (Carlson, 2004; Davies & Harré, 1990; Evreinoff, 1927; K Gergen, 1990; Sarbin, 2005; Sarbin & Allen, 1968; Walsh-Bowers, 2006). For example, Davies and Harré (1990) suggest that rather than adhering to a particular script, we make multiple choices and are responsible for our own lines to the extent that, besides being an actor, we are simultaneously producer and director, author and audience. They go on to argue that we are also aware of the distinction between our personal identity and our social identity, just like actors can distinguish between their own personal identities and the identities of the characters they are portraying to the audience on stage (Harré, 1993). This view fits well with the

position I have taken with respect to narrative theory and identity (also see McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988). Nevertheless, Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory provides an interesting link between the performative aspects of identity, and actors, stage, and theatre. While all performative social science proponents may not be committed to his theory, researchers at the vanguard of performative methods continue to draw on its major tenets (e.g., Leavy, 2010).

Performative social science

Performative social science (M. Gergen & Jones, 2008; Roberts, 2008), ethnodrama (Mienczakowski, 2001; Saldaña, 2003), performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003a; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; McCall, 2000), psychodrama (Moreno, 1945), polyvocality (Curt, 1994; Hatcher, 2011; Mulkay, 1985; Woolgar, 1988), and dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959; Walsh-Bowers, 2006), are all recognised literary forms used by authors in the social sciences to represent research. It is defined as the employment of artistic performance such as art, photography, poetry, creative (non)fiction writing, drama, music, dance, and multi-media to credibly and persuasively (re)present research findings (M. Gergen & Gergen, 2011). These arts-based forums, described as a "hybrid of artistic and scientific practices" (Leavy, 2010, p. 347), have been used by researchers to raise consciousness and awareness, to facilitate empowerment and emancipation, and to interrogate and disrupt long held conventions and boundaries of research (Denzin, 1997; Glass, 2008; Gray, 2003; Leavy, 2010). Exploring these creative forms of expression and analysis is also a good way to open up fresh ways of looking at and broaching reflexivity (Denzin, 2003a; Woolgar & Ashmore, 1988).

By dramatising data for wider public consumption, performative social science enhances access to research findings and is a vehicle for activism (Mitchell et al., 2011). Often, researchers interested in social justice or political issues are drawn to this form of representation because it helps *oppressed* peoples gain their voice, and collaboratively works with them to transform their circumstances by impacting or changing thinking and behaviour of others. Rather than just being a record or slice of lived experience, performing research pushes boundaries and provides a "forum for the search for moral truths about the self and the other" and the tale it tells is a "symbolic tale, a parable" to encourage critical consciousness and transformation of public opinion with a goal to improve the lot of those people the performance represents (Denzin, 2003b, p. 252). These aspects of representing multiple voices, generating social criticism, and promoting transformation are key features of performative social science.

It is not difficult to imagine that a powerful dramatic performance about the painful impact of stigma, bigotry, and injustice may leave a deeper impression on an audience than would conventional research representation. Theatre aims to shape public opinion. However, a very good argument could be brought that this relative impact on an audience may simply be a function of good academic writing rather than the advantage of performativity (e.g., see Richardson, 2003b). Simply creating a piece of drama to represent research data does not, in itself, ensure that it will make an impact. It too needs to be well written (Caulley, 2005; Sparkes, 2002). Nevertheless, audiences who have attended dramatic performances of research have often commented that live performances *per se*, make things seem more *real*: there is more room for emotional affinity (Cho & Trent, 2009; Curtis, 2008; Leavy, 2009; Saldaña, 2011).

In qualitative research, meaning making is acknowledged as an iterative process. In performative social science, especially those using theatre and dramatic performance, this process is more complexly layered and is explicit (Leavy, 2010). There is a sense of percolation or stewing to produce a very flavoursome end product. An example of one such layer or iterative cycle concerns the "doing" of performances but also the "re-doing" of performances (Carlson, 2004, p. ix), which is similar to the telling and retelling of stories, and the visiting and revisiting of data (Andrews, 2008). Although written in the past, a performance script is open to fresh interpretation each time it is performed. For example: reactions from an audience may encourage a return to the data, further analysis and reflection, resulting in script revisions (Goldstein, 2008; Mienczakowski, 1995). Consequently, changes arising from the doing and re-doing of a performance can accommodate temporal and cultural changes as well as other changes. The performance of research data in this way can draw attention to the "plasticity" of identity and behaviour (K Gergen, 2009, p. 76). A performance is always new. It is well-suited to withstanding the testing of time.

Ethnodrama

Ethnodrama is a form of performative social science that uses the art and craft techniques of theatre to provide an audience with a live performance of research participants' life experiences, together with a researcher's interpretation of data. Simply put, "reality theatre" or ethnodrama, is the dramatisation of data into a script (Saldaña, 2005a, p. 8). These data typically consist of selections of narrative collected from interviewing, but *data* can also include extracts from diaries, field notes, and journal articles. Subject to the same academic rigor as data presentation in non-performative research, dramatising data in this way is valuable because it allows

different voices, world-views, and beliefs to have a conversation, to question and debate, and to challenge and interrogate one another: it becomes a complex exchange that encourages multidimensional meanings to be drawn (Leavy, 2010).

As a fairly recent development in the field of qualitative inquiry, ethnodrama has been utilised to investigate facets of experience in such diverse fields as sociology, anthropology, political science, psychology, and education to name a few. Consequently, it has covered diverse topics such as teenage cruelty (Norris, 2000); racial, class, and cultural conflict (Smith, 1993); HIV (Sandelowski, Trimble, Woodward, & Barroso, 2006); the vagina and female identity (Ensler, 2000); living with dementia (Mitchell et al., 2011); homeless youth (Saldaña, 2005b); homophobia and heterosexuality in teaching (Chapman, Sykes, & Swedberg, 2003); and more (see Saldaña, 2005a, p. 10). However, while many topics seem suited to a performative form of representation, ethnodrama may not be suitable for sensitive topics such as suicide, especially if they are presented to vulnerable audiences (Mienczakowski, 2001).

Ethnodrama results in the production of a playscript. Such a script is a work of creative non-fiction since the events it portrays have not actually happened nor are the characters actual people, but it is based on actual research data. The fictive play brings two, three, four, or five characters' voices to the stage, each with their own integrity. They coalesce to produce a creatively multi-dimensional portrait. The voice of one character could be the experiences of a single participant or an amalgamation of the experiences of two or three participants: a composite character. Another voice could be a grand-narrative, and yet another voice could be a combination of a counter-narrative and the researcher. Regardless, these characters are more than just words or language: they are embodied and alive. As Carver says,

> *"the action of women speaking their own stories publicly...radically challenges traditional notions of agency, spectacle, and spectatorship as female performers move their voices and bodies from the back-ground to the fore-ground"* (2003, p. 16).

Ethnodrama is also suggested as a good way to (re)present and emphasise the collaborative nature of research. The collaborative relationship between participants and their researcher is facilitated if participants are involved in both the writing and performance aspects of the play. Thereby, the process of producing an ethnodrama is open, visible, and alive, and free to interpretation: nothing is hidden (Becker, McCall, Morris, & Meshejian, 1989; Ellis & Bochner, 1992; M. Gergen & Gergen, 2012; Hatcher, 2011; McCall, 2000; Saldaña, 2003). Through this collaborative process, participants, researcher, and audience are all engaged in the construction of meaning making. Just as

participants can take a role in an ethnodrama, so too can the researcher, or the academic literature for that matter, and these multiple voices are not reduced into a singular, conventional author(itative) voice.

(Un)Conventional representation

Convinced of the value of ethnodrama and *performative* representation, my research findings will be written into a play. The play will be written with the intention that it *could* be performed. Depth of feeling, subtleties of expression, and reflexivity of interpretation will be communicated through the passions, intonations, and movements of characters portrayed by actors. The *audience* will experience "much more than words" (Ellis & Bochner, 1992, p. 80). Unfortunately, the experience of a dramatic performance is not possible within the confines of this written thesis. Consequently, such a play will join the ranks of other purely textual works that are presented for reading purposes only and aptly called "closet dramas" (Saldaña, 2005a, p. 14). But the *performative aspects* of my play, which will be evidenced through creative scripting and annotation, will need to be taken into account by the reader in order to appreciate and preserve the *value of performance*. With careful playwriting it is anticipated that this will not be an onerous endeavour for the reader because clear *stage directions* concerning physical appearance and movement, mood, and ambiance will be provided.

It has been argued that the need to draw conclusions should be resisted in performative work, and preference should be given to keeping the dialogue between the text and the character, and the character and the audience, open and ongoing (Conquergood, 2003). In other words, interpretation should be left open and up to the audience. Some authors (e.g., Rogers, Frellick, & Babinski, 2002), have suggested that presenting data without specific interpretation or guidance could lead to misinterpretation or a more rudimentary appreciation of the performance and hence the research findings. But the opposite is also possible: members of an audience are equally capable of very detailed and complex interpretations of the performance (Denzin, 2010; M. Gergen & Gergen, 2012). However, while specific interpretation and guidance are not necessary for performative works, evidence of in depth interpretation and theorisation and the voice of academia are required in a thesis such as this. Therefore, the findings and interpretation of my research will be presented in two different and distinct forms. The first will be creative, arts-based, and '*performative*'; the second, conventional and non arts-based. Since the *performative* work (the play) will be a stand-alone piece of writing, the conventional piece of writing (the book

chapter) will compliment this by also being a stand-alone piece of writing. Juxtaposing these two quite different ways of explicating research findings provides an interesting vehicle for showcasing the advantages and disadvantages of both.

Summary

I will use visual methods incorporating drawings, photographs, and material objects to encourage participants to tell stories about lived experiences around weight. The elucidated stories, photographs, material objects, and timelines, which are the data of this research project, will be analysed and then (re)presented in two ways: an arts-based play and a conventional scholarly book chapter.

A rationale for each stage of my data collection procedure and methods is presented shortly. This will include a discussion about the form of analysis used, as well as explaining how and why the research findings will be (re)presented as an arts-based play and also as a conventional book chapter. My methods are unusual, perhaps risky, but I am in earnest. Besides wishing to tell my participants' stories, I take seriously Richardson's (2003b) comments that much of qualitative writing is boring. So, determined to avoid tedium, I will instead aspire to a writer's objective as urged by Pulitzer Prize winning author Barbara Tuchman:

> *"The writer's object is – or should be – to hold the reader's attention.... I want the reader to turn the page and keep on turning to the end. This is accomplished only when the narrative moves steadily ahead, not when it comes to a weary standstill, overloaded with every item uncovered in the research."* (Barbara Tuchman 1912-1989)

My methodology chapter now draws to a close. The next chapter introduces the methods used to collect and analyse data for this research project. It begins with details about the participants who took part in this project. It next provides an evaluation of the methods used by discussing illustrative excerpts from the data set, followed by a rationale for how and why data are analysed and presented as they are.

Because I have tried to not be bound by conventional qualitative data gathering methods, choosing instead to evolve a diverse, although congruent, multiple-method approach, this chapter is considerably more detailed than is usual for the method chapter of a thesis. I find this is warranted because exploring *method* has been a major facet or component of my PhD process. For instance, it has contributed to arts-based research method generally through the publication of two journal articles about the use of material objects in qualitative research (Sheridan & Chamberlain, 2011); and the

creation and use of a timeline for graphic elicitation: timelining (Sheridan et al., 2011). These publications are found in appendices L and M.

This space between methodology and method provides an opportunity to comment on reflexivity. Given, as Denzin says, that "all researchers take sides or are partisans of one point of view or another" and that "value-free interpretive research is impossible" (2001a, p. 43), a clear statement about my personal preconceptions and prior interpretations is imperative. While reflexive comments about my position are made in passing throughout this thesis as various topics and issues arise, my particular preconceptions and positioning with regard to my desire to craft my participants' stories and findings into a play are questioned and answered in Chapter Six in an excerpt of writing called, *"Jo's World"*. Because of the unique shape of my thesis, *"Jo's World"* could be read now if so desired or left to be read where it seems to *naturally* fall: Chapter Six. Reflexive ponderings and other concerns over ethical issues are part of a never-ending reflexive process that is typical of qualitative research (e.g., Finlay & Gough, 2003).

CHAPTER FOUR

METHOD

> *"...we live our lives with the conviction that we stand at the centre of the drama. Moments rarely come that put us outside ourselves, that divorce us from our egos and force us to see the larger picture, to recognize that the drama is in fact a tapestry and that each of us is but a thread in the vivid weave, yet each thread essential to the integrity of the cloth."*
> --DEAN KOONTZ, Life Expectancy

One of the ways my research findings will be presented is in the form of a play: a piece of ethnodrama. Theatre in Western culture has been telling stories for more than 2,500 years and the intricacy of social life has been the main topic of interest. It is suggested (Saldaña, 2005a) that the performance of dramatic theatre has served as both a medium, and a forum for communicating the socio-political climate of the times.

> *"Imagine a dark theatre. The lights come up. An actor walks onstage. The audience sits on the edge of its collective seat, waiting to see what will happen. What will he say? What will she do? And there you are, sitting in the back of the house watching the audience watch the actors perform your words and carry out the actions you wrote. You're the playwright*... (Dorf, 2005, p. 4).

However, arriving at this moment requires considerable work. Before an actor walks on stage, the data used to construct her character's monologues and movements need to be gathered and then fashioned into the cohesive story that is the play. As already mentioned, the data for my research are a collection of narratives elicited from participants keen to tell their stories about weight. The choice of method used to collect data generally is important. Radley *et al.* (2010, p. 36) have argued that, "the data – or what can be made of them – are tied up with the means of producing them". There can

certainly be no doubt that the complexity of lived experience warrants exploration using a complex research method. In this chapter, I will outline how data were collected for this research project, provide the reasoning for the particular analytical processes used, and also present a rationale for shaping and presenting data about weightloss and successful slimming: firstly into a play, and secondly into a scholarly book chapter. However, in the first instance I will begin by introducing the participants whose stories form my research data.

The participants: Nine (extra)ordinary women

To recruit participants for this research project, an advertisement (see Appendix A) was placed in a local newspaper. My research sought women who had been obesely overweight, having had a BMI of 30 or over; had lost at least 20 kilograms; had managed to keep this weight off for at least five years; and who were keen to talk about their experiences. Other than a deliberate change in weight due to factors such as pregnancy, participants' weight had remained stable for at least five years prior to being interviewed as a *definition* of weightloss control. Notably, there is currently no consensus on how weightloss maintenance should be defined (Stevens, Truesdale, McClain, & Cai, 2006).

Finding women who met all my criteria was harder than anticipated since an achievement of long-term weightloss maintenance is a difficult task (Crawford et al., 2000; Elfhag & Rossner, 2005). Nine women aged between 32 to 69 years of age took part in this research (see Figure 3) and names used are pseudonyms. The women had lost amounts of weight ranging from 23 to 62 kilograms, representing a loss of 27 to 44 percent of their body mass when obesely overweight, and they have sustained their weightloss for periods from 5 to 17 years.

Each participant introduced below provided many hours of very articulate storytelling, as well as written accounts, timeline drawings, photographs and other material objects, which all required lengthy and intensive analysis. Concerns around participants' anonymity, use of voice recordings and photographs, and so forth were all very carefully considered and approval to conduct this research was sought and obtained from The Massey University Human Ethics Committee (reference number MUHECN 07/043).

	Age	Relationship status*	Children	Occupation	Activities	Employment status*	Maximum BMI	Weight loss in Kgs	Current BMI	% body mass lost	Years maintained
Alice	40	M	4	Property valuer	Walking Badminton	P	32.7	33	21.0	37	8
Becky	35	M	2	Business Owner	Gym/weights Running	P	33.8	26	23.2	31	7
Charlotte	36	S	4	NZ Uniformed Services	Running ½ marathons	F	38.2	51	21.6	44	5
Diana	60	S	0	Data entry clerk	Canoeing Gym/weights	P	38.5	38	27.0	33	17
Elizabeth	35	M	2	Mother Chef	Walking	P	30.1	23	22.0	27	9
Fiona	58	M	1	Teacher	Walking	F	33.9	35	21.3	37	10
Guinevere	50	M	2	Hair dresser	Dancing Aerobics	P	74.9	62	51.7	31	5
Heidi	69	M	2	Retired	Walking	R	31.7	29	21.4	32	10
Ismene	32	S	0	Journalist	Swimming Running	F	38.6	30	27.6	29	9

* M= Married, S=Single, P=Part-time employment, F=Full-time employment, R=Retired

Figure 3: Summary of participants' details, and weightloss information, occupation and physical activities.

Alice

Alice and her husband Adam have two children. Alice also has another two children from a previous marriage. She recently graduated with a degree in Business Studies and received a top scholar award. Alice says she is good at setting goals, or more particularly, setting one goal at a time and achieving it.

> *My children make great comments - things like, "mum you look great", I love that. I feel happy to be in control of my life. [After losing weight] I exercised more; I improved at my sport. I became more confident - outgoing. I wanted to socialise more, wanted to shop and buy clothes. I was able to move on and make and achieve other goals. So rather than concentrating on the losing weight goal, I could leave that behind and think about something else that I wanted to achieve. I didn't feel like I could concentrate on anything else until that was done and in control.*

Becky

Becky is 35 years old, is married, and has two children. She works part time in her own business needing the rest of the time to train regularly in the gym and prepare herself for half marathon runs. Memories of childhood, talk about clothes, clothes shopping, and dressing to go to parties and special events, regularly featured in Becky's stories.

> *I was always the chubbier child. My sisters are all 5 foot 6 and tall skinny things - nothing to them. So I was always the shorter, chubbier one. You know four girls and three, your sisters, were perfect and you weren't, it was pretty hard. I was never a child that you would ever say was overweight. But I was always consciously aware of what my downfalls were. I mean I used to get called Fat Albert and fatso and hump-a-lump and all the awful names.*
>
> *[Talking about her daughter] it's like re-living my bloody life through her. It's like, "Oh I can't handle it". Yeah, it's really hard to watch her going through all of this. It does bring back the memories.*

Here Becky talks about her decision to do something about her weight.

> *I guess that's what did it - that woman at Jacqui E [a clothing store] she said, "You won't find clothes in here to fit you". And you know having to go and buy a bra and get fitted and think, "Oh my God, I'm now an 18E" or something like that. I was sick to death of that bloody Ezi Buy shop [Ezi Buy had the larger sized clothing] and I'll tell you what really did happen - I went out with my girlfriend with all our kids, and I bent over and split my pants just all down here [shows inside leg] like all the seam. We were out at this place and I'm like, "Oh my God what am I going to do?"*

Charlotte

Charlotte decided to do something about her weight after the birth of her fourth child. Over a period of four years, she unfalteringly lost 44 percent of her body mass: 51 kilograms.

> *Dieting fascinates me. I've looked into every single one of them [diets] and when a new one comes out I look into it too. I was reading the Herald yesterday about Helen Mirren, the actress, and she said that she had battled with her sex symbol status for years. She said she hates the Hollywood waif look but admits that she's been on an almost permanent diet for 40 years. And now I think that's what it is, I think that once you hit your goal weight, you have to. You can maybe change what you eat slightly, but you have to keep eating like that. You can never go back to eating how you did. And I don't think that we prepare ourselves enough for that.*

But it hasn't made me any happier, you know. I may have lost all that weight and be in size 10 and 12 clothes, and be really fit by everyone else's standards but I'm single…so sometimes I think Jesus Christ when I was a size 24 I had a husband, I had four children, I may have been miserable but I wasn't by myself.

Diana

Diana lost 38 kilograms seventeen years ago. Diana's life revolves around her outrigger canoe sport and preparing for race events. She tenaciously maintains a rigorous 20 hour per week training schedule both in the gym and canoeing on the water. When leading up to competition, this schedule begins anywhere from six to nine months before race day and has been instrumental in her winning both gold and silver medals at world championships. Diana's tenacity is exemplified in the excerpt below, as she talks about discovering the canoe sport she loves, and staying slim.

I had done most of the exercise for my weightloss on a rowing machine and wanted to find something to help me keep the weight off. Auckland being Auckland I thought about a water sport – I've always liked the water anyway. So I contacted the rowing club but they said, "No, we're not interested in novice masters" 'cos I was a master. So then I contacted the North Shore canoe centre and they said the same thing, "Nah, we're not interested in novice masters".

I was working with a temp typist at the time and she said she had a cousin who did outrigger canoeing – waka-ama. I had no idea what that was, but after talking to the cousin I went and paddled in a boat with a whole lot of guys. A guy, who is one of the fathers of the sport here in New Zealand, said, "You did very well – do you want to join the club?" and I went on from there. It keeps the weight down. I thought to myself, "I'm down, I may as well keep it off".

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a 35-year-old chef who is now a stay-at-home mum looking after four year old James and 18 month old Lisa. She met and became engaged to her husband while she was obesely overweight. After he proposed to her she decided she wanted to lose some weight before getting married. During our meetings, Elizabeth rarely admitted feeling unhappy with her body when she was overweight but she did recount this interesting story.

When I was training to be a chef we always had to get changed into our chef's uniforms and some of the girls were quite petite. They'd put their chefs pants on and they'd look quite neat in their chef's pants. I'd put mine on and I'd look like a balloon in

mine. I always used to think, "Oh, I wish I could look like that". And my jacket was always bigger than everybody else's. It used to bother me when we were getting changed but then once we were in the kitchen I never dwelled on it.

When I was working at the hospital it got to the stage where my legs used to rub together lots and I would actually wear my chef pants out. The seams would wear thin and eventually one day I'd bend over and they'd split in the seams because I'd worn them so thin. In the end I stopped wearing my chef's uniform and just went back to wearing a white smock just like everybody else so I didn't actually stand apart to say that I was a chef. I just wore a white smock like the kitchen staff.

Fiona

Fiona is a teacher and remembered that, even as a child, school holidays were a difficult time when it came to her weight. She began watching what she ate from around 10 years of age. Since giving birth to her son Harry in 1996, Fiona has maintained a 35-kilogram weightloss for over 10 years. In this excerpt below she talks about realising that she needs to be constantly vigilant: she needs to watch what she is eating as well as monitoring the level of the exercise she is doing.

I went to California for six weeks in the school summer holidays. I was horrified when I got to my friend's place and found I was hovering at nearly 11 stone [70 kgs]. I thought "Oh, oh I haven't been that for about 10 years. I don't like what I am seeing". But from that day to this I haven't done anything silly. I'm usually hovering between winter and summer between about 59 and 62 kgs – so I am in a band [see appended timeline].

When I finished breastfeeding I had to watch it … I was thinking, "I really enjoyed that meal". And thought "I've got to watch this again". Cos I could feel the food in my tum [stomach] and I thought, "Oh, oh you've got to watch this". When I weighed myself I was 63 and I thought "Ok you've got to watch this". It is always going to be 'keeping an eye on myself' I'm sure. I suppose, as I get even older it's going to be worse.

Guinevere

Like Fiona, Guinevere also remembered being encouraged to diet when she was young. She said her "mother started dieting her" when she was 11 years old. When she was 18 years old, she became pregnant and married her baby's father. They welcomed their second child six years later. In 1998, weighing her heaviest, Guinevere wrote a letter to a woman who had helped her lose weight in the past. In the excerpt below she reads from a rough copy of the letter she wrote and then talks about going to the weightloss classes.

Dear Yvonne,

I am writing this at 2.30am – another disturbed night for me either with sleep apnoea or thoughts and worries about myself. I talked with my daughter, aged 17, about us coming to see you to join your classes. I've been thinking about it for a while and watching her steadily gain weight and not wanting a life for her as an obese person. There is that word again – I cringe every time I hear it. I see her slowly lose her confidence in herself and wonder how I can help her. I'm not a very good role model for her I'm afraid. Not only do I want to help her but also I am very aware that unless I get weight off I will die... This brings me to the embarrassing part of whether your scales will be able to hold or measure me. I feel pretty desperate Yvonne, and I've had thoughts of easier ways out of my misery ...

Yeah, I put it [the letter] in the post. Yvonne was very good. I started diarying out everything that I was eating. I don't think I had big losses to start with. It was very slow maybe 500 grams or 700 grams a week.

Summoning up considerable courage, Guinevere began her very successful 62-kilogram weightloss journey. Now some years later, she and her husband of 32 years enjoy dancing lessons and taking part in ballroom dancing competitions.

Heidi

Heidi is 69 years old and has maintained her 29-kilogram weightloss for over ten years. Her first husband died suddenly when her children were 17 and 19 years of age and she was widowed for 10 years before marrying her second husband. Even after 10 years of maintaining her weightloss Heidi writes down everything she eats and drinks on a daily basis. She says that keeping careful track like this enables her to indulge herself every now and then.

You've still got to live and enjoy your life. Birthdays and grandchildren you can't just go there and sit back and don't have anything. Cos I'm so trained with this now – I mean it's a part of my life ... Like yesterday – my husband has a new granddaughter and we went to see this lovely little baby yesterday. And the mother-in-law is a lovely baker and cook. Anyhow, she made this beautiful cake and I've had it before. It's a Russian cake its like a pancake mixture but very, very thin and they put cream or something in the middle and then they put another one on the top and layer it up and you eat it with a fork like a cake. It's really, really nice and I'll have a piece of that with a cup of tea. You may as well go with the flow. But I don't over do it – I'll pick and choose.

Ismene

Ismene is a 32-year old journalist, swimmer, and tri-athlete who has maintained her 30-kilogram weightloss for nine years.

> *I think the thing I realised is that it wasn't just about weight. I had other problems as well, and that I needed to do something about those. I wasn't ever thinking, "Well, if I lose weight it would solve all my problems".*

For Ismene, as for all my participants, losing weight was a major achievement involving sacrifice she had no intention of ever repeating. In this next excerpt she talks about setting physical and sporting challenges for herself rather than imposing dietary restrictions in order to stay slim.

> *I definitely think that the swimming, and previously the triathlons, or whatever I happened to be working towards at the time, has helped. And I know that if I set myself a goal of doing a couple of events every year then that will keep me reasonably active for most of the year. If I get to a point where I feel like I've lost the habit of doing that and have been a bit slobbish for a few months then I start to go, "Well maybe I should work towards something else" – put in another challenge and work toward that. I find it easier to go, "I'll aim towards that swim event that's coming up" which will mean that I'll have to swim 5 days a week for the next two months than to go, "Oh well, I'm not going to eat chocolate for the next two months". If I need to lose a couple of kilos, to go back on the 'points diet' [a calorie counting weightloss programme] for two months or restrict something – that would just depress me. I get much more satisfaction the other way and I enjoy the exercise as well so it all feels like a plus to me rather than a chore that I have to deal with for the rest of my life in order to maintain this weight.*

These excerpts introduce my participants. It should be emphasised that these snippets are infinitesimal pieces of who these women are and what they have achieved. During our time together, I have laughed and cried with them as they returned to their pasts and revisited the full gamut of emotions that buffeted them as they experienced fatness and weightloss. We shared moments of exhilarating joy but also heart-wrenching pain and despair.

By encouraging them to *do things* with me, the detail of which will be discussed shortly, my participants contributed much to the frame of my research. They helped decide what questions were asked and how these should be answered and this reduced the one-sidedness often seen in conventional interviews and facilitated a *dominance-free* dialogue. Consequently, a sense of autonomy was encouraged rather than, "a

minimalist notion of informed consent" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 275). The process of my research method was complex; however, my participants engaged in it happily, providing me with a fascinating data set to work with: they truly are extraordinary women.

Multiple methods and multi-sensorial engagement

The assorted nature of my research method has nothing to do with the use of mixed methods, or the crossing of qualitative and quantitative boundaries in research. My multiple methods approach is entirely qualitative. The multiplicity of my research method arrives, firstly, out of spending multiple periods of time with my participants; and secondly, by doing a variety of things with them in order to elicit stories about their lived experiences. An analogy of going on lots of different dates with a friend and doing lots of different things together comes to mind. As mentioned previously, such complexity is warranted because of the intricacy of identity and the complexity of lived experience. Here is the procedure that was followed; while I expected it to flex somewhat to suit individual participants, in actuality it was essentially followed quite closely.

Procedures

Aware of the role and value of interviewing generally and multiple interviews in particular, four interviews were conducted with each participant at weekly or fortnightly intervals. These interviews were either held in the interview rooms at The School of Psychology at Massey University or in participants' own homes. An outline of the agenda for each interview is provided in Appendix D.

The first interview was an introductory meeting during which all aspects of the research process were explained, and the first stage of written consent to take part in the research was obtained (see Appendix E). Participants were given a notebook and asked to diary textual notes about their feelings and experiences while taking part in this project. They were also asked to seek out any information or material objects that would help them plot data points on a graph of their weight over time, like medical records or measurements of weight taken at gyms or weightloss organisations. The time anticipated for this first meeting was approximately 20 minutes.

The second interview involved plotting a graph (the timeline), on a sheet of A3 graph paper, of weight over time, facilitated by the information and objects participants produced about their weight, as well as the stories they told. After the interview,

participants took the timeline home and were encouraged to continue adding details to it. They were asked to bring the timeline with them to the next interview, along with material objects, which, from a perspective of fatness and weightloss, held special meaning. The second interview was expected to take between 30 and 60 minutes.

The third interview was the main narrative producing, story elicitation interview. Storying was drawn out by the timeline and the material objects produced, rather than by asking a predetermined set of questions. This interview was anticipated to take up to two hours.

Then, finally a fourth, wind-up meeting was held after all data had been collected. During this meeting, the second stage of the written consent process was completed, with participants choosing photographs and excerpts from tape recordings and notebook diaries that could be used in scholarly publications like this thesis or academic journals (see Appendix F). The time needed to complete this process was expected to take between 30 and 60 minutes.

The total time commitment for each participant was expected to be between four and five hours spread over a period of between four to eight weeks. However, these times were merely a guide, as participants were free to determine the amount of time they were able to devote to various parts of this project. In general, participants were keen to talk at length about their experiences.

Interview sessions were recorded, with participants' permission, and transcribed by me. The material objects produced were also recorded as part of the data set. Scanned copies were made of photographs, excerpts from diaries and written material, and photographs were taken of objects, such as clothing and jewellery. Having four interview sessions provided participants with time to reflect on what they had said, and subsequent interviews were opportunities to restate or change aspects of their stories if they wished.

Interviews and doing things together

Engaging in a series of four interviews and *doing things* with my participants had advantages. Firstly, the nature of our participant-researcher relationship changed as the number of times we met increased. When meeting a participant for the fourth time, there was a sense of ease and familiarity: I was someone she knew. As well as changing the participant-researcher relationship, using multiple interviews provided time for contemplation and reflection for participant and researcher alike.

> *It sort of made me think about things a bit more – things that I've never really thought about. I've been thinking about it since you were here last week. I've been*

thinking about it and I've talked to my mum and my sister. I've been trying to think – you know – why? [Elizabeth]

Secondly, interviews did not only involve talking. Using visual methods to elicit stories was an integral part of this research project and added a sensorial complexity to the usual singular dimension of talk to explicate experience. My participants were asked to bring objects, which, for them, held special meaning from a perspective of fatness and weightloss. The objects produced were used to elicit talk and facilitate the process of creating the timeline of weight over time. By researching in this way, insight into participants' lived experience was provided aurally, by listening to stories; visually, by looking at objects such as photographs; kinaesthetically, by drawing the timeline and feeling the texture of objects like clothing; and olfactorily, by smelling old objects that have been hidden or not looked at for long periods of time. The only sense not explored by my research method was taste. Clearly, doing research in this way is removed from the typically sterile, contrived research interview environment and is more like ordinary, everyday life. Also, just as the utility of time impacted on our participant-researcher relationship, so too did physically engaging with objects because they forced us to sit close together, even touching each other on occasion, as we plotted data points on the graph or fingered through things like old photographs and journals. Objects encouraged the physical and emotional distance between my participants' and I to shrink, and doing things together became a bridge between two strangers.

Multiple methods and engaging multi-sensorially encouraged the production of a rich data set for analysis. However, it should be noted that involving multiple methods was not, as Gauntlett argues for graphic elicitation procedures, to be used for "triangulation or to improve reliability" (2007, p. 110), at least not in its traditional sense with an implicit claim to seeking truth. Rather, multiple methods are used to explore experience in a variety of ways to ensure a deeper, richer, and more nuanced (re)presentation of the minutiae of everyday life. Working multiply: talking *with* objects; doing things together like drawing the timeline; flicking through photographs; or fitting on old clothes; have an impact, and the intricacies of doing so are discussed below under the following headings: the timeline and timelining; photographs and objects; diaries and notebooks; stories and talking.

The timeline: A quintessential prop

Maps and mapping have long played important roles in exploring and studying our world. Drawing maps encourages visualisation of the spatial relationships between events and activities, people and places, and time past and present. Any exercise in

mapping involves the plotting of data with numbers or words, drawings or photographs, positioned onto a grid. To facilitate the data collection aspect of my research, I adapted Gergen and Gergen's (1986, p. 37) theoretical representations of narrative form and in particular the "temporal arrangement of events relevant to the goal" or valued end-point to graphically plot weight, events and activities, people and things, over time. Stories about weightloss are very often stories about struggling to reach a goal weight. Hence, the concept of plotting or mapping weight over time, to explore the experience of living with issues around fatness and weight, was formed. A quintessential prop to elicit storytelling was created. The process of plotting the timeline to visualise lived experience and its utilisation as an instrument for graphic elicitation is called "timelining" (Sheridan et al., 2011).

A timeline was individually constructed for each participant on an A3 sheet of graph paper with my help. Figure 4 shows an example of a timeline (see appendices H, I, J and K for more examples). Time was plotted on the *x*-axis, and weights, in kilograms, were plotted on the *y*-axis. Although mindful of the critical research and commentary around obesity (e.g., Campos, 2004; Flegal et al., 2005; Gard & Wright, 2005), and the use of the BMI as a measure (Evans & Colls, 2009; Jutel, 2006), I chose to depict the familiar BMI categories of underweight, normal, overweight, and obese on the graph. Participants often referred to these categories in their discussions about weight before timeline plotting began, so it was a way of indirectly alluding to and troubling the categorisation of weight and health, and encouraging further talk around these issues. Having these issues innocuously *lying around* on the graph was a gentle way to approach matters that could have been sensitive for some participants.

Being able to plot a graphical timeline of their weight over the course of participants' lives was an essential part of this project. Producing the timeline was a co-constructed endeavour. During the timeline plotting session, I took the role of plotting the graph. However, what was entered onto the graph was at the discretion of my participants, who provided the details to be plotted. The plotting of data points, of how much a woman weighed at a particular point in time, was left up to the participant's memory guided by information such as medical records, photographs and material objects.

The time frame covered by the *x*-axis was also left up to participants and was expected to cover a period of a person's lifetime when weight was of interest or concern. The time frames ranged from ten years to a whole lifetime, including childhood and a participant's earliest memories. As plotting progressed, my participants often extended out the dimensions of their timeline.

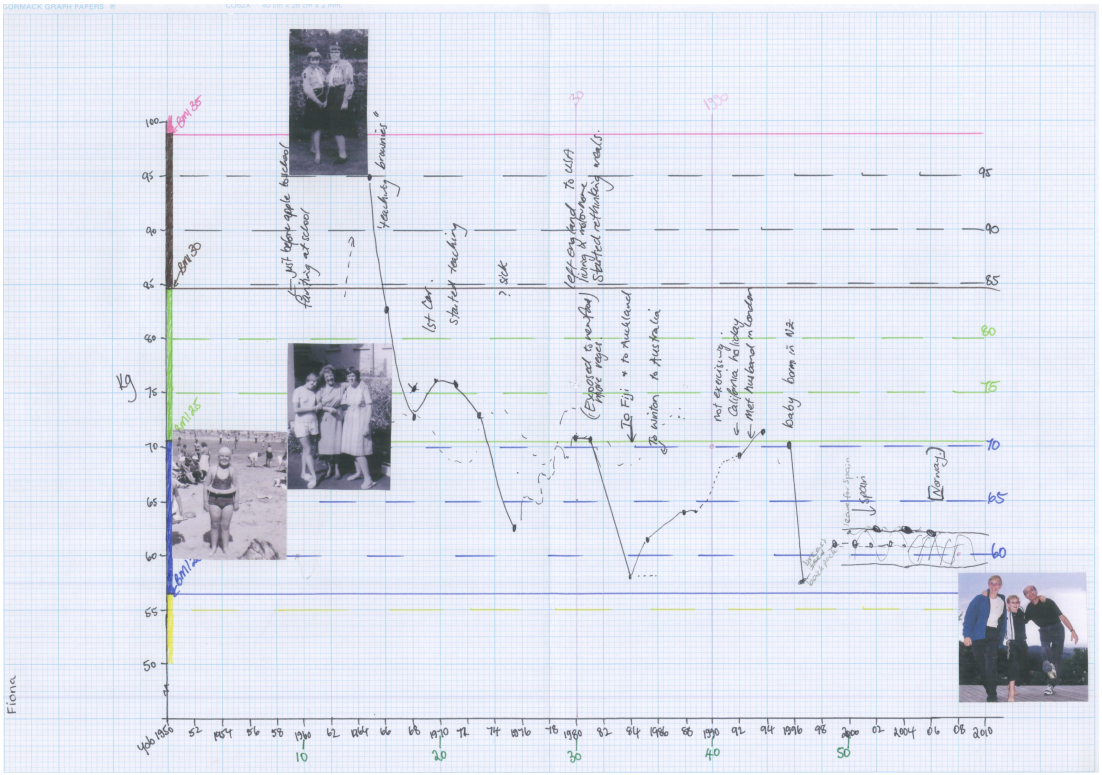


Figure 4: Fiona's timeline

Each data point of weight, as well as details about participants' experiences such as events and activities, were contemplated by the participant, discussed with me, and then plotted on the graph. They were discussed on their own, or in relation to other details plotted on the graph, as well as in relation to material objects produced, like photographs, and previous talk. The sequence for plotting data onto the timeline was also not directed by me, but left to my participants. Some participants preferred to plot memories of weight around a specific theme, whereas others were guided by time. For example, one participant systematically plotted weight changes starting from her teenage years and moving to the present, while another used a series of sporting events to focus the development of her timeline. Participants had no trouble providing data points for the graph.

> *I got my doctor to print this out for me. Um, he hasn't got all of my weights and that's just from 1995 to September 2006. [Charlotte]*

> *Yep. You always know how much you weigh on your wedding day! So it's just one of those things you do. You hop on the scales and it's committed to memory forever. [Alice]*

Gradually, as more and more data points were plotted on the graph, participants were able to join the dots together and, with weight shifting up and down as time passed, the graph pictured a somewhat zig-zaggy, albeit neat and tidy, line. But, a tidy, zig-zaggy line hides the messy, chaotic nature of the memory work process of making the timeline, which is not unlike storytelling and narrative generally (Sermijn et al., 2008).

Although guided by the grid of the graph, my participants were not asked to restrict themselves to any form of temporal linearity while creating the timeline. It is worth pointing out that the linearity of the timeline, suggested by the stricture of the axes on the graph, is probably no different from the constraint imposed on storying by a list of questions asked during interviewing (Kvale, 2006). In practice, the graph's axes did not curb the unfettered nature of plotting the timeline. Often, as one dot was plotted it would draw out a story about weighing a similar weight at a completely different time in the participant's life, and the need to plot a data point while it was being talked about meant that plotting sometimes jumped backwards and forwards over the timeline. Jumping also occurred when details about events and activities were put onto the graph in the form of text and drawings. Examples of experiences that punctuated the timeline included surgery and illness, holidays and employment, shopping and leisure, birthdays and weddings, the births of babies, and the deaths of parents. Often, talking and drawing about one experience elicited memories about other experiences and had a snowballing effect. As expected, there was a proliferation of events and experiences around turning points, when the graph line was observed to change direction. These life events, along with periods of weight change, were significant for drawing out stories of weightloss and gain. As already mentioned, participants were asked to produce material objects such as photographs, clothing, mementos, and so on. These objects were spread out on the table while the graph was drawn and were called upon, as the timeline was developed, to help participants focus on time periods they had previously glossed over. As one participant, who had kept a personal diary for many years, remarked:

> *I actually don't even remember those [periods of binge eating] but they're in the journal so can only assume that they happened. The journals don't lie...[Ismene]*

After the plotting session, my participants took their graphs home, giving them opportunity to alter or add to details on their timelines. By leaving the graph in a prominent place at home, such as a dining room table, the timeline became the focus of further comment, questioning, and revision. Participants also used the timeline to elicit stories about themselves from family members and friends, encouraging further

augmentation and providing more material for discussion during subsequent interviews. Thusly, my participants became researchers of their own lives as demonstrated in the following interview excerpt:

> *Joanna: So, how did you get on? Did you add anything to the graph?*
>
> *Ismene: I did a wee bit – bits and pieces. You can kind of in retrospect put more significance on things than they deserve, some of these things were maybe not relevant but they all add to the picture I guess. When I started I thought I couldn't really think of anything significant so I started putting things on and then as I was doing it, came up with some more stuff. Yeah this was interesting…I was at mum and dad's and they have this photo…*

The timeline was never intended to be anything other than a prelude to the *real work* of interviewing and storytelling. However, it became an important part of the interview process, storytelling, and analysis, and not able to be detached from them. Firstly, the timeline alleviated the need for a list of questions or prompts a researcher might ask to explore life experience, and in this case the course of weightloss. The timeline, and the material objects surrounding it, were used as points of entry into narrative and to point the way (Carpiano, 2008; Henwood & Shirani, 2012; Pink, 2008). Simply pointing to areas on the timeline or picking up photographs and objects and asking, "What is happening here? Or, "tell me about this" were the only questions needed to encourage storying. Importantly, researcher comments like, "that was when your second baby was born" were needed to unobtrusively connect aspects of the timeline to what a participant was talking about. Similarly, as shown in the excerpt below, passing comments were used to connect events and times on the timeline to particular visual objects. These connections were needed to facilitate subsequent analysis.

> *Elizabeth: I kept all my school photos. See I wasn't a tiny baby. That's me, and my older sister, and that's the three of us.*
>
> *Joanna: Oh, I know that giraffe, it's at the Zoo.*

Secondly, for participants concerned or shy about being interviewed, the task of drawing the timeline was a novel distraction. Intensive probing during interviews can make participants uncomfortable and uneasy, whereas an object like a timeline can distract, and by providing something to talk about, make a participant's need to perform less arduous. Timelining, the process of plotting and drawing the timeline, as well as the timeline itself, took over the participant's performative role. By drawing attention onto itself, the timeline became a third party in the interview (Collier & Collier, 1986). It took pressure off participants and became an *active player* in the

interview. The task of drawing the graph was not onerous. Rather, participants often talked about enjoying the process, and mentioned deriving insight and satisfaction from completing it.

> *Until we did this chart [timeline] I never really thought about that, about how I popped up [weight went up] last year and then came back down. Until we did this I suppose I never really worked a lot of it out. [Becky]*

Thirdly, the co-constructedness of drawing the timeline and timelining provided both my participants and me with a variety of perspectives from which to view lived experience. Sometimes it allowed the close scrutiny of important one-off events like leaving school; the comparison of one experience with another like the pregnancy and birth of a first baby relative to a second baby; or the comparison of one part of the timeline with another, like the steady increase in weight before going overseas, compared with the steep drop in weight before getting married. At other times participants *stepped back,* and took a bird's-eye view of the timeline as a whole: the picturing of a lifetime. In the following excerpt, Ismene discovered a portion of the graph she had not noticed while plotting her weight. She had not given any significance to it until she looked at the timeline as a whole. She was captivated by what she described as a "wiggle in the line", and compared it with other sections of the timeline. The portion of the timeline she is talking about is shown in the Figure 5 and refers to the more recent, right-hand section, of her graph (see red arrow).

Ismene used this section of the timeline to reflect on the past, and, in the present, she made plans for the future.

> *I thought that it [drawing the timeline] was quite helpful. I'd never done that before. I'd never looked at it in that way before. I think, looking at that and seeing how I did have that little kind of wiggle in the line in the last five years. It reinforced for me that I really don't want to do that. I don't want to be yo-yoing around and that if I can just keep that nice steady line within the weight range I am in, then that will be fine. [Ismene]*

The wiggle in the line, as she described it, was an incidence of weight fluctuation, and while it appeared to be no more than a minor aberration in the timeline, the lack of control that it represented, was not minor for her.

> *All of those feelings came back and it was really a bit sort of panicky and you start to think, "Oh my God is this going to spiral out of control. Am I going to lose it all? All that hard work that I did, is it going to be lost?" [Ismene]*



Figure 5: A section of Ismene's timeline showing her "wiggle in the line".

For Ismene, seeing this small fluctuation in weight elicited concerns about being able to keep control of her weight. She desired a nice steady line with no room for deviation, which for her, represented control. However, the simplicity of a straight line was deceptive because to achieve it required rigid discipline, on a daily basis. The timeline was a valuable tool for reflection for participants and researcher alike. It worked to reveal, uncover, and expose. However, it also worked to conceal, hide, and disguise. "The nice steady line" which Ismene desired, hid her anxiety about losing control and the constant dissatisfaction she felt: she never relaxed.

> *[I] never consciously stopped wanting to lose weight – [I] still think I need to lose 5-10kg more. Probably stops me from feeling too relaxed. [Ismene]*

Talking about their timelines with participants, provided me with insight as a researcher. For example, the story elicited by the "wiggle" in the timeline provided

insight into the never-finished project of maintaining a significant weightloss. Before Ismene had focused on, and discussed her wiggle, I had read this section of her timeline to be evidence of her success, given that she had maintained her major weightloss for seven years. However, timelining provided insight into her fear of losing control. It illustrated how, for successful slimmers, the fear of relapse and failure is ever present: the battle is never over (Sarlio-Lähteenkorva, 2000).

The timeline afforded several perspectives from which to draw out stories, and provided points of entry into narrative, resulting in a rich data set. However, such a variety of perspectives could not have been achieved if a single interview had been used, since participants used the time in between interviews for reflection, and their own personal form of (re)searching. Therefore, the utility of time is the final important feature of timelining, and a more in-depth discussion on this is presented elsewhere (Sheridan et al., 2011). Through storytelling, an appreciation of time was gained by how much had happened: like how much weight a participant had lost, or how much something had changed. As the graph was plotted, evidence of change was represented by the position and number of dots on the timeline. Spaces on the timeline where data points were conspicuous by their absence, or periods when seemingly nothing had happened, were also of interest. Drawing attention to changes, as well as spaces and absences on a participant's timeline, provided a versatile vehicle for storying elaboration, explanation, and discussion.

Unlike one off interviews, which are often relied upon by qualitative researchers (Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005), the creation of the timeline, and the process of timelining, offered all the benefits of longitudinal qualitative research (Neale & Flowerdew, 2003; Plumridge & Thomson, 2003; Shirani & Henwood, 2011) for exploring the complexity of lived experience. In my research, my participants and I had considerable time for contemplation and reflection. This encouraged us to view experience from a variety of perspectives, and provided insights into the meanings of fatness, weightloss, and successful slimming. Timelining involved engaging with material objects, and the value of doing so, is now discussed.

Photographs and objects: The power of things

Material objects surround us. They can be made, bought and sold, collected and disposed of, acquired through inheritance, and given and received as gifts. They can convey sentiment, they can provide pleasure and security, they can reflect personal tastes, and they can also manifest moral principles, and social ideals (Miller, 1987). Some objects gain extraordinary status and value, such as photographs, which have

been described as both images, and physical objects (Edwards & Hart, 2004). Objects can encode memories, commemorate personal histories, and have implications for identity (Morgan & Pritchard, 2005).

Based on anecdotal accounts received while planning my research, such as wanting to be able to fit into a wedding gown worn 20 years previously, or to one day wear a prized pair of *skinny jeans*, I had expected participants to produce articles of clothing when asked to bring objects that would aid talk about weightloss and body-shape-change. Also, a slim person holding up a pair of previously worn 'fat jeans', is a familiar image used in weightloss advertising. However, producing such items was not common, although one participant did talk about having kept one item of *fat clothing*.

> *At my 40th birthday I started making changes but I don't think I'd actually lost weight at that point. I've still got the dress that I had made for my 40th birthday. My daughter and I both fit into now – she stands behind me and we can put it on and get both of our arms through the armholes, so yeah I've still got that. [Guinevere]*

Given that my participants have managed to stay slim for at least five years, it was perhaps unreasonable to expect them to have kept unfashionable, over-sized, *fat-clothes,* particularly if fat-clothes were associated with bad memories and a past they would prefer to forget.

> *I've moved house a couple of times in that time. In doing so you get rid of a lot of things – I just had no use for it [fat-clothes] any more. I'm just not going back there, and to be honest I was really embarrassed I didn't want to see that clothing anymore. It was just [the] throwing out of it [which] actually made me feel good. No it did, oh honestly did. Just picking it up and tossing it in the bin was fantastic. [Alice]*

The predominant form of material object produced, by far, was photographs, maybe because, as Sontag (1977, p. 3) has said, "to collect photographs is to collect the world ... with photographs the image is also an object, light-weight, cheap to produce, easy to carry about, accumulate, store." Perhaps photographs are a very ordinary, everyday way to effortlessly show how things were and are, and are kept longer than other items might be. Photographs, although fragile and easily damaged, are often kept for generations in frames, albums, boxes, and more recently stored digitally on computers and compact discs. Without exception, participants all produced and consulted photographs while plotting data points on their graphs.

> *No, I know you [the researcher] don't need to see that [photograph] but it's a case of by looking at them I can remember what was going on in my life at the time. [Fiona]*

Photographs were also a good way to show a physical difference in body shape and size. For someone who has lost a considerable amount of weight, they captured a person gone: a fat person who no longer exists. My participants often used photographs to *prove* that a significant weightloss had occurred.

> *Yeah, but no one believes me that I used to be that big. I have to have the photos in my locker at work because people come up to me and go..."can we see your photos?" [Charlotte]*

However, there were instances where photographs were absent, or could not be found, which also created opportunities for discussion. Sontag (2003, p. 116) suggests that it is understandable "to turn away from images which simply make us feel bad" and some participants certainly admitted that they had destroyed, or avoided keeping, 'fat photos' which were unflattering.

> *I've got rid of plenty of photographs in which I thought I looked too fat. I've even asked friends to get rid of their photos of me. [Ismene]*

In the following excerpt, Becky tried to explain why her image was often missing in family photographs, and why she was unable to provide photographic evidence of her body when she was fat.

> *These [photographs] are the only ones I can find. I actually have no other photos, and even with the kids – I went through their photograph albums and there's heaps of the kids and the kids and Tom. I think I would be lucky to find two of me, and that was when I was hiding behind the kids so you've just got my face. So yeah, there's obviously, you know, and that's quite sad, that I just didn't get myself involved in the photos and things like that because it must have been in the back of my mind how big I was. But I actually don't ever remember saying to myself, "my God I'm really huge". [Becky]*

Interestingly, both the presence and absence within, as well as of, photographs and objects provided opportunities to broaden and expand storytelling. Becky's inability to find herself in family photographs forced her to talk about whether she actively avoided putting herself into the photographs.

Given that material objects are replete with stories (Miller, 1987; Noble, 2004), I expected them to be used as visual windows into the stories participants told as they created and discussed their timelines, which they did. However, the production of material objects also impacted participants, and my research itself, in unexpected ways. Firstly, objects like photographs often opened up and shifted memories, and forced identity to be renegotiated for several participants. For example, during her second

interview, Fiona recalled being a fat child but believed that other children of her age were not fat. She believed that fatness and obesity were problems of society today, but were not problems in the past. However, while looking at an old school photograph, she began to tell a different story.

> *And I was telling everybody that kids weren't podgy at school. Well I know this one at the back she certainly hid herself there because she was. [This one] she's quite tubby. And this girl here, we used to have a fight "who's the weightiest?" So she was chubby too. So actually in our year there actually were quite a few chubby kids. And I was telling everybody cos in those days there weren't – but there were! … So it actually wasn't so unusual as people would have thought in those days. I didn't realise that until I saw this photo last week. I thought "no, I wasn't the only one". [Fiona]*

Several participants were surprised at how wrong their recollections of the past had been when photographs did not support their talk: there was a mismatch between the visual evidence, and their stories. Although using photographs in this way seems to invoke notions of corroboration or triangulation, this was certainly not my intention. Rather, my expectation was that objects would assist, enrich, deepen, and enhance storytelling. My participants' use of photographs often provided them with new perspectives and insights, which may not have happened if the photographs were not used.

Secondly, as mentioned earlier in connection to the timeline and timelining, material objects changed the dynamics of an interview. Their use impacted on the relationship between participant and researcher at the same time as facilitating storytelling. Objects encouraged the physical and emotional distance between people to shrink and became "communication bridges between strangers" (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 99). For instance, one participant, Diana, presented a 61 year-old baby booklet documenting her development from birth (see Figure 6). She pointed out several entries in the old, fragile booklet that documented a babyhood of insatiable hunger and appetite. The following excerpt exemplifies a changing relationship between researcher and participant.

Diana *Look what I found.*

Joanna *Oh my goodness – it's your baby record.*

Diana *Yes (excited)!*

Joanna *What does it say?*

Diana *Oh, I was a good eater, it's wonderful. These books are incredible you know.*

Joanna *They are aren't they?*

Diana There we are, "hungry and having good meals. Is extremely hungry and having good meals" (both laughing). Now you see.

Joanna "Is extremely hungry…" yes, look at that (both laughing).

Diana I must have been eating like a little pig! I'm not even a year old and look at it (both laughing while pointing at what was written).

Joanna You were hungry then.

Diana Hungry all my life! See, some people say weightloss is something because of what you're eating; I've had it all my life! I've had an eating problem all my life! I've been hungry all my life!

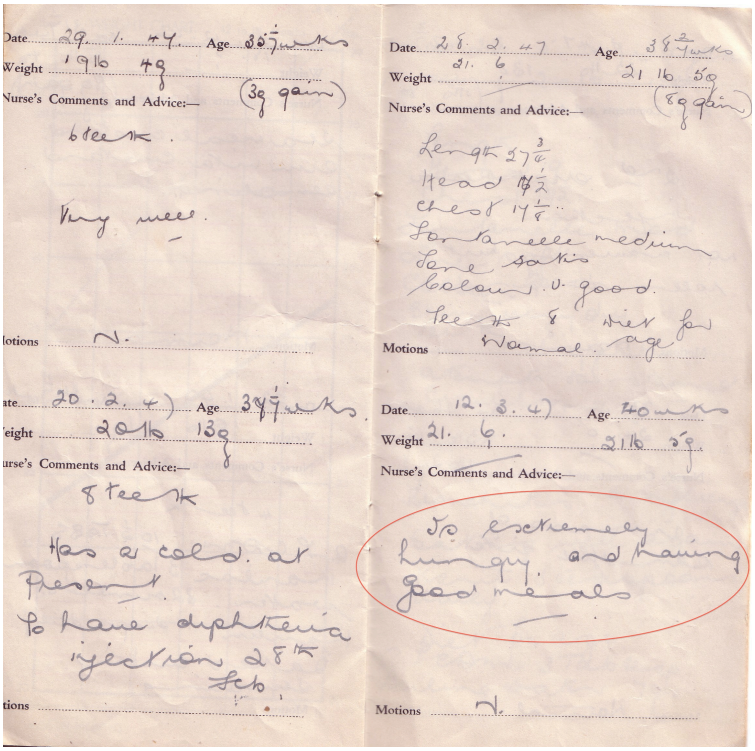


Figure 6: An image of two pages from Diana's 61-year-old baby development booklet

For several minutes, Diana and I became collaborative surveyors as we sat close together sharing and enjoying what the small book unveiled, as each page was turned. There were moments of high hilarity. Our interaction impacted on the tone of the rest of the interview, and subsequent interviews.

Thirdly, objects impacted on *my* relationship with the research. For example, several participants produced food diaries, and records of calorie counting and exercise regimens, and talked about keeping records of what was eaten. Often these records

were only kept for short periods of time, usually when dieting was difficult, or if weight was not coming off as expected. Some participants kept records on a weekly chart provided by a weightloss organisation, while others used personal diaries or calendars. One participant, Heidi, produced a particularly interesting food diary.

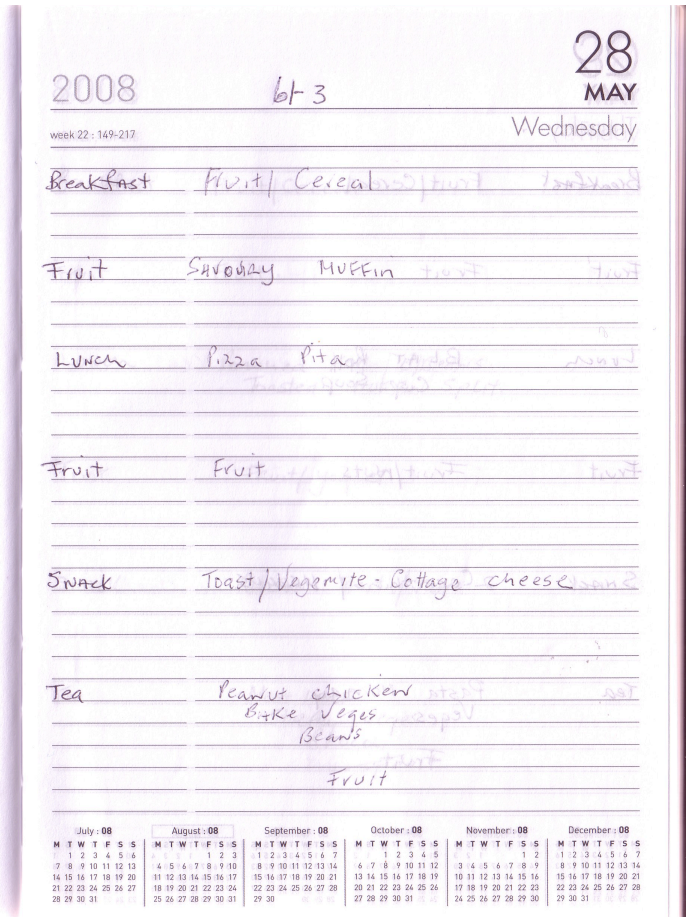


Figure 7: A page from one of Heidi's "stark" food diaries

Although each page provided very little detail, Heidi felt that completing these entries contributed significantly to her success of losing weight and staying slim. On its own, the production of this diary was not particularly valuable because it did not elaborate Heidi's narrative substantially since keeping a diary like this was a mundane, albeit necessary task, for her. It was when Heidi produced eight years of identically stark A5 diaries, and I flicked through page after page and year after year of identical diary records, that insight was provided into the ritualised practices that underlay Heidi's weightloss and long-term weightloss generally. My physical engagement with the object facilitated this.

However, although valuable, some objects also disrupted and distracted the interview process. During her second interview, Alice produced a box that contained a beautiful, handcrafted photograph album displaying a series of professionally taken photographs. She was keen to have this particular image below represent her victory over fatness.



Figure 8: "The red photograph" that for Alice represented her victory over fatness.

Steeped in concern over objectifying women's bodies, I was apprehensive to use this photograph. I felt it revealed too much and should be kept private but Alice did not agree. She was adamant that I should use it and insisted that I do so without any form of disguise. My concerns about objectification had to be balanced against Alice's informed choice and determination to represent her success in this way. The nature of the photograph forced an ethical debate both during the interview and for some time afterwards and distracted us from the purpose of the research (Sheridan & Chamberlain, 2011).

This episode uncovered the duality underlying my research method. By encouraging participants to select relevant objects, they were given control over what to present and what to withhold. My purpose in encouraging participants to bring things to the interviews was a belief that these objects would, as Collier (1957)

suggests, prod, focus, and enrich talk of lived experience. However, my participants' purposes were quite different. In this instance, the story Alice told shed light on her motivation and need to represent success in this overtly visual way.

> *My first husband did eventually leave. He said three things that really hurt. He said he didn't love me anymore. He said he wasn't attracted to me anymore, and that he didn't care about me anymore ... at the time I was a little overweight um yeah and the comments just sapped all my self-confidence ... my appearance was always important to him. I had to be slim – I had to dress right – I had to look good. He's a very artificial type of person – like I was some kind of possession. He said he was not attracted to me anymore. That was the most hurtful one of all to be honest. It didn't matter that he didn't love me or didn't care. But that he wasn't attracted to me, that made me feel ugly, horrible – that hurt.*
>
> *I just – I felt so disappointed for my wedding [to second husband]. I couldn't do it [lose weight] for my wedding. If only I could've done it for my wedding! It was such a gorgeous dress. And honestly I would've looked better if I wasn't carrying the weight. It [having the photographs taken] was what I did once I got to my goal weight. This is sort of my, my reward. But yeah I've come a long way to get that. [Alice].*

The photograph album Alice produced and the poignant story she told, illustrated that while using objects to elicit storytelling is valuable in research, it was the story she told which provided meaning and insight. The objects on their own carried no meaning; they needed to be talked about. Nevertheless, objects enhanced and encouraged talk, they were a vehicle for reflexivity, they added colour, richness, and depth to accounts of lived experience, and they offered greater leverage for interpretation and insight (Sheridan & Chamberlain, 2011). Also, in a repeated interview format, discussion sometimes becomes stale and stilted (Padfield, 2011). In my research this was avoided, since engaging with objects added a re-invigorated freshness along with a new or previously not thought of angle or perspective.

Besides the timeline and objects such as photographs, my multiple text method also used excerpts of participants' writing to facilitate storytelling. These were pieces of writing created specifically for my research, as well as writing already in existence such as entries in personal journals and letters.

Notebooks, letters and journals: Writing matters

During the first interview, participants were given a notebook and asked to write whatever they wished about fatness or losing weight while being involved in this research. They were told that they could include diarised notes about emotions,

thoughts, and feelings, and that they should not be constrained by content or form. Writing could have included: lists, poems, letters, prose, or even diagrams, and drawings. While participants were encouraged to write regularly, writing was not considered as an essential part of my method such as timelining was, so it was not overly emphasised. Rather, it was provided as a form of expression in case some participants were keen to convey their experiences in this textual way. Consequently, although the creation of writing and asking participants to keep a diary has been particularly useful in research investigating everyday life (Harvey, 2011; J. Johnson & Bytheway, 2001), writing for this research project tended to be used more as an adjunct to the other forms of data collection used. On the whole, participants reported finding writing difficult. They tended to write very little and some were perhaps even intimidated by it.

> *Yeah, I've written down um (looking in her notebook) I don't write a lot. I'm not a writer. [Becky]*

While it was hoped that the notebooks would provide an additional textual dimension to explore experience, participants tended to use them as they would a shopping list, to ensure important dates or events were not forgotten during interviewing, or while drawing the timeline. Hence, the notebooks primarily functioned as a prompt and to jog memory. The following is an excerpt from Diana's diary:

> 1973 To Auckland
> 1975 Scoobe (dog)
> 1983 Size 18 – dropped to 16 for Westpac uniforms
> 1984 Had Scoobe (dog) put down
> Went to USA – 10 weeks
> Snacked a lot – put on weight
> Ate extra (previously given to Scoobe) also stopped twice-daily walks.
> 1987 Gradual increase
> 1988 Joined gym
> 1990 Photo – New Year – max weight 114 kg plus
> May Robyn advised she was doing Jenny Craig; had lost 5 kgs in month
> Set myself 5 kgs target – 1 month
> Went on to loose 23 kgs
> Reward – trip to Hawaii

With these notes and dates, Diana used her notebook as an informative adjunct to storytelling and timelining. However, occasionally participants disagreed with, or questioned, entries they had written in their diaries sometimes weeks, or perhaps only days, earlier. For instance, Becky came across this entry in her notebook.

I still worry about my food and wine intake

As she read it out loud during her last interview session, Becky took exception to the implication that she was worrying about how much she was eating and drinking. She was almost annoyed at what had been written. It was not how she wanted to be perceived.

> *But I don't worry. I actually just watch it. I actually don't sit there scrutinising it. I just watch what I am doing.*

Although insight was gained from these data individually, considering how and why Becky took issue with what she had written was interesting. While it could be argued as having implications for corroboration or triangulation, it had a more useful value. Writing, and hearing herself say what she had written, were obviously different experiences. Becky had written a personal or "private" note in her notebook that became "public" when it was discussed with me. Her reaction encouraged me to look more closely at the motivation behind her story. It seemed important for her that the public effort of staying slim should be perceived as carefree, but perhaps this was not what Becky experienced in private. Consequently, just as Fiona's stark diaries provided insight into the ritualised practices of losing weight, Becky's critique of her notebook entry provided insight into the notion that staying slim should to be perceived as effortlessly achievable. Both these understandings have become central for my research interpretation as a whole.

Not unexpectedly, many participants wrote about food and weight, and while specific feelings or emotions were not always mentioned, they were sometimes evident between the lines that participants wrote. The following excerpt represented the entire content of Charlotte's notebook. The entries, although somewhat brief, revealed an unhappy relationship with food and there was a feeling of sadness, perhaps regret, along with a confession of relentless self-monitoring.

Food is not my friend.
Food dominates me and motivates me.
I think of food all the time. More now.
I wonder who I'm skinny for.
I read all packaging. Even in Starbucks.
I obsess about weight.
I have clothes I measure myself on.
I weigh myself every day.

Charlotte's extract also demonstrated the value of visually engaging with a written text. In this instance, the rather frequent use of personal pronouns drew attention to a self-centred or self-focused view my participants sometimes demonstrated which, considering the effort required to achieve long-term weightloss, was certainly understandable. However, this perspective was not as pointedly evident when listening to, or transcribing interview data, as it was reading this notebook excerpt.

The creation of written texts was generally underutilised by my participants, which was understandable, given their necessarily protracted engagement with the other methods used in my research, such as timelining. However, this has no bearing on the value of using diaries in research. Indeed, with encouragement and support while participants are producing written texts, this method can provide insightful data (Milligan, Bingley, & Gatrell, 2005).

Besides creating writing specifically for the research, participants also produced writing in the form of letters or journals which, in some cases, were written many years previously and were written for purposes other than this research project. For instance one participant said her personal writing was used as a distraction from eating.

> *When I was trying to get through the emotional issues and relationships and stuff without resorting back to using food I would try and write. I often wrote stuff like, "All my world revolves around is weightloss". [Guinevere]*

Extracts from personal journals often elicited intense emotions. An example of this involved a series of epistolary journal entries and letters that a participant had written, but put away, some ten years previously. While drawing the timeline, Guinevere had difficulty remembering details about a particular time. She had, however, remembered writing a letter around that time to a woman who offered advice on losing weight. The original, rough copy of the letter had been put inside the journal she was keeping at the time. The following, is a piece from Guinevere's timeline interview. The passages she reads directly from her journal are shown in a non-italicised font inside inverted commas:

> *Joanna: Do you often keep journals?*
>
> *Guinevere: I go through fits and starts of it. Do you want me to read you some of this?*
>
> *Joanna: Whatever you would like, whatever you want to do.*
>
> *Guinevere: This goes back to 1998*
>
> *Joanna: Yeah that's exactly where we are [indicating on the timeline]*
>
> *Guinevere: Yeah* "Binged on Irish cream thins last night – ate the whole box couldn't stop till they were all gone. Felt lonely" *[she starts to cry]*

Joanna: Is it too hard? [Pause]

Guinevere: It's a bit fresh mainly because um, of feeling like I've been relapsing lately

Joanna: Do you want to leave it?

Guinevere: Um, [Pause] It's just such mental torture you know when I look at this stuff (the diary entries). [Pause] Um, and then we've jumped to a couple of weeks later after that..."and bought fruit and vege and flowers for myself" *and I've underlined flowers because it would have been something that I wouldn't normally do.* "More hopeful – had a hair cut on Friday and felt good about that. Had wholemeal roll at Subway instead of Burger King didn't enjoy it as much though, still felt hungry."

I don't even remember ever eating Burger King but obviously I did.

Reading the journal entries reconstructed the intensity of Guinevere's emotional state during a particularly sad, and difficult, time in her life ten years previously as well as how she was feeling currently. It reconnected her to feelings and thoughts she had forgotten about. There was a *pulling and pushing* from past to present and from present to past. Reading the journal pulled Guinevere into the past, and pushed memories of sadness into the present. It is questionable whether talking alone could have touched as intensely, or connected as personally, to how she was feeling at that time. For Guinevere, reading the journal opened old wounds, and the ethical concerns that this raised were palpable. The journal also brought up issues and feelings that had been forgotten or misremembered. For example, she had not remembered having eaten at Burger King so, without the journal, a different story may have been told.

Whether created specifically for research, or already in existence, written texts brought all the advantages of engaging with material objects discussed previously and more. The written texts were an echo of a participant's voice from the past, and opened up and provided a very direct connection to emotions, feelings, and thoughts long since forgotten. Although observing how my participants engaged with written texts was insightful and informative for me, it was sometimes painful for them. Also, working with notebooks, letters and journals demonstrated that engaging with different forms of data, particularly if obtained at different times, can increase the likelihood that two pieces of data will contradict each other. The potential for conflict or juxtaposition of multi-dimensional or multi-sensorial data will be discussed shortly.

Until now, this method section has dealt with the elements of the material world such as photographs, and notebooks that were used to encourage participants to tell their stories and help distillate out the minutiae of lived experience. In this next section the stories themselves and what participants said are explored.

Stories and talking: What did they say?

Everyone enjoys a good story. Often, when we hear a good story we cannot wait to tell it to someone else. With narrative analysis, researchers seek to tell gripping stories that are believable, illustrative of participants' worlds, and convincing of their plight (Andrews et al., 2008).

My participants engaged in four interviews and talked about something they were passionate about: the data were replete with good stories. For most participants, issues around body size and weight had been a preoccupation their whole lives, and often their earliest memories were about thinking they were bigger than siblings or friends, and wishing they were smaller and slimmer. Even after successfully having lost a large amount of weight, several talked about wanting to be slimmer and many confessed that they thought about food all the time: food was both hated and loved. Preparing food, and exercise regimens, consumed a good part of each day, but some were quick to dismiss or make light of the amount of effort involved. Here Charlotte talks about the exercise she does. Training for half marathon races helped her maintain her weightloss.

> *I'll run before lunch or run before dinner. I find a really good way to distract myself from the effort of running will be thinking about what I can eat and the different combinations. I find myself thinking about food a lot…I run Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays. In saying that though, on Thursday, Friday and Saturdays when I work we start our [work] shift with a run. If I'm not running I'll walk my dog for a minimum of an hour every day. And that's not a dawdle – I'm sweating by the end of it. If I want to run 13ks [kilometres] I have to allot 2 hours for that because the actual run takes me an hour. But by the time you piss around and get ready and start doing it and then come home and cool down and finish stretching you've got to allow a 2-hour window. [Charlotte]*

Participants said they thought it was important to be aware of what was in food and to know how to read the labels on food packaging. For instance, foods with high fat or sugar content were red flagged and avoided. They denied knowing any more than the average person knows about food and said that their knowledge was really very limited. Yet they made distinctions between trans fats, saturated fats and mono and poly-unsaturated fats; they knew the advantages of complex versus simple carbohydrates in relation to their glycemic index; and they could talk about the vitamin and nutritional content of some foods at length. Interestingly though, sometimes the reasoning behind the demonisation of certain foods was not always well founded. "Why are potatoes bad? They just are".

Participants stuck to very clear guidelines and boundaries with respect to what to eat and what not to eat. Some never crossed these lines but others were a little more flexible, although, there were limits. Family members and friends were a source of frustration in this regard, since they often tried to cajole a participant into eating something she did not want to eat, or cross lines she was not prepared to flout. Consequently, for some, food was a reason to avoid certain social situations.

There were certainly many good stories. I have chosen to recount an excerpt from one of them. Guinevere's story began from when she was about nine years old and proceeded chronologically to the present day. In her first interview she talked about an unhappy, abusive childhood and one of her earliest memories was of her mother "dieting" her when she was 11. Guinevere's excerpt below jumps to when she was 42 years old; soon after she began her 62-kilogram weightloss journey. It is an account of some of the things that happened as she lost her weight:

> *Slowly I started walking and walked maybe to the end of the road (20 minutes) maybe a couple of times a week and my husband would go with me. He would try and get me to go further but I wasn't always able to go further. If my hernia was painful I would have to stop and turn around and go back cos it would make me feel nauseous.*
>
> *I went to see a surgeon about it who turned out also did lap band [bariatric] surgery. He was quite keen to sell me a lap band but I wasn't there to do that. I had started losing weight by that point and I think I had lost about 30 kilos. I was feeling very proud. He was awful. He said that it [the hernia operation] wouldn't be successful. That it would be like trying to darn an old sock and that it would all break apart again. And that I had 5 to 10 years tops anyway. And I said, "What are you saying" and he said, "Well, you won't be around long enough for me to do it anyway". He was a private surgeon and I had to pay a hundred and something dollars for this. On my way out and getting out to the car it felt like I had just been diagnosed with terminal cancer or something. I remember feeling absolutely devastated … there was no acknowledgement of what I had done – without his fucking lap band! I wouldn't have paid now. In fact – the person that I am now would have got up, left the office, and refused to pay. But I had had so many knock backs medically and have been placed in such a victim role and demeaned that I was used to that.*
>
> *Yeah, so I just picked myself up and just continued on with what seemed to be working. Then my daughter was working at Westgate when somebody came around selling a 6-week gym pass and she decided to join. I said, "I think I might be ready to do that". And so we did. I remember feeling a bit frightened about going cos I'd never been and was concerned about how I would be viewed I suppose. But then I discovered that I really quite liked it.*
>
> *I was enjoying my step-aerobics and spin classes. Then about six months after the appointment with the "lap band surgeon" and after a very busy week doing a fair bit of*

heavy lifting, I woke up at 3am in excruciating pain. Later that morning I was taken to hospital for emergency hernia surgery … I guess I was quite fearful of not pulling through it. But the surgery was successful and as far as I know I've still got a big piece of mesh in me. [That was 11 years ago.]

Some time after that I was at the gym and we'd had a session that was a bit tougher than usual. Apparently a young woman, who had been in the class, had to leave it because she couldn't cope with it. She couldn't cope with the way the class was structured and the intensity of the workout and she said something about it to the receptionist at the front desk. She said, "It's too much for me, I'm not fit enough to do this class but I don't know how that big woman in there can manage it". Whoever was on reception called me over and told me that she had said that. Well it just proved to me that size doesn't necessarily represent a person's fitness or health.

So, I've lost 62 kilos – I want it to be more. [Even after this weightloss Guinevere is still obesely overweight]. I've always had strength but I think maybe at times I used to allow myself to be treated badly because I thought that that's what I deserved. I didn't see myself as being a valuable member of society. I saw myself apart from people and society. People would stare at me a lot. I can even remember saying, "I may as well be the fat lady in the circus", because I felt so freakish. I notice I don't get stared at the same anymore, so I think I must look a little bit more normal than I did. When people look at me sometimes now they might come and compliment me on something I'm wearing. I went to a café recently and I got up and ordered some coffee and my husband waited at the table. He said, "That man was looking at you". I said, "Was he?" My husband said, "I don't know why, cos he's got nothing to be proud of". The man wasn't slim. I said, "What makes you think he was actually looking at me only because I'm fat. He might have been looking at me cos he fancies me!"

Guinevere's story took me on a roller-coaster ride of emotion: her tenacity amazed me; the doctor's personal agenda and blithe dismissal of her achievements infuriated me; a fitness industry not better at enticing big people to exercise disappointed me; and finally, in the photos she showed me, the look in her husband's eyes as he held her in his arms as they danced, took my breath away. As the protagonist in her story, Guinevere appeared to become more assertive and self-confident as she lost weight. However, during her interviews she often talked about lacking confidence when it came to controlling her eating urges. To her, her body disavowed any evidence of success or achievement. Even after having lost 62 kilograms; she was *still* obesely overweight, and very aware that society measured success in kilograms and slimness. She glossed over, or ignored, other evidence of success in her life: like running a thriving business; caring for ill parents; having a husband, children, and good friends who all adored her; competing in regional dancing competitions; raising funds for charities; restoring and driving vintage cars; all things she did on an almost daily basis.

She certainly never appreciated the inspiration that she was. She had won the "Inspirational Member" award at her gym on more than one occasion. She has inspired the title of this thesis, for one of the first things she said to me was that "people judge a book by its cover". Aspects of Guinevere's story echoed other participants' stories: all were remarkable.

My research elicited arts-based, visual, written, and spoken texts to explore participants' experiences of weightloss. The next step was to weave these multiple texts together and craft a coherent story. Since stories are crafted for different audiences, I will tell this story in two different forms for two different audiences. First, my participants' stories will be told in the form of a piece of ethnodrama: a play that is persuasive and engaging. Second, the stories will be told in the form of a chapter out of an edited book that is scholarly and interpretively sophisticated.

With respect to analysis, it is not uncommon for researchers to struggle to convey and deconstruct their analytic processes into step-by-step stages (Crossley, 2007; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In my research, while the latter stages of play building are difficult to delineate into steps, the earlier stages of coding and theme construction necessary for writing the book chapter and important foundation aspects of the play such as scene setting and characterisation, were fairly structured and are outlined below. The process was iterative and involved a lot of to-ing and fro-ing across each participant's data set and between participants.

Making sense of multi-sensorial texts

In this research project the production of timeline drawings, copious photographs, excerpts of writing, and lengthy oral narratives all generated a large amount of messy data, which required careful selection, analysis, and interpretation. Since participants referred to their timelines, photographs, and written texts during their interviews, these objects were perused as the recordings were listened to, transcribed, and analysed.

Having all forms of multi-sensorial data available for perusal during analysis was important. While meaning was derived from texts individually, putting multi-sensorial texts together encouraged another level of interpretation and meaning making for participant and researcher alike. Spencer (2010, p. 251) has used the term, "third effect" in reference to the third meaning derived when two photographs were juxtaposed. When engaging with multi-sensorial texts in my research, meanings were derived from the two texts individually, but a third effect or impact sometimes occurred when they were placed side-by-side and compared.

Sometimes texts were at odds with each other. While there was a temptation to pick holes in data that were seemingly contradictory, it was important to keep two things in mind. Firstly, I was not seeking truth. Although interested in the "what" and "when" detail in participants' stories, I was more interested in the negotiation between multiple-texts and this facilitated the exploration of a deeper level of analysis. Juxtaposition and the exploration of difference between texts were vehicles for stepping outside stories. They encouraged looking more closely at the "who", "how" and "why" of participants' stories. These performances of narrative provided insight into the social worlds in which these stories circulate (Gubrium, 2005; Riessman, 2008).

Secondly, talk about lived experiences is rarely simply structured. Rather, it is often chaotic, fragmented, and contradictory (Frank, 1993; Sermijn et al., 2008). A lack of coherence in storytelling data, especially when stories were about family and daily life, was not unexpected (Hyvarinen et al., 2010; Langellier & Peterson, 2004). Engaging with multiple texts only made the incoherency and messiness of storytelling more obvious.

In most instances differences between texts were explored with the participant, and having a series of four interviews with each participant facilitated opening up inconsistencies. Revisiting and comparing something that was said in a previous interview with other texts like photographs or writing was common. For instance, Fiona re-evaluated the stories she told about her childhood after looking at old photographs, and Becky contradicted what she had written in her notebook.

Observations of differences between data, and the identification of a third meaning or third effect were also made long after interviewing had been completed. Arriving at an explanation for differences between data required critical thought and reflection. As with narrative analysis generally, multiple explanations can account for gaps and incoherencies within stories (Worth, 2008). The availability of multi-dimensional, multi-sensorial data facilitated the process of arriving at the *best* explanation: they loosened anchors and long held beliefs, presented openings for a different perspective, and provided insight. The process divulged detail that might otherwise have remained hidden (see Sheridan & Chamberlain, 2011). However, I was acutely aware that while this process was insightful and important for analysis, it was also subjective and enigmatic (Spencer, 2010). Therefore, it was necessary to keep track of the interpretive route taken.

With coding being an intermediary procedure between data collection and in-depth data analysis, I needed to utilise a coding frame or method that would facilitate the generation of concepts, categories, themes, and subthemes; encourage exploration,

meaning-making, and theorisation; and suit both the creative and theatrical, and non-arts-based conventional (re)presentation forms and aims of my research project. No single coding frame met these requirements. I therefore combined three coding frames to facilitate the analysis of my data: dramaturgical coding, narrative coding, and process coding (Saldaña, 2009). *Dramaturgical* coding was useful for focusing on a participant's intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences from a performative point of view. Participants were seen as characters in a social drama, which helped me become attuned to a participant's motivations and perspectives. N*arrative* coding was useful for focusing on a participant's storied experiences of places or settings, with messages, morals, and beliefs also suited to being explored this way. Finally, *process* coding was useful when searching for a participant's ongoing processes or responses to events or experiences, while striving to solve problems, or trying to reach a goal (Saldaña, 2009). The differences between these coding frames were important. Together, they provided an analysis method well suited to my research topic and my decision to represent my findings in two distinct forms.

Coding

Coding began by digitally copying and pasting participant's verbatim story transcripts into the first column of a three-column table using Microsoft Word (see Figure 9). Viewing coding much like winnowing, the next part of coding involved identifying and highlighting the elements of dramaturgical, narrative, and process coding and putting these text excerpts into the second column of the table. For instance, with *dramaturgical* coding I sought examples of objectives like, "staying slim"; conflicts or obstacles impeding achieving these objectives like, "wanting to have a baby"; how participants' dealt with conflicts or obstacles like, "limiting breast feeding"; participants' positions or attitudes towards conflicts or obstacles like, "wanting my life back"; and emotions like, "feeling guilty".

With *narrative* coding I sought types or forms of narrative. For example, a cautionary tale was, "if you had problems when you were fat these problems don't disappear when you're slim"; an epiphany narrative was, "I decided, right, I'm going to do something different; and that changed everything"; and an example of a genre like a comedy was, "I have a husband who continually thwarts my efforts to help him get healthy"; examples of settings were social functions such as a wedding, "every woman wants to look good on her wedding day"; features of plots like a turning point in a plot was, "I had already thrown out one skirt so it had gotten to the point where I couldn't hide it anymore".

This year, um and yeah and I amazingly coped, I did start drinking again. *Drinking again*! God I sound like an alcoholic. But no I'd have a couple of glasses of wine; it was only over a couple of weeks period. Um and then I sort of got myself into control and that. But I wasn't eating properly and that's probably why nothing went out of control on my weight. But yeah it was quite a big thing and I um managed to keep coming back down with it. Um and I guess you know one of the things I probably do have now is a lot more friends' support. You know a lot of friends are around me. And when you do hit strife and when things are going wrong you can actually speak to people and you can actually get it out that way instead of turning inwards and start eating again. Now that was a pattern that has to, you've got to break. I mean yes it did spiral up a little here but at that stage I was talking to friends and was you know getting help through it. But again at the beginning of the year um with my *shock* um it um I had a lot of support and so then things didn't spiral. Whereas I think back here things spiralled because of working, and lifestyle, and losing of my granddad, and connection to family...And you know my real father left when I was 5 um he chose to come back into my life at this stage. So there was a lot of shit really going all around here and so I didn't have a lot of support then. I didn't have a lot of girl friends around me cause my kids were young and a lot of my friends didn't have kids or. I never really made any amazing bonds at that stage. Whereas back here (maintenance) I did make amazing bonds which have seen all the way through. And I have got amazing bonds with friends. So now I'm not so reliant on the food to make me feel better or and those sorts of things. I'm um more reliant on talking to people about it but usually it's over a glass which is the problem. But you know you are sort of yeah I've got a lot more bonds and things. So I think even going back here you could say it was a really lonely stage of life as well. I felt quite alone. I had 2 little kids. I had a husband that worked a number of hours. And he's older than me so you know the children were for me, oh not for *me* just but you know if I didn't have children then there was no chance of me having children now. So I had to have them and he wasn't that keen on having them but we had them. Um and I think he found it hard with little ones around again cause he had, he's got a son whose now 24. So um it was a really lonely period of life. If I actually was to describe to you having my children and the beginnings of their life it was really lonely. And I always thought everyone was judging me and everyone looking at me oh how's that young mother raising them. My kids were the most perfectly well kept children in the world. You know they were well provided for; they had a perfect life. But I always thought people judged me. And I think this whole period back here would be described extremely lonely. Whereas now I'm quite filled in my life, I quite happy, I would like it a little bit more fuller but I have a lot more control over it. I know where I'm going; I know what I'm doing. And maybe because I'm in my 30s you've gone into a different stage of life.	Sounding like an alcoholic Need to have support – need friends so don't turn to drink or food Learning to cope with "things" differently with support weight doesn't spiral Lot of things contributing to the spiralling Needing support from friends and not reliant on food to make her feel better But not good when supporting is over a glass of wine. Staying slim OBJ Shock OBST Needing/using support TAC BUT support involves a glass OBST Awareness TAC Maturity TAC Last time was lonely and didn't have any support from friends or husband Failing at losing weight Slim (Control) OBJ Having children OBST Husband didn't really want children so not supportive OBST Mothering was obstacle OBST Had to be the best mother possible others were watching/judging her SUB she had something to prove to sacrifice herself for having children OBST No support OBST Loneliness EMO Mothering – she wanted children Doing her body was not priority A lack of control seen as a lack of maturity. *Now she has control and happiness, has a future and can set and achieve other goals* *MATURITY = CONTROL*	SPIRALLING and the SLIPPERY SLOPE MOTHERING SACRIFICE No SUPPORT MATURITY

Figure 9: A coding table with verbatim transcript, researcher comments, and code names.

With *process* coding I sought examples of ongoing action, or interaction, to situations or problems and used gerunds (words ending in "ing") to represent these. For example, pontificating, "Fat people shouldn't sit in McDonalds"; avoiding the slippery slope, "I don't have the first chocolate cos it leads to the second and the third"; monitoring, "I keep my weight between 61 and 63 kilograms"; demonising, "potatoes are bad".

Using three coding frames meant that there were sometimes excerpts of text that were evaluated using more than one code. For example, in the following excerpt Alice is talking about the constant battle she has with her husband.

> *I guess my husband was a trigger, and it's still a battle now with his food, to be honest. When we were out he wanted to go to the bakery for lunch. But that's out for me. I just won't do it. Lucky, there was a sushi bar right next door and I thought, "Yes, you go into the bakery and have your food, I'm going to grab some sushi." So, that's just the way it is. Yeah, but he needs to lose weight; he's got high cholesterol and high blood pressure. It's frustrating 'cos he can see me eating so well, and I'll say, no, no, no, no, but he still goes out and buys his food. Unfortunately, Annie, the 10-year old, she indulges with him. I have to keep saying to him, "Do you want her to go down that diabetes path? I really don't!" But it's out of my control because he buys the food when I'm not around. He picks up the kids before me and he's quite often bought something, and his idea of an occasional treat is a lot more than 'occasional'.*

This excerpt was coded using dramaturgical coding, since Alice sees her husband as an obstacle to her objective to stay slim. But she also sees him as reckless with his health, and with the health of their young daughter, which she finds frustrating. Using narrative coding, Alice is the battling heroine; she can be viewed as a "saint" at odds with her transgressor, "sinner" husband. Using process coding, Alice is "all knowing"; she is the expert, she has the answers, she knows what is wrong and what should be done. As this excerpt and example demonstrates, coding involves interpretation.

After interesting elements of the transcript texts in column one were digitally highlighted, copied and then pasted into the second column of the table, I added personal comments to these excerpts. My comments included notes about juxtaposed texts, subtexts, and both explicit and implicit interpretations of what participants had said. They were often my personal reflections about the research. Some were about my interactions with my participants, conversations with my supervisors, discussions with other researchers or people interested in my topic, and at times included relevant details and references from the literature. These personal reflections were a way for me to search within myself (Richardson, 2003a). They were as much about my story and me, as they were about my participants, and their stories. The reflections became an important and necessary reflexive lens on how my assumptions and views may have impacted on the interpretation of my data (Doucet, 2008; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992; Morgan & Pritchard, 2005). The extent of my notes and the amount of participants' highlighted text varied considerably from individual words or phrases, to complete sentences or a whole page of text.

Finally, descriptive key words or code words, which encapsulated both participants' piece of highlighted text and or my interpretive comments and reactions, were chosen and entered into column three of the table (see Figure 9). Finding a code word to capture this *essence* was not unlike seeking a title for a song, book, or film (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3). Both column two and column three were revisited on several occasions, and comments and code words were added or changed. The coding process was fluid and iterative. As new ideas or codes were drawn from the data, earlier transcripts were re-examined with these in mind. Examples of initial codes drawn from the data included: pontificating, a good mother, rationalising, demonising, the slippery slope, envy, control freak, ritualising, battling, the athlete, remorse, and many others.

The next phase of analysis required looking for relationships between different codes and sorting and combining codes into broader, categories and eventually into overarching themes. These themes formed the elements of the ethnodrama such as setting, plot, costume, characterisation and dialogue, and elements of the key factors in the book chapter. All excerpts from transcripts that were represented by a particular theme were sorted into separate Word documents, which became a repository for each theme. This made seeking examples of text for a particular theme for dialogue construction for the play, and excerpts to illustrate key points in the book chapter very straightforward.

A colour coding system was used so that each transcript excerpt could be traced back to the participant. For example, all text produced by Charlotte was represented by an orange font, whereas Elizabeth was blue. Consequently, it was possible to recheck a participant's intent, and the content and context of an original excerpt of verbatim transcript. This was particularly important for tracing back excerpts of participants' stories that had been reduced to a *juicy* piece of dramatic dialogue. Figure 10 provides an example of the integrity of colour coding through to analysis for a piece of playscript in the very early stages of development.

Although the play is a work of creative non-fiction, its characters, and their dialogue are anchored to my participants' stories. Importantly, the analysis used for the play and the book chapter were the same. The analysis simply took the interpretation and representation of my research findings in two different directions. My close relationships with my participants, my familiarity with their stories, and the thoroughness of my research method informed this.

PLAY: The slippery slope – Losing it all

Words from themes are in participants' own colours so I can track who said what Alice, Becky, Charlotte, Diana, Elizabeth, Fiona, Guinevere, Heidi, Ismene

If several said the same thing they are in black italics. My voice, grand-narrative etc are in green italics

PATTY		I don't know, I suppose I just watch what I eat.	
MOIRA		*But that's not really what you're saying though is it?*	
PATTY		*All I said was* I watch what I eat.	
MOIRA		Yes, but the implication is that I don't?	
NANCY		*Silly really, as if just watching what you ate would ever achieve anything – well think about it - just watching does nothing*	
OLIVIA		She was talking about fat people sitting in MacDonalds they should be watching what they eat	Brownell
PATTY		It is so unnecessary.	
MOIRA		What? Unnecessary for fat people to eat.	
PATTY		*It's offensive watching fat people eat.*	
MOIRA		No you're right they should be eating in secret.	
NANCY		That was my problem I used to eat all kinds of things in secret.	
OLIVIA		*I make a point of never hiding anything.*	
PATTY		I count everything.	Diaries
MOIRA		*Seriously?*	
PATTY		Absolutely everything - I have to	
NANCY		*And you never miss a day*	
PATTY		*No, Never. There are rules and I obey them*	
NANCY		*And you never miss a day*	
LIZ		*What rules?*	
PATTY		*Rules about writing stuff down, rules about what to eat. Rules.*	
OLIVIA		*About what not to eat.*	
LIZ		*And you stick to them. What don't you eat?*	
PATTY		*I wouldn't look like this if I didn't stick to them*	
OLIVIA		KFC, peanut butter, bread and mashed potatoes, Custard, *Takeaways,*	
LIZ		*You'd never eat mashed potatoes*	
OLIVIA		Never	
LIZ		*What would happen if you did?*	
PATTY		*I wouldn't*	
MOIRA		*You're scared*	
LIZ		*Of what?*	
MOIRA		*Scared of slipping-up. Scared of losing it all. Of losing this slim thing that you are. That's it, isn't it? You can't relax, you can't; not for one moment can you?*	
OLIVIA		**Well not if relaxing means eating a whole packet of biscuits or scoffing down some fish and chips.**	
NANCY		**Or drinking a bottle of wine**	
PATTY		**It's about keeping focused on today and not having regrets later on.**	`

Figure 10: A piece of Playscript at an early stage of development.

Analysis, and (re)presenting research differently

My research seems suited to being (re)presented in a performative forum for a number of reasons: my participants daily *doing, displaying and performing* their bodies; their preoccupation with *looking* and *watching;* and their *doing* of identity as they talked. However, I am motivated to explore ethnodrama for four other reasons.

First, as has been mentioned with respect to performative social science generally, an ethnodrama about losing weight could pointedly challenge long held beliefs and taken-for-granted views around slimming, health, attractiveness, and success. There is a general assumption with slimming that anyone who is determined enough can lose weight, and keep this weightloss off, even though evidence would suggest that this achievement is unusual (Crawford et al., 2000; Elfhag & Rossner, 2005; Jeffery et al., 2000). My participants too believed that long-term weightloss was very achievable. At times they even revealed a quiet intolerance, or impatience with women who had failed, where they themselves had succeeded.

By all accounts, losing weight and successful slimming were indeed hard fought. It required considerable effort and sacrifice, despite my participants' keenness to pass off their practices as easy and effortless. Suggestions of effortlessness around losing weight have implications for women who struggle with their weight and reinforces the view that women who are fat are simply unprepared to make even the slightest effort to lose weight, which, as research has shown, is not the case (Ikeda, Lyons, Schwartzman, & Mitchell, 2004). Notions of ease and effortless endeavour paint a distorted picture of successful weightloss, which in reality, is very difficult to achieve. As Crawford *et al.* (2000) point out, women who fail at losing weight do not need intolerance or impatience; they deserve empathy and understanding.

An idiom of painting oneself into a corner is a helpful analogy here. Imagine a woman has painted herself into the corner of a room. She is fat. She has her back against the wall and cannot escape the fat body that encapsulates her. The popular perception is that she has recklessly inflicted fatness on herself, despite *helpful* advice from the lucrative food and weightloss, health, and beauty industries. These industries are the pots of paint she dips her brush into; they have *helped* her paint herself into the corner. Rather than become yet another pot of *paint* for this woman to dip her brush into, which a lot of weightloss research seems to be, I would like to create a hole in the wall behind the woman and make a window for her to climb out of. I want to give her, and the audience, something different: a new perspective. I believe that putting fatness, and particularly weightloss, on a stage will be a breath of fresh air for *trapped* women who struggle to lose weight and stay slim. It will provide a new perspective and

understanding of what weightloss involves, and how very difficult it is. A desire to help women who struggle with their weight was what motivated most of my participants to take part in this research. My aim is to find an effective forum to reach and educate, and *change* long held beliefs about fatness, weightloss and successful slimming.

The second reason concerns emotions surrounding obesity and weightloss. By focusing on *disease* rather than the *person*, a lot of research on health issues has "back-staged the patient's experience" (Morse, 2011, p. 402). Obesity and weight are constantly in the media, and the emotive terms like alarm, battle, combat, crisis, epidemic, explosion, and fight are frequently used and are not innocuous (O'Reilly & Sixsmith, 2012): they depict a war zone and an enemy requiring eradication. Language such this fuels anti-fat rhetoric and discrimination, and an inevitable "war on fat people" (O'Hara & Gregg, 2012, p. 41). The television programme, "The Biggest Loser", is a *war zone* where fat people are humiliated and abused: they are *fat freaks* served up to a *judgemental* audience.

All my participants talked about discrimination and abuse that they experienced when they were fat, and how much it affected them emotionally. During interviewing, a lot of emotional pain came to the surface. However, the intensity of these emotions was less noticeable when I listened to the recordings of interviews, and less again when I read what I have written about them. In its textual form, my participants' pain had been *diluted*. Written words can keep a participant and her emotions at a distance: they fall short when conveying emotion. I suggest that a better forum to represent the intensity of my participants' emotions is to see them embodied in an ethnodrama. The very visceral experience of emotion is a noted feature of performative social science; it better represents passion and elicits compassion. It makes experience, and hence emotion, more real and therefore more likely to make an impact and be remembered. Embodying and foregrounding discrimination and stigma will help separate a war on obesity from a war on fat people, and give fatness a *face*.

Thirdly, with participant selection criteria focusing only on long-term weightloss, the participants who took part in this project were all very different from one another. They had lost different amounts of weight, had maintained their weightloss for different periods of time and currently had quite different BMIs. Successful weightloss was not only about a BMI below 25, or even more stringently, a BMI between 20 and 22. These differences were interesting and an emphasis on diversity was important particularly with respect to the notion of *health at every size* (Bacon & Aphramor, 2011). Two participants, Diana and Ismene, were *proponents* of this position without being aware of the paradigm's existence. Other participants like Heidi and Charlotte could not accept that anything other than a BMI below 22 was *healthy* and desirable.

Also, even though two participants may have had similar beliefs with respect to body size or health, their views and practices around food and eating, while sometimes similar, were also quite different and even polarised. This was also the case for individual participants themselves too: in some situations they were relaxed and flexible, but in others they were stubbornly rigid. Equally, while some practices seemed to be well thought out and rational, others appeared entirely based on whimsy or superstition, and in some cases could be considered extreme or even bizarre. These multiple layers of contradiction and difference speak to the complexity of weightloss. While discursive analysis draws attention to difference and contradiction, performative writing, especially if using satire and humour to embellish characterisation, can highlight and accentuate difference and contradiction, making them even more obvious to an audience. Hopefully, this will help douse the general perception that successful weightloss is simple: a trite calories-in versus energy-out equation.

The fourth reason has grown out of using creative methods to collect research data about everyday experience. Exploring creativity in this way has kindled a desire to look at nonconventional forms of research representation. More particularly, I wanted to find out if performative social science had something to offer research about fatness, weightloss, and successful slimming: a topic as yet not examined using ethnodrama. Embarking on this endeavour is no mean feat: I needed to become a playwright[12]. Being a road less travelled, the production of a play is risky for a piece of scholarly work such as this thesis. But as a social constructionist I would agree with other authors (e.g., Denzin, 2010; M. Gergen & Gergen, 2011; Richardson, 1997), who argue that no one mode or method of (re)presentation is privileged or more authoritative than any other method. The methods I have chosen suit my research questions and agenda. I also suggest that my close involvement with my participants; familiarisation with the data; knowledge of the literature; my participants wish to help other women; and a desire to explore the value of performative social science, all provide a rationale for my analysis and how my findings are represented. I will now discuss how the setting, characters, and dialogue for the play were created and developed.

[12] This was a 12-month sojourn involving playwriting workshops, productions and competitions.

Creating the characters and scene

With the line, *"The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King"* (Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2) Shakespeare points to a playwright's ability to prick an audience's conscience, particularly an audience guilty of malevolence. By slipping telling lines into a play, a playwright can make an audience squirm. Because empathy with the person uttering the telling lines piques this reaction, to have impact the words need to be said by credible people reacting to believable situations.

Analogous to a phenomenon experienced by some fiction writers (Hall, 1998; Lamott, 1994), the play's characters began to take on a life of their own and almost began to write themselves during interviewing and transcription. Careful analysis has resulted in the creation of six characters to address important themes and issues in the data. Who these characters are, how they look, and what they do and say are grounded in my research. The characters will say words participants said, wear clothes participants described or wore or had photographs of, and they will even engage with objects that participants talked about or brought with them to interviews. As is usual for explicating research findings in this creative way, some "fictional glue" (C. S. Davis & Ellis, 2008, p. 101) will be used to ensure that the characters and their story are held together seamlessly, which in turn helps the analysis move forward.

In theatre an audience is rarely provided with a detailed description of characters since the characters reveal themselves as the play develops, however a brief description and rationale of character development is valuably provided here. There are six characters: a bride KATE MARSDEN, her sister LIZ MARSDEN who is her maid of honour, KATE and LIZ'S mother MOIRA MARSDEN, MOIRA'S best friend NANCY NORTON, and KATE'S bridesmaids OLIVIA ORLAND and PATTY PORTER. Each character is a composite: an amalgam of my participants and their stories, the critical literature on health, fatness and weightloss, and myself.

Like a cartoonist, who exaggerates parts of a person's physical features for effect and to grab attention, I have drawn aspects from different participants' stories to create larger than life characters to embody particular themes or situations. In this way themes and situations, which are research findings, become more obvious and transparent: larger than life to the audience. For example, the character PATTY is a fanatical character who embodies the obsessive fixatedness of staying slim. She is Charlotte who takes carrot and celery sticks to parties; Elizabeth who never tastes, let alone eats, mashed potatoes; and Heidi who writes down everything she eats; all combined into an extreme character to draw attention to what it takes to stay slim.

Another character, NANCY, embodies latitude and relaxation. She is like Diana and Heidi who both have a go-with-the-flow approach and demeanour. Therefore, themes rather than participants themselves are polarised into satirical *cartoon-like* characters. Because characters are a composite, it is possible for one participant to contribute to two or more quite different characters. Notice that I have used multi-barrelled names to reflect this amalgam, unlike the single pseudonym names used for participants. A *sketch* of each character is presented below. It is important to keep in mind that these characters, like the participants who inspired them, are complexly multi-dimensional: a brief summary does not really do them justice.

KATE (Bride) Marsden

KATE is 25 years old. She has been dreaming about getting married for a long time and has been preparing for her wedding for 6 months. KATE is slim but she wishes she could redistribute her weight around her body so she would look shapelier. After one of her friends gave her *"The wedding dress diet"* book (Flipse & Shannon, 2000) when she got engaged, KATE has been contemplating losing a few kilos so she will look good in her beautiful dress and in the photos.

The character of KATE is based on many participants' stories about their past and how naive they felt they were when they were younger and embarked on early, probably needless, attempts to lose weight. She has much in common with a young Alice and Ismene, but also the rhetoric (e.g., Neighbors & Sobal, 2008; Prichard & Tiggemann, 2009) around women's bodies and weddings.

LIZ (Maid of Honour) Marsden

LIZ is the maid of honour and is five years older than her sister KATE. She has never had an issue with her weight which is unusual for women (e.g., Cash & Roy, 1999). Unlike KATE, LIZ is aware of her mother's *war* on fat. She is a sous-chef at one of Auckland's leading waterfront restaurants and has helped KATE and her mother with all the wedding arrangements. LIZ has very definite views on food and health, medicalisation, beauty, and so forth but begins to question these as the play progresses. During the wedding and reception she keeps an eye on everything from helping KATE and her mother get dressed, to ensuring the caterer does his job and the food is beautifully presented. LIZ is the narrator and a go-between. Through her monologues the audience hears her perceptions of the wedding, its guests, but also about fatness and health.

The character of LIZ is based on Elizabeth, with respect to her occupation, and Charlotte's knowledge about food. LIZ learning and changing as the wedding progresses is a metaphor for this research project.

MOIRA (Mother) Marsden

MOIRA is 48 years old; she is KATE and LIZ's mother. She was an 18-year-old teenager when she had LIZ and has been happily married to LIZ and KATE'S father, MIKE, ever since. She is obesely overweight, even after having lost a very significant amount of weight. She is perceived as a transgressor, her sin being that she is fat. As the play progresses the multi-dimensionality of MOIRA are revealed. She is a wife and mother, but she is also a successful, intelligent businesswoman, creative, busy, caring, and talented. There is more to MOIRA than meets the eye.

The character of MOIRA is based on my participant Guinevere but all participants' stories about what it was like being obesely overweight are represented through MOIRA. MOIRA embodies the calm voice of reason as far as the obesity epidemic is concerned. On many fatness issues she holds views similar to authors such as Campos (2004) and Gaesser (2002).

NANCY (Normal) Norton

NANCY is 45 years old. She is MOIRA'S best friend and is mildly overweight. KATE and LIZ have known her their whole lives. She is the *slim* body success that MOIRA wishes for and NANCY wishes she had what MOIRA has: a husband and daughters who adore her. NANCY has been maintaining her weightloss for a long time and is relatively relaxed about it all. Unlike KATE'S friends OLIVA and PATTY who lead rather *restrictive* lives as far as maintaining their weightloss is concerned, NANCY is more relaxed. She can eat one chocolate from a chocolate box and leave the rest. She takes time to appreciate what she has achieved and while she could be slimmer this would require sacrifices she is not prepared to make; believing instead in moderation and going-with-the-flow, just occasionally. She is suspicious of a "weight-centered health paradigm" preferring a "health at every size" perspective (O'Reilly & Sixsmith, 2012, p. 97).

The character of NANCY is based on Diana and Ismene and a little of Fiona and Becky. She is a complete contrast to OLIVIA and PATTY and her character troubles the commitment and obsessive self-control needed to achieve long-term weightloss: is it worth it? Somewhat of a conspiracy theorist, she questions long-held beliefs and taken-for-granted views like whether fatness research is well substantiated (e.g., Gaesser, 2002). NANCY is the wedding photographer. She also does everyone's hair and makeup.

OLIVIA (Olympian) Orland

OLIVIA is 30 years old and very slim. She is one of KATE'S bridesmaids. A very keen sports woman she works part-time to accommodate her training activities. OLIVIA runs half marathons and rigidly sticks to a gym workout each morning and a run after work. Anything that interferes with her training schedule irritates her including the timing of KATE'S wedding. While LIZ is more tolerant of OLIVIA'S schedule than KATE is, when she discovers that OLIVIA has brought her own food to the reception, she is disappointed and insulted.

The character of OLIVIA is based on Alice, Becky, Charlotte, and Elizabeth but also Fiona and Heidi. She embodies the fanatical rigidity, and considerable exercise and energy needed to keep slim.

PATTY (Pianist) Porter

PATTY is OLIVIA'S best friend and is as slim as she is. They met KATE at the gym and the three of them have been working-out together for several years. PATTY is a musician and spends many hours a day practising. She constantly strives for perfection but never achieves her idealised perception of it. Although very critical of others, she is even more critical of herself.

OLIVIA and PATTY know KATE well; they know MOIRA less well. MOIRA and NANCY find OLIVIA and PATTY'S diet and exercise practices amusing. In the past they have referred to them as ascetic minimalists who reject anything that could be considered pleasurable. OLIVIA and PATTY are comedic characters often at odds with people around them. For instance, their family and friends sometimes try to undermine their slimming efforts.

The PATTY character embodies the considerable time and preparation involved in keeping slim. She is similar to OLIVIA and based on the same participants. These two characters represent the black and white nature of participants' thinking, and the dominant discourses around slimness and health. OLIVIA and PATTY epitomize the single-minded dedication that a feat of long-term weightloss requires. They are extra-ordinary in the same way that an elite athlete and a concert pianist are extraordinary.

SETTING (The scene)

"The world, in truth, is a wedding." (Goffman, 1959, p. 36)

It has been said that art, including theatrical works, are celebrations of ordinary experience (Dewey, 1934). While the motivation for making such a statement was to

reject an inclination to set art upon a pedestal, I also draw from this that ordinary lived experience is something to be celebrated and that through art the ordinary is made extraordinary. A play is ordinary life with the boring bits taken out. A theatrical drama can set everyday experience like getting dressed, eating and drinking upon a pedestal.

There are several different types or genre of plays like tragedies, comedies, and satires. A problem play, popularised by Henrik Ibsen (e.g., A Doll's House published in 1879) is a style of play that confronts a contemporary social problem with the intent of changing public opinion on the matter. My one act, problem play called *"Wishing at a Wedding",* tackles fatness, weightloss, and successful slimming. Talk about weddings was common among my participants. Weddings were and are events to look forward to, to prepare for, to enjoy, and to look back on. As mementos of the past and illustrations of change, wedding photographs memorialised body shape and weight for many of my participants. A wedding theme, and choosing "a wedding" to be the setting for my play, was arrived at early in my analysis. I have attended several weddings while I wrote the play which has informed my playwriting.

There are around 22,000 weddings performed in New Zealand each year (Bascand, 2010). As a celebration, a wedding has been referred to as a life-crisis ceremony, with examples of others being birth, puberty, and death (Turner, 1986). There is a suggestion that things will change with this celebration: it is a turning point (Denzin, 2001a). As a ritualised social event and a rite of passage, a wedding is well suited for the construction of life narratives (K. Murray, 1986). For instance, the rhetorical demands of wedding speeches emphasise an individual's storytelling ability and the telling of a person's life story for which the language used is often self-reflexive.

Weddings and weight have several things in common. For example, weightloss projects and weddings both require planning, time, effort, commitment, and considerable financial investment in order to be successful. There is an abundance of advice and information available for each in the form of specialists (wedding planners, and dieticians and personal trainers) web sites, books and magazines, and both are construed as more important for a woman than for a man.

Weddings are events that can invoke concern about appearance with brides drawing the spotlight and scrutiny. Preparing for a wedding is often about dealing with body shape issues like excess weight (Flipse & Shannon, 2000; Neighbors & Sobal, 2008; Prichard & Tiggemann, 2009; Sobal, Bove, & Rauschenbach, 1999). For guests there can be frustration around finding something flattering to wear, but also concern about diet and trying to avoid certain food or drink at such a catered affair. There is also a focus on partnership and relationship, which can elicit emotions around being

alone and feeling undesired or unattractive: of being the bridesmaid but never the bride.

Using a wedding as the setting of my play to deliver the findings and analysis from my research about weightloss and successful slimming is fitting for all the reasons mentioned above. The dialogue characters will say has been crafted from participants' stories with the ums and errs of ordinary talk removed. Boredom has been avoided because the play fast-forwards to the exciting bits of life in order to entertain, captivate, and inform. But the play is more than just mere distraction. *"Wishing at a Wedding"* is a piece of social science research as well as a piece of art.

Summary

The overriding feature of this Method Chapter has been multiplicity. My method has been about engaging participants in multiple one-on-one interviews; doing multiple things with them like drawing timelines, flicking through photographs and reading diaries, and then encouraging each of them to become researchers of their own lives by taking their timelines home, and reflecting on and talking about the research with family and friends. Doing these multiple things facilitated participants' storytelling about weightloss and successful slimming.

My complex and creative method generated a large amount of messy data that required careful selection, analysis and interpretation. The data were analysed utilising a coding frame involving dramaturgical coding, narrative coding, and process coding (see, Saldaña, 2009). Together, these multiple ways of coding and analysing data facilitated the generation of concepts, subthemes, and themes, and aided interpretation, meaning-making and theorisation about how weightloss and successful slimming gets done.

To explore the value of performative social science for explicating research about weightloss and successful slimming, my findings are (re)presented as a play called, *"Wishing at a Wedding"*. Then to illustrate how such a performative work is different from conventional representations of research such as academic-intellectual journal articles and book chapters, my research findings are also presented in the form of a book chapter called, "Defying the odds—Successful slimming". Appreciating the value of the visual (Spencer, 2010), the excerpts of writing appear as if they are indeed a playscript and a book chapter. Their outward appearances hint at the nature of their content. Presented as two stand-alone excerpts, these two perspectives will resonate differently with members of different audiences.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

> *"But he that dares not grasp the thorn*
> *Should never crave the rose."*
> --ANNE BRONTË, The Narrow Way.

This results and findings chapter is divided into two parts: Part One presents the playscript, and Part Two the chapter out of an edited book. These two different forms of representation have been utilised so my research findings will make an impact on two levels: first, with an emphasis on characterisation and emotion through the art of '*performance*' (even though this is a closet drama); and second, intellectually through conventional social science writing. Both are stand-alone literary works. Neither form is "privileged over another, each simply performs a different function for a writer and an interpretive community" (Denzin, 2010, p. 30). Therefore, they do not need to be read in a particular order. It is possible to read the book chapter before the play or vice versa.

In Part One, the '*audience*' comes face to face with the playwright's drama about a group of women who talk about fatness and dieting as they get ready for a wedding. How successful slimming gets done is presented through the setting, plot, characterisation, and dialogue of the play. The play is a repository for the research findings. If performed, the researchers interpretations would be portrayed and embodied through actors. A performative work such as this is open to further interpretation by members of the audience. Besides finding out how successful slimmers stay slim, this drama gives these women a face and helps an audience get inside the skin of a *fat* woman who works on her body: the emotional connection and impact.

"*Wishing at a Wedding"* is a one-act play divided into five scenes that span a time frame of a single day. Scene One opens late morning and has the main characters LIZ, KATE and NANCY discussing various issues about weight while preparing lunch. Scene Two jumps back in time to earlier that morning when we meet the main character, MOIRA, for the first time. Scene Three begins after lunch as the women start getting ready for the wedding which takes place later that afternoon. Scene Four is set around the bride and groom's head table at the reception held in a beautiful garden. Finally in Scene Five, MOIRA and LIZ discuss the wedding day after the bridal party and guests have all gone home.

In Part Two, the book chapter "Defying the odds—Successful slimming", is presented. Theoretically, such a chapter could be found in a scholarly edited book about women's relationships with their bodies. The writer draws attention to, and expands on, key factors and conclusions drawn from the research findings. Using excerpts from participant's stories as illustration, three key factors that contribute to successful slimming are elaborated upon. The first concerns how successful slimmers set, achieve, and continually reset goals; the second concerns the amelioration and management of the gap between goal-expectation when the goal was set, and the outcome when the goal is reached or unable to be reached; and the third key factor concerns the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and the focused discipline needed to be a successful slimmer. In the discussion, these three key factors are tied together and an analogy is proposed to help explain the extraordinary commitment required to maintain a reduced weight: the intellectual impact.

In an orthodox thesis about the *topic* of successful slimming, the interpretation and conclusions would be drawn in the chapter following this results and findings chapter. But in this thesis an interceding chapter will be presented between the findings and conclusion chapters about the *process* and (re)presentation component of my thesis. Importantly, while this additional, interceding chapter will feature further excerpts of writing about successful slimming, the play and the book chapter individually and especially jointly encapsulate the findings and interpretation of my research *topic* about how the everydayness of successful slimming gets done.

PART ONE: An Ethnodrama

Wishing at a Wedding

Characters

Kate Marsden (25) slim: The bride

Liz Marsden (30) slim: Kate's sister and Narrator

Moira Marsden (48) just obesely overweight: Kate and Liz's mother

Nancy Norton (45) a little overweight: Moira's best friend

Olivia Orland (30) slim and athletic: Kate's bridesmaid

Patty Porter (30) slim: Kate's bridesmaid

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Thank you to the very talented Julia Kozerski. Her art installation entitled, “Tag” inspired projecting images onto Moira’s body.

Director’s Notes:

SCENE ONE: Wedding day morning

As the audience finds their seats, the song Short People by Randy Newman is playing. The curtain rises on a semi-darkened stage. A spacious and romantically decorated bedroom is stage left with a door connecting the bedroom to an open plan kitchen/dining/lounge area situated stage right. A small spot of light falls on a large wall-clock on the lounge wall. A hand (this can be a stagehand's hand or an actor's hand) moves the hands of the clock to 10 o'clock, after which the spotlight fades.

The audience views the bedroom through a large, almost ceiling to floor, mirror at one end of the bedroom and can see part of an ensuite-bathroom at the far end of the bedroom.

A soft spotlight on LIZ slowly grows brighter. She is sitting on the floor of the bedroom at the foot end of the bed leaning against it. She is reading an old journal-diary and looking at some loose letters and photographs between its pages. Eventually, she puts it beside her to blow her nose and dry her eyes; she's been crying. She looks at the door of the bedroom because noise from KATE and her friends OLIVIA and PATTY, who are busying themselves in the kitchen next door, brings her back to reality. As their noise gradually increases the stage lights slowly come up in the kitchen/dining/lounge area, which has a kitchen area on one side with a dining table and four chairs. The lounge area on the other side of the room has a sideboard, two comfortable lounge chairs and a sofa. There is a ranch slider at the back of the room that opens out to a large garden and lawn, which is where the wedding and wedding reception will take place. It is mid-morning.

LIZ: *(Gets up, straightens the tiny wrinkles in the bed's duvet, adjusts the pillows etc before eventually standing in front of the mirror, at times she looks at her own reflection, but she also looks straight through it to the audience.)* Gosh, my legs are sore *(stretching)* I've been sitting hunched up too long *(she stares at herself in the mirror, shakes her head slowly and then blows her nose again).* I wish I could stop crying. Hang on. *(She blows her nose and composes herself. Her persona becomes different such that the audience is in no doubt she is now the play's narrator. Whenever LIZ as NARRATOR speaks her comments are to the audience and only heard by them.)*

LIZ as NARRATOR: Ok, so you're looking at me wondering who is she, what's she doing? Yes, I'm a character in the play, I'm Liz but I'm also … your go-between. A go-between between you, the audience, and the characters in the

play – I'm your narrator – a bit like Feste in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night I suppose, *(to herself)* and equally no fool. The lines between my character, LIZ, and my narrator role will blur at times – try to keep up. Anyway, *this* is mum's room. Well, mum *and* dad's room. I know there's stuff going on over there *(pointing towards the dimly lit kitchen where KATE, OLIVIA and PATTY are moving around)*, but just ignore them for a minute. *(Pause as she looks about the room.)*

You know, I can remember sneaking into this room when I was little. It always smelt so good. *(She sprays Chanel No 5 on herself and smells it deeply.)* I used to try on makeup and stuff – it always got me into trouble. I loved everything about this room – the clothes; all the jewellery; the shoes; that huge bed; the amazing pillows you could bury yourself under – everything in here *(she wanders towards the photographs on the wall)* – especially these photographs. Nancy took most of them. She and mum have been friends forever. She has a wonderful knack of capturing something special about people. Every time I look at these I see something new *(pause as she runs her finger over the image.)* And last but not least there's this mirror – this portal – your glimpse at the inner workings *(gestures as if to show the audience the bedroom).*

Mirrors are *(pointing out its shape)* audience and critic aren't they though? Don't you hate the bargaining we do with them? Constantly! They're so betraying and judgemental; cruel, even paralysing *(She moves her hair, adjusts her clothes, and pulls in her stomach and props up her breasts. She then looks in the mirror for approval before adjusting them all again.)*

Um … *(She pauses, looks in the mirror for a few moments then spins on her heels to look at the door behind her.)* That hook on the back of the door *(it has a beautiful wedding dress hanging on it)* – mum always hung the latest gown or dress she'd made on there. She's made plenty – I loved all the costumes, especially the ball gowns; the rich colours – the sparkles *(she pulls out a long glittering gown on its hanger from the closet, thoroughly wraps herself in it and turns around a couple of times before hanging it back up)*. Dad was probably keener on the competition side of dancing than mum was. She just loved dancing, and the music, especially if it had a beat. K'thunking music's probably why she liked aerobics so much.

Mum got me to go to one of her dance-aerobics classes a while ago *(demonstrates some aerobic exercises as she talks)* – God, it was exhausting! Awful! It was all I could do to last even half the session. Others pulled out before I did – not that that should make me feel better. It was so tough. I

needed a beginners class not the advanced class. But the spin class was worse. I could barely walk for about two days *(demonstrates saddle pain and walking painfully).* I was waiting for mum to make fun of me but she never did. She'd been through it all herself and more. The gym was a three, sometimes four times a week thing for her – I overheard people watching her say, "I don't know how that woman does it" *(A little sad again, pausing for a few moments, then looks around the room).*

My bedroom's never like this. Yours? This is always immaculate. Look at it. It belongs in one of those, home and garden magazines or whatever. The whole place does, doesn't it? You'll've seen the rose gardens when you came down the path just now – I've always thought this place would be a perfect place to hold a wedding, and now it's happening. The gazebo looks especially beautiful all done up. *(Sighs)* Right, thank you, you've helped me pull myself together. *(Another pause as Liz looks about the room again)*. You know, I can still see mum sanding her fingers raw working on those ridiculous picture windows. *(She goes over to the window, runs her hand over it and the curtains she's pulled back.)* Anyone who's sanded and painted wooden window frames and jambs knows what a rotten job they are. And who the heck washes a house inside and out, ceilings and walls, curtains and everything – spring-cleaning – to get ready for Christmas. I've never been bothered, too many other things I'd rather be doing. It would take her several weeks and she'd be aching all over but by Christmas Day everything looked wonderful, and with all the trimmings – such good memories … *(Pause).*

It was always a treat to come in here to get dressed-up to go out somewhere special – like mum helping me with my hair and makeup for my school ball – then sitting on the end of the bed all of us chatting while Kate got ready for her's. Who's Kate? She's my baby sister: she's the one getting married today. Knowing her, she'll still be in her pyjamas over there *(pointing)*. I'm her maid of honour, but why she chose Olivia and Patty as bridesmaids, I'll never know. Anyway, this is *her* day *(going over to the dress)* and her dress. It took mum weeks to bead the bodice. One night when Nancy was helping her they went on and on about wedding traditions and wedding dresses being "imbued with symbolism" – not much beading got done that night. Their conversation was sometimes over our heads – not that Kate cared; all that really bothered her was that she'd look good in the photos. All I care about is that everything runs to plan. *(Thoughtful)* It's certainly a beautiful dress though.

While LIZ/NARRATOR has been talking, KATE and her friends have carried on making cups of coffee and chatting etc. During this time KATE has offered

OLIVIA and PATTY various things to eat e.g. toast, muesli, chocolates, fruit etc but they've declined everything, sometimes after scrutinising and pointing to the ingredients labels on various packaging – much to KATE'S irritation. KATE now notices activity outside – she goes out through a ranch-slider at the back of the lounge for a few moments before coming back inside. Their noise and chatter, which was just audible before, has now become louder.

KATE: *(Calling loudly)* Liz. Liz! Where is she?

LIZ as NARRATOR: Ok, here we go.

LIZ: *(Rushes back to where she was sitting reading. She ensures that all the loose letters and photographs are back inside the journal and carefully fits it between the other journals into the old brown suitcase that lies open next to the bed. She then clunks the old latches shut and with effort, kicks it under the bed and makes sure that the bed and room are immaculate).*

KATE: I thought she was still here. At least, I didn't think she had anywhere to go this morning. Maybe she's outside. Where's my phone? *(She finds her phone and starts dialling.)*

LIZ: *(Comes into the lounge)* I was just practising my speech in front of the mirror. What's the matter?

KATE: Your catering guy's arrived. He's got some kind of refrigerated trailer thingy with all the food in it. He wants to know where to park it and he's got an extension-cord but doesn't know where to plug it in.

LIZ: Ok, I'll go and sort it out. *(She goes out the ranch slider)*

OLIVIA: *(Looks up while flicking through a food and diet magazine)* Is she alright? *(PATTY has been counting on her fingers and discreetly writing in her food diary for some time before looking up)* She looks like she's been crying.

KATE: These past few days have been a bit crazy – we're all tired – I'm sure she's fine.

OLIVIA: Hey, listen, I can't stay – I've got to go.

PATTY: Yes, me too. Olivia's my ride – we worked out at the gym together this morning so I've left my car at the gym. I got to go and pick it up …

KATE: But you've only just arrived. I thought you were going to stay – till the wedding?

OLIVIA: We only really popped in to see if everything was ok. I'll be back just as soon as I've dropped Patty off and taken the dog for a walk.

PATTY: I've got some shopping and things to do. It's tough fitting everything in.

KATE: Yeah ok. It's just that I was enjoying relaxing and chatting. *(To OLIVIA)* Didn't you fit a run in this morning?

OLIVIA: Yeah, but it wasn't a long run, *only* 13 kilometres – just a short jog really.

KATE: You went for a 13 kilometre run, worked out in the gym, and now you're taking the dog for a … what – a run around the block?

OLIVIA: A quick 5 kilometres to tire him out – that's all.

KATE: The wedding's at…

OLIVIA: I know, 4 o'clock – stop worrying.

PATTY: Right, so we better get going now then. The sooner we go the sooner we'll get back.

KATE: Liz was going to make an early lunch…

OLIVIA: I'll have something later…

KATE: *(Looking at PATTY)*

PATTY: I've already made mine. I made it before I went to the gym so it would be ready and waiting for me when I got home.

KATE: You're so organised.

PATTY: I need to be. *(Quieter)* It's hard to fit everything in – really hard.

LIZ: *(Interrupting from the doorstep)* Kate, could you give me a hand with Nancy's stuff. *(To KATE about OLIVIA and PATTY)* Are they leaving?

KATE: The dog needs a walk and things to do *(as she goes outside).*

LIZ: *(To OLIVIA and PATTY while carrying two dress bags containing the bridesmaids' dresses inside.)* Please be back before 1 o'clock at the latest so Nance can do your hair and makeup.

NANCY: *(Close behind LIZ carrying another two dress bags. They wrestle them inside and lay them carefully over the back of the sofa.)* Please don't be late.

OLIVIA: Sure – no, we won't. The dog won't take long – *(to PATTY)* we'll be back by 1, right?

PATTY: Yes, easily.

OLIVIA: *(Gives KATE a hug)* We won't be long, promise. *(PATTY hugs her too)*

PATTY: *(Quietly to OLIVIA as they are leaving)* That "dog" excuse works well.

OLIVIA: It's a genuine excuse – but yeah, I do use it to help me get out of things. I mean let's face it he doesn't really want to power walk or run for an hour, which is what he gets. He'd rather dawdle – sniff and pee on everything. But it's a good excuse. It works. People can relate to a dog needing to get out and go for a walk but taking myself for a walk or going for an extra run is self-indulgence …

PATTY: It's just putting yourself first

OLIVIA: It's just easier to say I have to take my dog for a walk – it's the perfect alibi. I wish I didn't have to make excuses *(they leave).*

KATE: *(To NANCY*) Is there more to bring in?

NANCY: Just a couple more bags. Oh, and the flowers are on the front seat.

KATE: *(Goes back outside as NANCY checks the dresses aren't crushed. KATE carries in the box with the flowers in it, which she puts on the table after admiring them for a few moments. She then helps LIZ carry in two large bags and a substantial camera case and tripod, which they set down beside the sofa.)* Gosh what a lot of stuff.

LIZ as NARRATOR: Weddings are all about stuff.

LIZ: *(To NANCY)* You're nice and early.

NANCY: The things I had to do didn't take as long as I thought they would, so here I am. I thought you might want some help with stuff. *(Looking at KATE.)* How are *you* doing – you need to sit down now and take it easy *(as KATE sits down on the lounge chair NANCY massages her shoulders and strokes her long hair and pats her forehead.)* Stop frowning. Have you been *hydrating*?

KATE: That fancy word for drinking water!

LIZ: She's been drinking coffee and diet coke – not much else.

KATE: I drink other stuff.

NANCY: You should be drinking water.

KATE: I prefer diet coke or sprite zero. A zing without the calories – a single calorie burnt in a moment of passion.

NANCY: A what?

KATE: Burnt in a moment of passion. Haven't you seen the ads? *(Pause)* I know I should drink water, and I do sometimes, but it's just so boring! And have you tasted what comes out of the tap lately?

NANCY: It's alright chilled…and you can dress it up. Ambrosia tastes like pigs' swill too if it's served in a bucket.

KATE: Our water tastes like someone's washed his feet in it – doesn't matter how chilled it is. And no, slices of lemon or cucumber served in a champagne flute don't disguise that!

NANCY: You could drink bottled water but it's a bit expensive I suppose. People can't seem to do anything these days without holding onto a bottle.

LIZ: Where did Olivia and Patty have to go to anyway?

KATE: I'm beyond caring – they're obsessed. They're fanatics – totally inflexible.

NANCY: Possessed?

KATE: That too. They won't eat a single thing you offer them – it's like food is an enemy or something and so is the person who offers it. They're just boring and anti-social.

LIZ: I'm sure it's not that bad.

KATE: Olivia controls everything, every little thing. She's a control freak.

LIZ: She and Patty just have rules and they stick to them. They obviously have to. *(She is starting to get lunch ready)*

KATE: Are you getting lunch ready now? Isn't it a bit early?

NANCY: Better to eat something now rather than be so starving later on when you'll eat more than you need to. *(Pause)* Who were you talking about before?

LIZ: Olivia and Patty, Kate's friends from the gym.

KATE: They practically live there – well Olivia does, when she not doing *short* 13 kilometre runs or taking her dog on *quick* 5 kilometre walks – every day!

LIZ: Stop it, you're exaggerating it's not every day.

KATE: Yes it is – well nearly.

NANCY: Don't they hold down jobs?

KATE: They've both got part-time jobs – only just – Patty's hardly ever at work.

NANCY: How does she afford that? Not everyone can afford to work part-time. Plus gyms are such expensive places – expensive and unhygienic – people in Lycra dripping sweat everywhere.

LIZ: What? No, that's not true, they're fine. When was the last time you were in a gym?

NANCY: They're intimidating … I wish they'd get their act together and find ways to make fat people feel more welcome – their classes should be stacked with big people – all sizes actually. The whole health and fitness industry should be more accepting and encouraging of fat people.

LIZ: Come on Nance – gyms are heading that way – especially women's gyms – it's getting better. There are gyms that have special classes for fat people now.

NANCY: Special classes for fat people! Do they have special classes for short people or people who wear glasses too?

LIZ as NARRATOR: Does she have a point? Do big people need to be closeted in special classes?

LIZ: Anyway, so what if Olivia and Patty enjoy their gym – it's helped with their weight …

KATE: … and now they're preoccupied with it, 24-seven.

LIZ: It's not that bad.

KATE: Oh come on – it's like life or death or something – every day, every minute. Ok, they might not be running or lifting weights every minute, but if they're not *physically* doing it, they're either *talking* or *thinking* about doing it; or *planning* what to eat and working out how many calories they're allowed to

eat; or figuring out how many kilometres they need to run to burn the calories they weren't allowed to have.

NANCY: Sounds exhausting.

KATE: It is!

LIZ: Maybe that's how it needs to be for them.

KATE: It's the first thing they worry about when they get up in the morning and the last thing they think about when they go to bed at night.

LIZ: Maybe it *was* life or death at some point – maybe that's how it started – you know they had high blood pressure or diabetes or something.

KATE: I don't know – maybe. But right now Olivia's more than just keen on her sport – she's addicted – seriously, she really is – they both are. Ok, maybe if they were All Blacks or something – maybe I'd understand it, but …

NANCY: But they're not. They're just women …

LIZ: Olivia and Patty are just committed and dedicated to what they're doing …

NANCY: *(Interrupting)* What's wrong with having goals and sticking to them? What's wrong with making yourself your number one priority.

KATE: Yes, well it's certainly all about them isn't it?

NANCY: But it would be OK if they were All Blacks. If they were All Blacks *you'd* understand and be more supportive – besides men have legitimate, important reasons to do what they do. To do what Olivia and Patty are doing that's frivolous and superficial – it's about aesthetics and sex appeal.

KATE: You always manipulate the conversation around to this stuff – stop hassling me – it's my wedding day!

LIZ: But you often hassle Olivia and Patty. What if they *were* celebrities or entertainers or yes, All Blacks – would you be hassling them then? No, then you'd be a huge fan.

KATE: Yeah, but they're not though, are they?

NANCY: Patty does do that … that whole, "walk in, to a party, as if she were walking onto a yacht … one eye in the mirror…" thing *(singing Carly Simon's, You're So Vain)*.

KATE: Ok, now you're being silly.

LIZ: No, but I think she does. Weren't you the one who told me that when you go shopping with her Patty's often looking for her reflection in shop windows and comparing her size with everyone else in the mall? "Am I slimmer than her? How about her?"

KATE: Yeah, she does. She said that when she was fat she used to dread being the biggest woman in the room or the fattest person at the mall and was always relieved to find someone fatter than her.

LIZ as NARRATOR: Bit sad really.

NANCY: I remember when I lost my weight I needed constant reminding that I was slim – it takes a while for your head to catch-up with what your body's doing especially if you've been fat for a while. I can understand needing mirrors and getting acknowledgment and appreciation for the changes you've made.

LIZ: So she's just pleased with how she looks.

KATE: Yeah ok *(sighs).* But it's all a bit much.

LIZ: Kate, they're your friends, you shouldn't be dissing their commitment to something that's obviously very important to them.

KATE: I know, but it's fanatical. It's their whole life. It's not normal. We don't carry on like they do. Who do you know carries on like they do? Have you seen the diary Patty carries around with her? She writes down every crumb and drop she eats and drinks – literally everything – she's been doing it for years. I even think *she's* embarrassed about it. I've seen it on her kitchen bench at home. But if I've gone around there and she's forgotten to put it away, she whisks it into a drawer hoping I haven't seen it.

LIZ: Elite athletes and elite entertainers always keep a close eye on what they do … they keep records.

LIZ as NARRATOR: Not that only the elite keep records

NANCY: They don't seem to be carrying on all that differently to the rest of us really …

KATE: Are you talking about Olivia and Patty? *(Sarcastically)* Are you serious?

NANCY: … Well, just a bit more intense perhaps.

KATE: They're forever hopping on their bathroom scales.

LIZ: Fine, but it's not the eating disorder you're making it out to be.

KATE: Ok, maybe not – but it's a lot more intense than you're making it out to be. I just wish they were a bit more normal.

LIZ: They're really no different from top sports people or celebrities. Except, unlike celebrities, who have a gang of nutritionists and personal trainers running around after them, Olivia and Patty are doing it on their own. It takes a village to raise a child.

NANCY: It takes a lynch mob to slim down the Biggest Loser.

LIZ: I hate that programme.

NANCY: I hate reality TV full stop!

KATE: People love the Biggest Loser. What's so wrong with it?

LIZ as NARRATOR: Does anyone else notice the derogatory pun? In the title? The biggest Loser – fat people are losers. They're stupid, lazy, gluttons ...

NANCY: People watch crap like that and believe that every fat person can do what the Biggest Loser contestants do. The problem is that ordinary, everyday people don't have the resources the Biggest Loser contestants have – I wish we did – but we face it on our own.

KATE: But we – us – we don't carry on like they do, like Patty and Olivia do, do we?

LIZ: You can't compare Olivia and Patty with us. We've never been fat like they have. Do you need reminding? Have you seen their photos? *(She imitates fatness by blowing up her cheeks and gesturing with her arms?)*

NANCY: If they've been as fat as you say it's a minute to minute, day after day, year after year battle. One day off the wagon and it's the thin end of a very thick wedge. They can't ever stop.

KATE: So they're "dieting" forever – for the rest of their lives.

LIZ: Yep, if they want to stay slim it is.

KATE: They weren't fatter than you were Nance.

NANCY: Probably not, but that was 15 years ago for me. Plus they're a lot slimmer now than I am. That makes a lot of difference. It takes work – heaps of work, heaps of hard work.

LIZ: *(To KATE)* Have you talked to them about it?

KATE: Several times. They always make out as if it's easy – as if it's nothing. It's effortless

LIZ: If you look at it closely it's not though, is it?

NANCY: Yeah, that doesn't actually surprise me …

LIZ: It's at times like this that you get an inkling into what it's really like for them – it's a big commitment – it's hard work …

KATE: Why doesn't it surprise you? Nance?

NANCY: Cos they're women for one. God, they need to cut the corset strings! For two, have you seen those, "it only takes 3 minutes a day, bun tightening, thigh evaporating, breast lifting …

LIZ: *(To KATE)* Here we go ...

NANCY: … money sucking, weightloss plans and contraptions. Those collapsible gyms you origami into a shoe box so you can roll them under your bed or hide them in your closet. They make it all sound so easy plus there's a new one out every week. And did I say, *(louder)* they're women! There are so many other, more legitimate things women *should* be doing like enjoying their vacuum cleaning *(sarcastically).*

LIZ: *(Loudly, trying to get NANCY'S attention)* Nance! *(To herself)* Oh, great this'll take a while …

NANCY: *(Ignoring LIZ.)* If we're not concerned about sparkling clean dishes then we should be unfolding our origamied gymnasiums and working-out while we *relax* in front of TV. And *then*, then while *relaxing,* we see stick figure supermodels who wear jewellery and makeup that weigh more than they do, dressed in little more than two Tic-Tacs and a … a post-it-note, or wearing one of those *(She pulls her clothing very tightly around herself.)* … what are they called … bondage dresses …

KATE: Bandage dresses! Not bondage.

NANCY: … whatever! They're swanning around with breezes wafting their obedient hair – then, when we switch the TV channel over, we get The Biggest Loser and have to watch fat people dragging truck tires or even the whole truck, moving logs, and pushing shit up hill while being abused and thumped by *supportive* personal trainers hitting them over the head yelling, "I'm going to beat the weight off you".

LIZ: Nance, we get it.

NANCY: I'd like to see one of those Tic-Tac post-it-notes drag a truck.

LIZ: Nance!

NANCY: Then they undress before getting on the scales, making sure to take off feather earrings, to see how much weight they've lost and *oh, (exclaiming) oh* the disappointment if it's only one or two or three kilograms for that week – irrespective of how unhealthy it is to lose weight rapidly. *(She pauses.)*

LIZ: Finally!

NANCY: It's supposed to be about health.

LIZ as NARRATOR: It would be better if there was something other than a weight-fixated health paradigm.

NANCY: It's wrong and abhorrent to smack a child but abusing a fat person while they are struggling to run or jump or whatever – that's ok – it's what they deserve. Fat people are such easy piñatas.

KATE: Piñatas? Ooh that's clever – you mean full of chocolates and lollies and crap.

LIZ: No! *(to KATE)* Damn it! Nance! *(Pause while NANCY collects herself).* You're impossible sometimes.

NANCY: Yeah, well it gets on my wick

LIZ: Oh, I'm sure no one noticed.

KATE: I just wish they could lighten up. *(NANCY throws her arms up in frustration).* I mean Olivia and Patty – they could take a day off once in a while – not go to the gym. Eat the pizza – just once.

NANCY: Did you hear any of what I just said?

LIZ: It's ok.

NANCY: It's not though.

LIZ: Ok, how about this – what if Olivia and Patty were alcoholics who hadn't had a drink for five years – would it be ok to say, "lighten up", hand them a drink and say, "go on, have one. One won't make any difference – it's my wedding! Go on – just have one?"

KATE: No, I wouldn't do that – I'd never do that. Anyway, Olivia's not an alcoholic – heck, she drinks beer – only the Pure Blonde, low carb ones, and not often. She'll drink wine and spirits as long as she can mix them with diet coke or sprite zero or whatever. Alcohol's a reward for her – for when she's been especially good.

NANCY: For when she's been good? It's like a religion or something.

KATE: If she's been good diet and exercise wise.

LIZ: You're missing the point entirely. *(She's put sauce, onions, vegetables ham etc onto pita-pockets, which she'd split open and used as pizza bases).* I wasn't saying they were actual alcoholics.

KATE: *(Interrupting.)* Well anyway, I don't think it's the same.

LIZ: Oh, I think it is – I think it's very similar actually. It's about abstinence.

NANCY: More religion.

LIZ: It's an analogy. It's not perfect I know.

NANCY: *(To LIZ)* Not much cheese on mine.

LIZ: *(To NANCY)* Yeah, yeah I know – "I'd like a BLT, no bacon, no butter, and put the mayonnaise on the side!"

NANCY: – umm … just weigh the cheese – it's too easy to lose track of how much you're having otherwise – and once it's melted it's anyone's guess. *(LIZ weighs the cheese on a flat scale, which is permanently on the kitchen bench – NANCY checks the reading)*. Yeah see, only put half of that on mine and maybe leave off the onions.

LIZ: No onions *(pulls the onions off)* – Ok, I understand the cheese restriction, but what's wrong with onions?

NANCY: Bad breath – we'll be sitting close to people tonight – you never know, I might meet an interesting someone!

LIZ: Herbs?

NANCY: And spices – the tastier the better. If I'm not having much what I do have better be exciting – I'll want to savour every precious mouthful so they better be tasty morsels.

KATE: I think it sounds a bit extreme.

NANCY: What, tasty morsels?

KATE: No.

LIZ: Onions, or herbs and spices?

KATE: Stop it! You know exactly what I'm talking about – about Olivia and Patty being like alcoholics. Surely with eating it's not that critical.

NANCY: Of course it's critical.

KATE: *(Thinks for a little while)* So they're "food-o-holics".

LIZ: I suppose that's an ok way to think about it. As I said it's not perfect.

KATE: I couldn't stick to anything the way they do. Not that stringently.

LIZ: We're lucky we don't have to. *(Turns on the oven before putting the pizzas into it.)* Are you going to give me a hand with these dishes *(gesturing at the dishes)*?

KATE: Ok, I'll dry. *(NANCY starts rinsing the dishes)* Actually, I don't want to eat much.

LIZ: I'm not making much – it's just a snack.

KATE: Look at it, that's heaps.

LIZ: Not really, it's mostly vegetables – you can eat heaps of vegetables. They're not going to do anything to you.

NANCY: What if 90 or 95 percent of marriages ended in divorce – do you think you'd be bothered?

KATE: What are you talking about? The divorce rate's nothing like 95 percent. No one would be bothered if it was 95 percent. It's more like 30 percent.

NANCY: *(To KATE)* Actually, it doesn't matter what the divorce rate is – that's not the point. *(To LIZ)* Where am I going with this? *(She pauses.)*

LIZ: *(To NANCY)* … presumably about people staying slim after losing a lot of weight – the high failure rate.

NANCY: Yes, right – the 95 percent failure rate.

KATE: Really? No, it can't be that high!

NANCY: It is. People have no idea how difficult it is to lose weight and keep it off – especially if they've lost a significant amount of weight, and for more than five years. The Olivia and Patty's of this world are hard to find. They're pretty special.

KATE: Just about everyone I know is on some kind of diet. I know lots of people who've lost weight – a lot of weight actually.

NANCY: Ok, but for how long?

KATE: *(Thinks for a few moments)* Yeah ok, you're right. Not for more than five years – Charlie and Juliet have only been slim for just over a year – maybe two. I never realised that before. Plus Juliet's actually put some on lately.

NANCY: It's a major achievement to do what Olivia and Patty have done. They have to be one track minded – blinkered – completely focused – they have to stay on the straight and narrow and stay on track – year in *and* year out.

KATE: Sounds a bit dramatic, but ok. But Nance, you don't do that.

LIZ: Umm yes she does – some of it anyway.

NANCY: Well, maybe not quite, but like I said I'm not as slim as they are either. Those extra kilos take a lot more effort and work. I'm more of a relaxed kind of slimmer.

LIZ: You have your moments too.

LIZ as NARRATOR: Remember measuring the cheese a few moments ago.

KATE: But Patty and Olivia aren't new to this either – they've been like this for 5 years.

NANCY: That's new in weightloss terms. Their appetite-regulating hormones will still be screaming, "feed me, feed me". Their bodies will be grabbing and hanging onto every morsel and will be very efficient when it comes to food – more efficient than yours or mine. Every crumb and every drop counts. Their willpower and self-control have to be incredibly strong. They can't relax.

KATE: So they're permanently on a diet – and terrified of falling off the wagon?

NANCY: Terrified might be a bit strong – but, yes they're focused, and very vigilant – they nip any aberration in the bud and I imagine they think about it a lot.

KATE: Every day, and 24-seven.

NANCY: They know the *fat* monster is still very much alive – it hasn't been slain – so they stay on their guard and the battle continues.

LIZ: I'm just glad you didn't get on the weightloss rollercoaster. There was a lot of pressure on you to lose weight for your wedding wasn't there?

KATE: Yeah, from everyone.

NANCY: Once you start dieting it can be the beginning of a life of yo-yoing and a never-ending series of battles. Each battle could have you gain weight after trying to lose it.

LIZ as NARRATOR: Weight cycling or yo-yoing dieting is often caused by fad and extreme diets – it really isn't healthy. When the fad's over your weight bounces back to where you were and often with interest!

KATE: I'm not good at fighting at the best of times – especially nothing long-term.

LIZ: You're not patient either.

NANCY: So best not to start. That would be my mantra – don't start – stay as you are.

LIZ: But don't gain either.

KATE: *(After a short pause she picks up a book)* There sure was a lot of pressure. Everyone at work told me I should lose a few kilos – they said the camera puts on. One of them gave me this book *(she hands it to LIZ).*

LIZ: "The wedding dress diet".

KATE: She said I should get a dress that was one or two sizes smaller to motivate me to lose weight – the people at the gym were the same. It was mum who talked me out of it in the end – she said …

LIZ: …that you're just fine as you are. *(Gives the book back to KATE who puts it down. LIZ then gets out plates, glasses etc and puts them on a large tray)*

KATE: Well yes, but she also said that she's not a magician. She said she couldn't conjure a big dress out of a little dress if dieting didn't work.

NANCE: Which it often doesn't.

KATE: Nothing worse than looking like you're busting out all over. Haha busting. *(She lifts her small breasts.)* What a joke!

NANCY: Like Liz said, you're perfect just as you are. We all are.

KATE: I thought I could lose a few inches off my butt and maybe my cankles.

NANCY: Cankles?

KATE: You know, when you don't have ankles – when your calves meet your feet without any sexy tapering – cankles. Anyway, it'd be my luck that my breasts would disappear instead – I'm sure Adam would be thrilled about that.

NANCY: *(Holding two apples as if they were her breasts.)* Annoying how food, especially chocolate and cake won't go where you want it would go.

LIZ: Adam wouldn't care either way.

NANCY: But there are plenty of men who would. *(She has been cutting up carrots, capsicums, celery and apples and putting them on a plate).* There we go – that should be enough – if there are leftovers I'll put them in a box and take them to work tomorrow.

KATE: I suppose I'm lucky – he loves me for me – not just for what I look like.

NANCY: So he hasn't got you to sign a prenup forbidding you to gain any weight while you're married.

KATE: No! That's ridiculous. Who would do that?

LIZ: Weight factors into all kinds of things. Just talking to a fat person before a job interview can affect whether you get the job or not. And didn't Olivia say it was one of the reasons why her husband left her – a few extra pounds meant she wasn't attractive anymore.

KATE: It devastated her and zapped all her self-confidence.

LIZ: Maybe that's why she's terrified of being fat again.

KATE: She's been going on about wanting a boyfriend for ages. I know she worries about being left on her own. She thought that slimming down would increase her chances but it hasn't really worked.

NANCY: It's never as simple as all that though is it?

KATE: Not that she'd ever have time for one – seriously, when would she fit him in? She barely has time to fit herself in sometimes.

LIZ: He'd want to love running.

KATE: He would

NANCY: *(Jokingly)* They could have "dates on the run" or "spot" each other at the gym.

KATE: Hilarious. Why are you in such a good mood?

LIZ: She's always in a good mood when it's feeding time.

NANCY: I'm always in a good mood full stop.

KATE: Food would be an issue for Olivia … *(NANCY and LIZ look at her questioningly)* … in a new relationship.

LIZ: Patty manages, doesn't she?

KATE: Yeah, but she's often at odds with her husband about food. Patty reckons he has no idea and eats a lot of rubbish – she's waiting for him to have a heart attack – plus he corrupts their kids.

NANCY: He corrupts their kids?

KATE: He buys them cakes and stuff she doesn't want them eating.

NANCY: Is she a bit of a preacher – like one of those born again Christian types – who worries about saving your soul – her way's the only right way?

LIZ: It's all very black and white for her isn't it? *(To KATE)*

KATE: Well yes, I suppose. *(Pause)* But she's also aware that people might think she's preaching so she worries about spouting on – especially when it's anything to do with dieting. Often she won't say anything in case it opens up a can of worms and people get defensive.

NANCY: People can get very defensive.

KATE: She hates arguments. She'll cook two dinners to stop her family complaining about having to eat her *diet food* – she'll cook them what they want and cook herself something different. She *never* compromises though on what she eats, which annoys him and she says she feels like he tries to sabotage her healthy eating efforts.

NANCY: All this extra cooking must be time-consuming.

KATE: It is! It's one of the reasons she only works part-time.

LIZ: All she's doing is putting herself first. Olivia does too – they're both putting themselves first. There's nothing wrong with that.

NANCY: It's something women aren't good at. And then there's the guilt. *(No-one's listening to her).*

LIZ: *(The oven beeps just as the dishes are finished)* Perfect timing! *(She takes the pita bread pizzas out of the oven and cuts them into slices before putting them on a plate and onto the tray.*

NANCY: *(She puts her vegetables etc on the tray too. She also fills the glasses with water and drops in a slice of lemon and a sprig of mint into each glass.)* Let's go outside.

LIZ: I'll have to practise my speech after lunch.

NANCY: You had your speech sorted out weeks ago.

KATE: I thought you were going to practise it this morning.

LIZ: That was the plan and I did – but I just need to change some it a bit.

NANCY: Why, what happened?

LIZ: *(To NANCY)* Nothing really – I was looking for a blue necklace...

KATE: What blue necklace?

NANCY: It was one your grandmother gave to your mother years ago. She's actually never worn it. It was when she was quite big and it didn't fit around her neck. I asked Liz to try and find it.

LIZ: That must have been embarrassing for her.

NANCY: Yeah, it was a bit.

KATE: Did you find it? *(They go through the ranch slider)*.

LIZ: No, not yet – that's what I was doing before you got up this morning …

(The stage lights fade to black)

SCENE TWO: Earlier that day

A spot of light again lights the lounge wall-clock a hand winds time backwards to 8.30, earlier that morning.

The stage is semi dark until LIZ comes in via a door stage right, which leads to bedrooms and other rooms off stage. She opens the lounge curtains and then goes into the kitchen to pull up the blinds and have a glass of water. She has a sheet of paper containing a list of items that she is ticking off – she also adds items to the bottom of the list from time to time.

LIZ: Caterers, dresses, cake *(sighs and ticks).* The flowers … umm *(she picks up the phone and dials)*. Hi Nance, it's me – you're picking up the flowers when you pick up the dresses right? *(Pause)* OK that's good. *(Pause)* The time? Umm, it's after 8 o'clock, *(pause)* you said call early *(pause).* Kate? No, she's probably not even up yet *(pause).* No, she'd gone before I even got up, *(pause)*, no, nothing – she didn't say anything at all … *(pause)* hang on … *(she writes on her list)* … blue … *(under her breath)* … so clichéd. In a black suitcase you reckon *(pause)*? Where? No, I can't remember ever seeing it. Ok, I'll have a look. If I can't find it, you'll have to have a look when you come 'round *(pause).* Yes, I know – you don't need to tell me. I can't believe we've left so much to the last minute. *(Pause)* Yes I know, of course we will. *(Pause.)* Ok, how long will all that take? *(Pause)* Ok, so you'll be here around 11 – yeah, that's really good, thank you. I'll make pizza or something – we'll have an early lunch or brunch *(pause).* No, I won't forget, I'll go and look for it now. *(Pause)* Ok, see you soon, bye (*She hangs up her phone then picks up some pages of hand written notes that are lying on the end of the kitchen bench and goes into the bedroom closing the door behind her).*

LIZ: A blue pendant – I'm sure I don't know what she's talking about. *(She looks about the room then kneels near the foot end of the bed, reaching underneath it)* Ok, now ... God this thing weighs a tonne (*she drags out a brown suitcase and clunks open its old latches).* You obviously haven't been opened for a while, have you? *(The smell of the past catches her momentarily. She sits down.)* Oh wow, I knew you kept diaries Mum, but this … this is crazy … there's a library's worth here. *(LIZ lifts one out carefully, but loose, handwritten pages and photographs fall out of it. She scrambles to put everything back together and put the journal back into the suitcase, but it falls open begging to be read).*

The stage lights dim such that colours have faded to greys apart from a small spot of colour surrounding LIZ who is sitting at the end of the large bed. (This

grey/colour lighting effect splits the space into two different time frames – LIZ is in one time frame but the rest of the room is in another.) LIZ begins reading the diary quietly. The audience becomes aware that MOIRA is in the bed, and stirring from sleep and as the alarm clock clangs – she taps it quiet. In complete silence, LIZ and the audience watch as MOIRA stretches and gets out of bed to go through her morning routine. She goes into the bathroom and goes to the toilet, washes her hands, and then takes off her nighty (sleepwear). MOIRA is only just obesely overweight. Unlike the typical images of obesity, there are no folds of flesh, just curves, smooth curves – she's an attractive woman. She glances at her reflection in the large mirror in front of the audience before standing tentatively onto the bathroom scales but then gets off and onto the scales again to double-check the reading. She puts her nighty back on and then writes down her weight along with a few comments in a diary. The diary MOIRA is writing in is a newer version of the diary LIZ has pulled from the suitcase. LIZ notices that at the top of the page a weight is recorded and she reads it out loud.

LIZ: "The 89kg has a ring around it – and the note – probably still the effects of the school BBQ – tomorrow will be better – it has to be". *MOIRA comes back into the bedroom to make-up her bed, reposition all the cushions and ensures everything is immaculately tidy. She then returns to the bathroom and turns on the shower and after a few moments she undresses and gets in. While the audience can't see her having a shower, they can hear the water running quietly in the background. Meanwhile, LIZ is reading excerpts from the diary. After a few words MOIRA'S voice replaces LIZ'S voice.*

LIZ: It's 2am, and again I can't sleep.

MOIRA'S VOICE: Liz says the kids at school are teasing her about me. If you want to know what people think and how they hate, listen to their kids. Apparently, one of them was laughing and saying that *his* mother would rather *die* than look like *me*. People, especially parents, should know better. Who would want to look like me? And yes, I've contemplated dying. I've thought about the tree on Jackson's bend along the highway. I want to believe my girls need me regardless of what I look like and that being their mother is what's important and all I need to concern myself with right now. But I'm an embarrassment – I know I am. None of Liz's drawings have me in them. I'm invisible – I'm so big, yet I'm invisible. I can't use the, "I was behind the camera – someone's got to take the photo" excuse – not this time. But nor can I bring myself to ask Liz why I'm not in her drawings – I can't ask her – I'm scared of what she might tell me. *(LIZ unfolds one of the loose pages that fell*

out of the journal – it's a drawing of a happy trio – herself, her sister and their father – there are several similar drawings. It brings tears to her eyes – where was her mother? She continues reading for a while but looks back at the drawings again.)

LIZ: I can't remember drawing these – but I must have; they're definitely mine – that's my childish signature. I have no idea what I was thinking. Although, I do remember someone telling me that fat people like my mother can drop dead at any moment simply because they're fat. *(She continues reading)*

MOIRA'S VOICE: People would rather lose an arm, be blind or crippled, or even die than be like me. Of course I'll never ask her about the drawings and why I'm not in them. These are such dark days.

LIZ: *(Puts the loose pages back where she found them.)* I shouldn't be reading this. *(She turns over several pages and begins to read again.)*

MOIRA'S VOICE: I've been loathed and hated my whole life – not because of who I am or what I've done, but because of what I weigh – because of a number on a scale. I *should* be slim. Slimness means success so fatness means failure – and they're both measured in kilograms. Why is weight a measure of who you are? *(LIZ turns over a page to a photograph of an old man.)* It's Dad's anniversary today – he's been gone a year now – Do I miss him? Perhaps. I certainly don't miss the constant reminding and chiding about my weight. "It's a lack of self control – you simply need to control yourself – and it's laziness. Ugh … all fat people need to do is eat less and move more!" He'd say this as I cleaned him up, lifted him off the toilet, and helped him back to bed. How often had I heard it? It's so simple – so easy. Endless bullying. People don't hide or disguise their disgust or dislike of fatness – of me – it's in their voices and on their faces. Sometimes I see fear. I'm just fat, I feel like screaming – I'm not dangerous or contagious – it's not going to rub off onto you. You don't need to remind me that I'm fat either – it's not something I don't see when I look in the mirror. I see it. I'm aware of it. I know I'm fat! But believe it or not it's not something I actively choose to be – why would I? Why the hell would I? No one has any concept of how hard this is – I wish they did. It's *not* simple – it's complex. It's complicated. Does it occur to anyone that I'm trapped in here? I'm trapped in this ugly shape – this bad, *wrong* shape. I fight to be free of it every day, but I don't win. There has to be another way out of my misery. But there's no escape. Knowing the girls need me keeps me here – and keeps me going.

LIZ: This was – 1999. (P*ause)* I had no idea it was so bad for you. I wish I did. I can't believe you picked a tree. How did I *not know* about this? I wonder if Nance knew? *(She keeps reading.)*

The shower stops. Still in shades of grey, MOIRA dries herself then wraps herself in a towel before brushing her teeth and flicking a comb through her hair. She puts on moisturiser and perfume and then selects what she will wear for the day. From time to time she checks how she looks in the mirror as she dresses, clearly enjoying having attractive underwear and lingerie, jewellery, clothes and shoes to wear. Before leaving the bedroom she pulls a gym bag off the shelf in the wardrobe and puts a set of training clothes, shoes and a fresh towel into it.

When MOIRA eventually leaves the bedroom, the room returns to colour with LIZ still sitting hunched up on the floor at the end of the bed reading the diary. MOIRA goes into the grey-lit kitchen to drink a glass of water before grabbing a bottle of water and a box of prepared food from the fridge. She tosses them into her gym bag, collects her keys from a bowl on the lounge sideboard and then goes out through the ranch-slider door. As she leaves, colour returns to the room – LIZ blows her nose – a few moments later the stage lights fade to black.

SCENE THREE: Getting ready

Again a spot of light falls on the lounge clock. A hand winds the clock's hands forward in time to around mid-day – the spotlight then fades before the stage lights come up.

LIZ: *(She comes inside through the ranch slider carrying the lunch tray with KATE and NANCY close behind her.)* I'll deal with these dishes – you start getting ready.

NANCY: Ok, I'll put the dresses on the bed in the bedroom *(she carries two of the dress bags into the bedroom and lays them on the bed. KATE follows her bringing the other two dresses.)* I'll do your makeup and hair in the lounge – the light's better in there. *(They leave the bedroom.)* Let's move this over here. *(She gestures to KATE to move the table closer to the ranch slider)*

LIZ: Hang on. *(She grabs the flowers off the table and puts them on the bench she's clearing.)*

NANCY: *(Spreading the contents from her two large bags onto the table. The things include a make-up case and hairdressing equipment. She also sets about setting up her tripod and camera gear. She then drags a chair from the dining area and sets it down beside the table.)* Sit here – and try to relax. *(She then snaps a few photos of LIZ in the kitchen, the flowers on the bench, and of KATE relaxing who isn't really impressed.)* The bride relaxing.

KATE: Hardly. Not if you're poking that thing at me. *(Pause)* Liz, the tables and chairs are set up outside but the tablecloths and … there's still lots to do?

MOIRA: *(Comes inside carrying several bags)* Phew, that took longer than I thought.

KATE: Mum, yay! Finally! We were wondering when you'd get here.

MOIRA: *(Goes to her bedroom and drops off some bags one of which is her gym bag. The other bags had boxes with shoes in them and a couple of well-wrapped wedding presents. She has a quick peek at the dresses and then goes back into the lounge with the gifts.)* Liz, where are we putting these? *(Gesturing to the presents she's holding.)*

LIZ: They're going to go in here on the table … umm … once the make-up's finished.

MOIRA: They can go on the sideboard for now. *(Puts the gifts on the sideboard. She then kisses KATE on the head.)* You should stop worrying. Everything's fine – Liz has thought of everything.

KATE: I'm not worrying.

MOIRA: I heard you when I came in. We've got four hours before people start arriving that's plenty of time. You can't prepare for a garden wedding too early. Most of what we've got to do are just finishing touches. We're lucky the weather's gorgeous. There's actually not much more to do – Dad and your uncles and cousins are finishing off the tables – so stop worrying. You just relax. *(Pause while thinking)* Umm, tables … right … Liz where's the seating plan? Dad wants to put out the place names?

LIZ: It's with my speech … where did I leave it?

NANCY: There on the bench *(pointing)* – I'll give it to the boys. *(She takes the list from LIZ and goes outside.)*

LIZ: *(She calls after NANCY at the door)* While you're at it, could you check they're ok with everything – give them a bit of guidance.

MOIRA: *(To LIZ)* I'll get that dress-hanging thing from the spare room so we can hang the dresses up.

LIZ: Good idea. *(MOIRA goes thru the door leading off stage (stage right) and comes back dragging a dress rack.)*

LIZ as NARRATOR: *(After looking outside)* Gosh, everything looks so beautiful outside – the tables, the flowers the lanterns everything's lovely. Weddings are such special things – so much changes.

KATE: Ok, I'll just sit here *(she put's her feet up.)*

MOIRA: Liz, can you give me a hand in the bedroom?

LIZ: Sure! *(She carries a jug of water with strawberries and mint leaves floating in it over to the table and pours out a glass of water for KATE.)* Here, drink this.

KATE: Yum.

MOIRA: *(As she and LIZ drag the rack into the bedroom, take the dresses out of their bags and hang them up. They take a few moments to look at them.)* They turned out beautifully.

LIZ: I love purple. Oh now, I almost forgot – Nance said you have a blue necklace that Kate could wear as her something blue – it's apparently one grandma gave you.

MOIRA: Oh ok – I've actually never worn it. It was too small when she gave it to me. It told me I was too fat for pretty things.

LIZ: You could have had it enlarged.

MOIRA: That would have been embarrassing. Throwing it into the suitcase was actually one of the best things I ever did – it was a turning point for me because I decided to stop focusing on the negative and concentrate on the

positive things about me. *(She kneels down beside the bed and drags out a small black suitcase).*

LIZ as NARRATOR: The black suitcase not the brown suitcase!

MOIRA: Looking back it was life changing. My periods had stopped, my doctor was worried about my blood pressure, I'd split my pants at a party we were at, and then grandma gave me the necklace as a birthday present which didn't fit – it was the last straw – everything changed after that – it's the day I started my diet and focusing on myself – I made *me* my first priority. If the plane's going down you should put your own oxygen mask on first.

LIZ: So it's the perfect something blue thing for Kate to wear.

MOIRA: I suppose it is. It's in here somewhere. *(They look through the suitcase together)* There are all kinds of memories in here. *(She finds a small red box.)* Here it is. *(She takes out the necklace and holds it up to her neck.)*

LIZ: Look at that – it fits you easily.

MOIRA: Gosh it does. *(She goes over to the mirror to have a look at it as LIZ puts the suitcase back under the bed)* It's much prettier than I remember it. Ok, I'll give it to Kate when she gets dressed – good idea. *(Pause)* Ok, now – the caterer's got a table thing he wants to set the cake up on. *(They go to a table in the corner of the room near the mirror where MOIRA had the exquisitely decorated wedding cake hidden under a white sheet. They carefully lift the sheet.)*

LIZ: I haven't seen it finished.

MOIRA: I finished it last night.

LIZ: Has Kate seen it yet?

MOIRA: No, not finished.

LIZ: She'll love it.

MOIRA: Ooh – hang on, I've left something in the car – I'll only be a minute. *(She hastens through the lounge and outside.)*

LIZ as NARRATOR: Isn't the cake exquisite? What a clever idea – it's a model of the gazebo in the garden – where Kate and Adam will take their vows – look at the roses, they're so real. *(She then steps through the mirror into a spot of light to the left of the mirror. As she does so the stage lights dim. A smaller spot of light falls on the lounge wall clock, which a hand stops. Time standing still and a disruption in the play are represented by the clock's motionless second hand.)* What was your reaction when you saw Moira – Kate and Liz's mother – the fat woman? How did you feel about her – what if she was your mother, your wife, your friend – what if she was your blind date? *(MOIRA now appears in the bedroom and stands in front of the mirror looking at her*

reflection. She is wearing a fitting long sleeved white leotard and white leggings – not motionless she changes poses from time to time.)

Forgive me but I need to get this out … *(LIZ stands so as to not block the audience's view of the mirror.)* We, as a society, value beauty and slimness don't we? Things of value are only valuable because they're rare or they're hard to find or difficult to achieve. *(Almost to herself)* Pursuing rarity just makes people miserable. But the buxomness of the Venus of Willendorf or Titian's Venuses, the voluptuousness of Lillian Russell, the curves of Marilyn Munro and Adele they're fat – their bodies aren't prized today. *(As these names are mentioned, the coloured images of the women's bodies (e.g., Titian's Venus, Marilyn Munro and others) are projected onto MOIRA'S body followed by images of not slim, slim, and very slim well-known women like Charlotte Church, Kirsty Alley, Beyoncé Knowles, Keira Knightley, Angelina Jolie, Kate Moss, Alexa Chung and other runway models, and lastly a naked barbie doll.)* Today, attractiveness means thinness – the frame has to be slender. *(Again to herself)* Somewhat emaciated. Women who are considered beautiful today don't have curves like Moira has. Rather the bodies that *are* considered attractive are bodies whose appearance approaches a boyish linearity or rather they would if they didn't have breast implants – these are the bodies that are paraded before us as models to aspire to. We learn what is beautiful and valuable because it's packaged, presented and paraded before us on a daily basis.

When it comes to bigotry and discrimination, race, gender or sexual preference have nothing on fatness. Being overweight or obese cuts across them all. Prejudice and discrimination against fat folk is ok – it's actually encouraged. But is it really better to be blind, armless or even in a wheel chair than it is to be fat? Is it better to be dead? *(Now images of blindness and disability, for example Helen Keller, and The Venus de Milo and death (represented by a gravestone with the name and words, "MOIRA MARSDEN – a beauty spurned by this world") are projected onto MOIRA'S body.)* Disdain and hatred for fatness can be found in every level of society. Children as young as 5 and 6 years old fear and hate fatness. It's outrageous. *(Pause)* Evolutionists say that being able to gain weight quickly and efficiently was advantageous in times when food was scarce? Food isn't scarce anymore. When there is food around fatness is inevitable. We live in a fat enabling environment. Fat bodies are simply bodies of evidence – evidence of genetics and heredity, and evidence of an obesogenic environment. Bigotry and discrimination don't curb fatness. Blaming fat individuals doesn't either – It's fruitless. Lose the hate and

stop worrying about weight *(The projection of images onto MOIRA'S body stops and she draws away from the mirror into the greyness of the stage lighting.)*

Health seems to be a euphemism for a standard body shape or appearance. We don't need to accept this, do we? There are diverse body heights – why not accept diverse body widths? Look at the difference in body shape of a body builder compared to a ballet dancer – they're different. Diversity can be healthy. I would wager that Moira is fitter and healthier than most people – fitter and healthier than most of you. The trouble is we tend to lump all fat people and obese people together. But, being overweight or mildly obese has virtually no consequences for health. But not exercising and not eating well do. Seriously, it's ok to be overweight. Moira's not part of New Zealand's fat nation health problem, yet many of you think she is? She is the fat statistic that the obesity epidemic fuss is about but she's healthy. Do we envisage a body like Moira's when we think obesity? No, not usually. Where are the rolls and the hanging belly?

No matter how you look at it though, we need to be careful making judgements about what we see *(She points out the shape of the mirror where MOIRA stood.).* Slim people aren't necessarily healthy simply because they're slim and vice versa. It is all too easy to misrepresent health by relying on appearance. We certainly shouldn't make judgements about a person's character, value, and health based on appearance. Sure, obesity's considered a disease today – homosexuality was a disease not that long ago. Have we progressed at all from the days when a certain forehead and nose shape *(pushing down her nose)* meant you were a criminal? Not really. Fat people are society's criminals today. *(Pause)* In any case we need to get back to Liz and Moira *(The spotlight fades as she steps back through the mirror. A hand restarts the clock and the stage lights come up.)*

MOIRA: *(Dressed as she was before LIZ stepped through the mirror, MOIRA comes back into the bedroom carrying a small box.)* I forgot the cake's figurines. *(They are icing figurines of The Owl and The Pussycat dressed as a bride and groom.)* I promised the people at work I'd show them to them.

LIZ: Oh they're gorgeous. The Owl and the Pussycat – Kate loves that poem. The cake's just lovely Mum, everything is.

MOIRA: *(She hugs LIZ)* It's been fun to do. *(She carefully positions the figurines on the cake.)* Ok, let's show her and then take it out to the caterer – he's

promised to keep it safe. *(They carry the cake out to KATE who gets up immediately.)*

KATE: The cake – oh wow Mum, it's so beautiful.

MOIRA: Do you like it?

KATE: I love it!

LIZ: We're just taking it out to the caterer so it can be set up – it's going on that table by the apple tree right? *(They carry it out through the ranch slider.)*

MOIRA: Yes, I think so – let's have a look.

KATE: *(After a few moments of sipping her drink – OLIVIA arrives)* Gosh, you were quick *(checking the clock)* – I wasn't expecting you for another hour or so.

OLIVIA: I felt guilty – I did the bare minimum so I could get back early.

KATE: Did you see the cake?

OLIVIA: Ah ha, your mother's really talented.

KATE: She's very clever. *(Pause)* So, when's Patty coming?

OLIVIA: She's got a few more things to do – I don't think she'll be long.

KATE: The dresses are in the bedroom, come and have a look. *(They pause as LIZ, MOIRA and NANCY come inside.)*

LIZ: *(To KATE)* Everything's pretty much ready out there now – Nance's been sorting those men out – everything looks great. All we need to do is concentrate on getting dressed … and we've got plenty of time.

KATE: I was just going to show Olivia the dresses.

NANCY: Yes, let's. *(They all go into the bedroom. LIZ, KATE, and OLIVIA look at the dresses then eventually one by one perch on the bed while NANCY sits on a Lazy Boy recliner chair near the bathroom end of the bedroom. MOIRA is getting out the shoes.)* When are you going to get rid of this old thing? *(Patting the chair.)*

MOIRA: I can't bring myself to throw it away just yet. *(OLIVIA looks at her questioningly.)* Umm, I used to sleep in it before I lost all my weight – I couldn't breathe lying down and my back was so sore ... I thought I wouldn't wake up if I lay down so I slept sitting up – for quite a few years.

NANCY: You're fine now so you should get rid of it – it's got bad memories.

MOIRA: I keep it just in case.

NANCY: Just in case of what? You're not going to get fat like that again. I'd never have a thing like that looming over me. I got rid of all my fat clothes – it was liberating – it felt so good chucking them all out. Moi, *(her pet name for MOIRA)* get rid of it *(moving around on the chair).* It's not even comfortable. When do you ever sit in it?

MOIRA: I don't … it's just a reminder of how far I've come.

NANCY: Yeah, well, I suppose that's important.

OLIVIA: *(To MOIRA)* How much did you lose?

MOIRA: Over 60 kilos – it's around about what Liz weighs. Imagine a whole one of her stuck to you *(LIZ attaches herself to MOIRA'S side)* – that's how big I used to be.

OLIVIA: It's hard to believe. But people don't believe I used to be fat either. I have to show them my photographs. But photos don't really tell the whole story. It's the day-to-day struggle that's so hard and photographs can't show that – nothing can actually.

MOIRA: It's certainly important to look back and see how far you've come.

NANCY: It's good to talk about what you've been through too because like you say, it's about all the stuff in between the photographs and in between sleeping in the chair and not sleeping in the chair ... all that everyday, day in day out stuff. It's all so time-consuming.

LIZ: What about your diaries mum – they have all the everyday stuff in them – all the emotional detail?

MOIRA: Sure, but a lot of that's just crap.

LIZ: Why crap – what do you mean?

MOIRA: When I read stuff I wrote years ago I can't believe what I wrote.

NANCY: That's because this Moira, the one whose reading the diary, isn't the yesterday Moira who wrote them – if that makes sense. You're a different person. The experiences you wrote about yesterday are the things that have changed you into who you are right now.

MOIRA: You're right – sometimes it feels like I'm reading someone else's story. But I know it's me. Although, sometimes they drag me back to that time, which can be uncomfortable. You forget stuff – the intense high and lows that you feel get smoothed out over time.

NANCY: But they're good to have all the same.

MOIRA: I don't know, maybe *(pause)* sometimes they just make me cry.

LIZ: *(To herself)* You're not the only one. *(There's a loud knock on the ranch slider door.)*

MOIRA: *(Looking around the corner.)* Oh, it's Patty. That's good *(She gestures to PATTY to come in.)* We're all in here. *(Patty comes into the bedroom and perches on the bed by KATE.)*

PATTY: Cosy.

KATE: We're just chatting. Mum was just talking and reminiscing about the past and how fat she used to be. You and Olivia do that too don't you – reminisce I mean?

PATTY: Well … sort of. I don't know … what we do isn't all that constructive really.

OLIVIA: It's usually about how dissatisfied we are with ourselves regardless of how far we've come. There's still so much to change – and a lot hasn't really changed at all.

NANCY: Are women ever satisfied?

MOIRA: We should be.

PATTY: *(A little distracted.)* This morning we were talking about babies and trying to control staying slim when you're pregnant.

KATE: *(Ignoring PATTY)* What do you mean – so much still to change – you look pretty perfect to me?

OLIVIA: I thought losing weight would make me more attractive and I'd find a man – that a guy would want me. But no such luck. I sometimes wonder what the point was – I've lost all this weight but I'm pretty miserable – why did I even bother? Sometimes I think I don't have someone to share my life with – not like you two. *(To MOIRA and KATE.)* I wish I had someone special.

KATE: *(Hugging OLIVIA)* You will.

MOIRA: Wanting to meet someone's probably not a good reason to lose weight. Losing weight changes your body's shape and the size of your clothes but not much else really – all the other stuff stays the same – all the issues and problems you had when you were fat aren't going to disappear just because you're slim. They'll need their own work and attention.

OLIVIA: I'm beginning to realise that. It's not what you're led to believe though is it?

NANCY: No, but what you need to realise is that losing weight is a massive achievement – you've succeeded at that so now you can tackle your next project knowing that you're good at setting goals and achieving them. You really do need to appreciate what you've done – we all do.

OLIVIA: Yeah, I suppose. I don't really do that. I just wish I could lose a few more kilos and get shapelier legs – the trouble is my body's not playing the game. I practically starved myself for a week a while back and did lots of running but my weight stayed the same and so did my legs.

MOIRA: Maybe this is how you're supposed to be – everybody is different – your bone structure, muscle make-up, skin and hair are unique to you. You can't fight your genes.

KATE: You're incredibly fit and healthy – surely that's the ultimate reward.

OLIVIA: That's what I tell myself.

NANCY: You could try plastic surgery I suppose – not that there's an inch of fat on you so liposuction would be a waste of time. But…you could have them break your legs and make the bones longer to give you the shape you want. The lengths women go to …

MOIRA: Nance, stop it! *(To OLIVIA)* She's not serious.

OLIVIA: I'd never do that.

MOIRA: Why can't we just be satisfied with ourselves?

NANCY: As I said before – we're women.

KATE: Please don't get started on that again.

MOIRA: Seriously, we need to like ourselves. Attractiveness is about liking yourself.

PATTY: I've thought about having a tummy tuck – I wish I could get rid of my jelly belly.

MOIRA: Do it – have one!

PATTY: I don't know if I could

MOIRA: Why not? I've had one.

PATTY: A tummy tuck *(MOIRA nods)* gosh really. I'd be worried I'd want to keep going and have all sorts of bits nipped and tucked.

MOIRA: It was excruciatingly painful – I'm not tempted to do anymore.

PATTY: Why did you do it?

MOIRA: I had all this lose skin that wasn't ever going to go away – I had an apron of skin that hung halfway down my thighs and every time I lay down I was lying in a puddle of skin. Before I had the tummy tuck I'd stand in front of the mirror and just cry – I felt so ugly.

KATE: Everyone always talks about the pluses of losing weight – you hardly ever hear about the negatives.

PATTY: Did you feel vain?

MOIRA: No, not really – it's been the ultimate reward. Plus I have a wonderful doctor. He said, imagine you've got tickets to a ball, you've bought an amazing dress, got stunning shoes, your hair just perfect, your nails, and had all your makeup done but you didn't put on any lipstick? Why wouldn't you? Why wouldn't you finish it off and put on some lipstick? I feel like it's been the icing on the cake. It made me feel so good about myself, which is never a bad thing. So the question should be, why wouldn't you?

NANCY: We need more doctors like that.

MOIRA: We do.

PATTY: But what if you lose some more – you'd need another one? Or what if you gain it again – does that matter?

MOIRA: I'm not planning on losing or gaining any more weight. This is me done – weight-wise it is anyway! Losing more involves more effort than I'm prepared to make – I can do everything I want to as I am – I'm pretty healthy – besides life's too short – there's stuff to enjoy.

OLIVIA: What do you mean? Surely you'd be healthier if you were slimmer?

NANCY: But that's just not true! I'm healthy – and fit. I refuse to buy into the whole "if you're xyz tall you should be 123 heavy". It's ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. At my supposed to be "ideal" weight I'd be skeletal – like Twiggy … I'd look ridiculous. Look at my big square hands I'm big boned. You – you're tiny. We're just different. There are diverse heights, what's wrong with diverse widths?

OLIVIA: Twiggy? Who's … ?

NANCY: Umm …

MOIRA: Kate Moss – *(sucking in her cheeks)*.

OLIVIA: Oh, ok. But isn't it better for you to be thinner – well – in the normal range?

NANCY: Who says?

OLIVIA: Everyone.

MOIRA: No, not necessarily. People like me live just as long as people your size, longer if I'm exercising and you're not. Not that living longer is the be all and end all. For me enjoying what I'm doing and being happy are more important.

OLIVIA: Gosh, I wish I could be that satisfied with myself.

MOIRA: *(To OLIVIA)* Kate says you like running … long distances – do you enjoy that? You do right? *(OLIVIA nods)*

PATTY: That's a big part of the secret I think – finding something you really enjoy doing and sticking to it.

MOIRA: I think so too – I hate running so I'd be forever finding excuses not to do it. But a spin class or aerobics and dancing – I can do them every day.

OLIVIA: Competing's what's important for me – I love working towards a race or a competition – that's what keeps me going – always something else around the corner to look forward to – some new challenge.

KATE: First it was 5k walks …

OLIVIA: I can remember when I could barely get to the end of my road.

KATE: Then it was 10k runs – and now it's half marathons. You're always pushing yourself. What's next?

OLIVIA: Yeah, well I feel so good afterwards. Maybe I'll do a couple more half marathons to get my times down and then I'll see. Everyone should do it – it's not that hard.

NANCY: Um it's not that easy either. You can't expect everyone to do what you do.

OLIVIA: It's not that hard.

NANCY: Umm …

MOIRA: Shhh, *(trying to stop NANCY)*. Patty, what were you saying about babies just before?

PATTY: Oh, it's Paul, he wants another baby but I can't bear the thought of being fat again. It's so easy to put on weight when you're pregnant.

MOIRA: Being pregnant's a good excuse to add a few pounds.

PATTY: Nothing's a good excuse to put weight on. What if I don't get my body back or it takes ages – I'm not sure it's worth it – all that effort? Bodies like this aren't supposed to have babies. *(Everyone is silent for a moment.)*

MOIRA: I packed on heaps of weight with each pregnancy – I'd probably've been a different person if I hadn't had babies – I could've been a beanpole my whole life.

NANCY: Isn't being a mother a part of being a woman *(looking at MOIRA)* – more than being beanpole thin is anyway?

MOIRA: This from you? Next you'll say that being pregnant is the epitome of being female.

NANCY: Isn't it?

LIZ: Umm ...

NANCY: Or you could smoke.

PATTY: Smoke?

NANCY: Lots of women smoke to stay slim.

LIZ: Umm, we should get ready.

MOIRA: Yes, we should. Does anyone need showers?

OLIVIA: Nope.

PATTY: *(Shakes her head.)*

MOIRA: Me neither – I had mine at the gym – I'll just want to freshen up a bit.

KATE: I do *(She goes through the lounge and off stage via the door stage right.)*

NANCY: Don't let your hair get wet!

LIZ: I'm right behind you. *(She follows KATE.)*

MOIRA: Ok. Nance, while that's going on can you start with Patty and Olivia?

NANCY: Right, *(to OLIVIA and PATTY)* come with me. *(They go to the lounge – OLIVIA sits on the chair by the table with PATTY on the sofa beside her. NANCY sets about doing their make-up first then hair.)*

MOIRA: *(Grabs the camera and snaps a few photos*.) If you're all okay I'll start getting dressed. There's water there if you want it – glasses are on the bench.

NANCY: Yep, we're fine.

MOIRA: (*Goes to the bedroom, freshens up, lays out some pretty lingerie and starts getting dressed. Stage lights fade to black.)*

SCENE FOUR: During the reception

The stage lights come up – the setting is the garden behind the house. There is a long decorated table with a flower arrangement, plates, cutlery and wine glasses. KATE, the beautiful bride, is in her seat at the head of the table with OLIVIA and PATTY in figure flattering purple dresses seated nearby. Adam and the best man have left their seats empty so MOIRA sits down – NANCY is close behind her with her camera and tripod.

MOIRA: *(Kisses KATE'S forehead.)* How are you doing?

KATE: Great – everything's absolutely lovely – the food was really good.

MOIRA: There was certainly plenty of choice.

NANCY: Photos – let's do a casual mother-daughter shot – heads closer. Moi – do the turtle – chin forward and then down to hide that turkey and double chin thing you've got going on *(MOIRA, being used to NANCY'S posing requests moves into position)* ok good. *(Pre-empting OLIVIA questions)* It feels uncomfortable but looks good on film. Photographers can enhance and manage all kinds of physical features. They can do amazing things plus they immortalise you. Ok, just a couple more – soft smiles *(she takes some more photos)* – really good. Where's Liz I want a couple with her. Olivia, could I get you to take a few of the four of us when Liz gets here?

OLIVIA: Sure – but I'm not very good.

NANCY: Don't worry I'll set everything up *(She starts setting up her tripod.)*

KATE: Actually, what's the time?

OLIVIA: Just after 7

PATTY: *(Pointing)* Ooh, there's Charlie, I promised I'd catch up with her – excuse me for a minute, I won't be long. *(As she leaves LIZ arrives.)*

LIZ: Where's she going?

NANCY: She saw a friend. Liz can you get next to your mum I want a photo of the three of you – yes that's lovely *(she snaps off about five more photos).* Ok, now – Liz move to your left a little bit. Ok perfect. So, Olivia, could you … all you need to do is press here *(She shows OLIVIA where to press and then poses with the others.)* Just a few more – great – thank you *(she then checks the images to ensure she's happy with them)* – bit of photo shopping will sort them out.

OLIVIA: Really?

NANCY: No one actually looks like the images you see in the magazines – half of it's getting the body in the right position the other half's photo shopping – it's that simple.

MOIRA: *(To LIZ)* What's the matter with you, you seem a bit hassled?

LIZ: No, it's fine I've gotten over it. *(MOIRA looks at her questioningly.)* Look it's nothing really – it's just that I made such an effort choosing the food and everything but it still wasn't good enough for Patty – she still brought her own.

KATE: But I told you she'd do that.

OLIVIA: She does it all the time – everywhere. I actually thought she was being very discreet – she usually tries to make sure no one notices.

LIZ: I suppose, but I noticed.

OLIVIA: Don't worry about it cos there's nothing you can really do about it – it's about her … and me too I suppose. It was just that the salads had dressings on them, which we don't want to eat. I had the chicken and some of the cooked veges. Patty just added some of her own salad.

MOIRA: As Olivia says – it's not about you it's Patty doing what she needs to do. I was a bit like that a few years ago too.

KATE: She does it all the time – she takes her own food with her everywhere – I don't even think she gives it a second thought.

MOIRA: It takes a lot of effort always planning and preparing and fitting in what you want.

LIZ: Regardless of how much it might offend somebody.

MOIRA: I'm sure Patty doesn't mean to offend anybody especially not you. *(PATTY comes back.)* Just forget about it.

PATTY: Forget about what?

OLIVIA: I was just saying that we'll often stay away from social functions like this because they bring up issues around what to eat. I wish they didn't but they usually do don't you think?

PATTY: It can be a problem but if I've had a meal before I go which I often do and then I just nibble on a few bits and pieces and I'm fine. But if I haven't had a meal and I'm really hungry – like if I've had an intense gym work out or whatever – then I've got to be very careful not to pig out on the wrong things and spend the rest of the week regretting it.

LIZ: Hence, you bring your own food.

PATTY: Yeah, I do – just in case. But the food today was lovely – I had all sorts of things.

LIZ: Well good.

NANCY: How's your friend?

PATTY: Oh Charlie – yeah she's good. She said she was telling a friend of hers about how much weight I've lost. She wanted to know my secret.

MOIRA: Everybody always wants to know your secret. What did you say?

NANCY: Hopefully you said that there isn't one

MOIRA: *(Sarcastically – while smiling at LIZ – wanting to lighten her mood)* Of course there is – there's always *a* secret!

NANCY: Ok, tell us your secret Patty – what's *your* secret?

LIZ: *(Under her breath.)* Bringing your own food to parties!

PATTY: My secret … umm … well all I said was, I watch what I eat.

NANCY: And that's it – that's the big secret – you watch what you eat. Gosh, so deep (*sarcastically).*

MOIRA: And simple.

PATTY: That's right, it is simple.

MOIRA: If it really *is that simple* surely there'd be no fat people. Not in Western culture anyway.

LIZ: You watch what you eat?

PATTY: That's what I said.

NANCY: *(A bit the worse for wine and joking with MOIRA).* Do you suppose that if I used a magnifying glass I'd be able to more effectively – watch – what – I – eat? Maybe that would help me be slimmer. At least I'd think I was eating more cos everything would look bigger.

MOIRA: Nance, Stop it!

KATE: *(To PATTY)* Just ignore her.

PATTY: But that is what I do. I just watch what I eat – that's what I do.

LIZ: You probably do a whole lot more than that though.

NANCY: That's hardly a secret. You were meaning much more than just that though, weren't you?

PATTY: All I said was ...

NANCY: Yes, but the implication is that everyone else doesn't. At least, all the fat people don't. You assume that *I* don't? That Moira doesn't. I mean just look at us. Obviously, we *don't* watch what *we* eat. It's actually a bit silly really isn't it?

OLIVIA: What is?

NANCY: As if *just* watching what you ate ever achieved anything. *(To PATTY and OLIVIA who look confused.)* Well think about it – does *just watching* actually *do* anything? *(Pause)* Well does it?

PATTY: Ok, but you know what I mean.

OLIVIA: I constantly hear people say that they've tried everything but they just can't lose weight. Then I see what they're eating – and I can see why.

NANCY: Oh sure.

PATTY: *(Almost whispering)* But, you can't tell them.

MOIRA: Like what?

OLIVIA: *(Getting a bit flustered.)* Ok, look at muffins – take bran muffins – people think they're healthy. I'm sitting there thinking, "You've got no idea what's in them". If they knew what was in a bran muffin – they wouldn't eat it. Umm, it's the same with McDonalds – fat people should stay away from McDonalds!

PATTY: I agree.

MOIRA: What? I shouldn't go to McDonalds?

NANCY: Hang on, what's wrong with bran muffins?

MOIRA: Umm … Did you …?

NANCY: *(Stopping MOIRA)* Wait. I want to know what's wrong with muffins!

OLIVIA: You need to look at what's in them. People have no idea. If you count up all the calories and fat – they're not good for you at all. Bran and wholemeal makes them sound like they're good – but they're not. You need to know what's actually in them.

NANCY: Another job for my magnifying glass.

OLIVIA: *(To NANCY and tapping her glass)* This stuff needs to be taken seriously too. Alcohol is food – heaps of calories.

NANCY: Well that depends – wine and beer maybe – but vodka's just fancy water isn't it – there aren't many calories in that.

OLIVIA: You might be surprised. And it all counts.

PATTY: You are what you eat … and drink.

NANCY: Oh really? *(To MOIRA)* Gosh, I don't remember eating … or drinking a curvaceous, sexy minx this morning – do you?

MOIRA: Umm, I think I'll take this *(Taking NANCY'S glass off her and handing it to LIZ.)*

OLIVIA: People just need to keep track.

PATTY: Keeping track of everything's all very well but the annoying thing is that not all stuff comes with ingredients' labels on it. So you don't know what they're worth calorie, carbohydrate and fat wise.

NANCY: You've got to watch those carbohydrates!

MOIRA: Do you read the labels on everything?

OLIVIA: Yes, everything – even when we get coffee at Starbucks.

PATTY: Everything I buy's got to be low fat and low sugar. It's got to be 5% fat or less. But I might go higher if it's something that's really good for you like hummus – but never anything over 10%.

LIZ: Never – so, no butter or cream or ice cream or chocolate? Not even one chocolate?

PATTY: If I have a box of chocolates in the house and have one I won't be able to resist the rest of them. I'm no good at rationing it – so it's just better not to start – it's not worth it.

MOIRA: I've got to the stage where I *can* have one chocolate and not have another one for two or three weeks – but I'll agree it takes effort – it takes control.

LIZ: What if food doesn't have labels on it. How do you work out what's ok and what's not?

OLIVIA: You read stuff … you find out … or you just don't buy it.

LIZ: How do you know that what you're reading is right?

OLIVIA: You find sources you know you can trust. I've got a Nutrition Almanac, which tells me what foods have in them and I like the New Healthy Food Guide – but the Weight Watchers magazines are good too. If you read enough you'll soon find out stuff. Like you can't just be worried about the fat in food often the culprit is carbohydrate – sugar.

PATTY: I've cut out sausages completely and I won't eat mince.

LIZ: You can buy lean mince.

PATTY: There's still too much fat in it

LIZ: So…

PATTY: I'll buy a piece of rump steak and chop it up myself**.** It's worth it – that way there's no fat at all.

MOIRA: Who has the time for all that?

LIZ: Plus cheap meats are sometimes all that low-income families can afford.

PATTY: Slow-cook cuts of meat don't have to be expensive and they're better for you. And don't say they take longer to cook and people on low-income don't have time cos they're holding down two or three jobs. Crock-pots can work wonders and they're not that expensive.

LIZ: With power on for half the day – it's swings and 'round-a-bouts cost wise really.

PATTY: *(To OLIVIA, but overheard by the others)* They're going to give us the – "it costs more to eat well, speech."

LIZ: We obviously don't need to – you already know it does.

MOIRA: What you do takes a fair bit of knowledge, time, and money. As you've said before, fat and sugar are cheap ingredients…

NANCY: … with opiate like qualities. *(MOIRA looks at NANCY sideways)* They do – fat's very tasty and very more-ish.

MOIRA: They're cheap ingredients and cheap food, which is loaded with them, isn't the best food to eat.

OLIVIA: That's why reading labels is so important.

NANCY: You need to be a chemist to understand some of those labels. Ingredients represented by numbers are a big turn off.

MOIRA: Ok, now go back to what you were saying about MacDonald's. You know you can get a burger for only a dollar some days – that's hard to resist when you've got a family to feed and not much money to do it with.

PATTY: It's just so unnecessary

MOIRA: What's unnecessary? Eating? Is eating unnecessary?

PATTY: No, it's not necessary to go near those places – it's not clever, especially if you're fat.

MOIRA: Gosh, so if you're fat you shouldn't be seen anywhere near a place like MacDonald's – it might give people the impression that you eat.

PATTY: It's about *what* you eat.

OLIVIA: And how much.

LIZ: What's wrong with bread, chicken and salad. *(Pause)* Actually those are not the burgers fat people buy are they? They're the expensive ones.

MOIRA: So it's about economics – socioeconomics.

PATTY: *(Not really getting the point)* For me it's about fat and carbohydrates – simple as that – well actually it's about long chain Omega-3s, carotenoids, lycopene, selenium, isoflavones, and phytoestrogens.

NANCY: Wow, Carotenoids, lycopene, selenium and phytoestrogens – you're a walking talking food encyclopaedia.

LIZ: *(To NANCY)* Look who's talking – so are you – you all are. You rattled off that list as if you're reciting the alphabet. Patty's not the only food encyclopaedia here.

PATTY: I admit I know about food – I have to. I also actually enjoy it – I know stuff – not many people know a lot about food – they should – but they don't.

NANCY: *(To PATTY and OLIVIA)* Go back to what you were saying about eating in MacDonald's? That it's offensive watching fat people eat.

PATTY: I didn't say that – you're putting words in my mouth.

OLIVIA: I think for their own sake, they should stay away from places like MacDonald's and KFC.

MOIRA: So the food's not good for them.

PATTY and OLIVIA: Right.

MOIRA: It's not good for fat people but it is good for slim people?

LIZ: I say again, what's wrong with bread, chicken and salad?

MOIRA: You're not really concerned about the food are you – you just want to restrict and control fat people.

NANCY: I have the solution – it's simple – how about one of those dog-collars people put on dogs to stop them wandering off their property …

LIZ: *(To MOIRA)* Oh heck – here we go again.

NANCY: … you could put those collars on fat people and they'd get an electric shock if they go near McDonalds or KFC or if they put the *wrong* food into their shopping trolleys – food that's more than 10 percent fat? And then there's that American guy, Moi what was his name *(MOIRA ignores her)* – that guy who said fat people should to be put in prison camps for their own good … and for the good of the whole country? The problem is that that would mean jailing millions of people. Fat concentration camps – seems reasonable enough – we're at war aren't we – there's a war on obesity – we hate fat people. Everything's their fault! There are more of them in unemployment queues, they clog our health care system, and they're responsible for the economy and global warming!

LIZ: Nance! Seriously! Stop it!

NANCY: I did it again didn't I?

LIZ: You did, and worse this time.

NANCY: I'm sorry. *(Pause)*

PATTY: It's so unnecessary.

NANCY: I apologised, didn't I.

PATTY: No – yes you did. It's not that – I mean fat people and food – it's so unnecessary.

MOIRA: What *are* you talking about? Surely you're not still going on about fat people eating – you're not are you?

NANCY: You see *(to MOIRA)* there it is again – intolerance.

LIZ as NARRATOR: I'm beginning to see Nancy's point. Why are slim women who used to be fat so impatient with other women who struggle to lose weight? They've forgotten how hard it was.

PATTY: Well, it's gross – it's gross watching fat people eat … sometimes. It's ok if they're eating an apple or something healthy but most of the time they're not. They're eating pies or burgers, which is so unnecessary – it's gross.

LIZ: Is it gross watching them eat or is it what they're eating?

PATTY: Probably a bit of both actually.

NANCY: Moi, we should eat in secret. Fat people should eat in secret.

OLIVIA: No, I don't agree at all – that was my problem I used to eat all kinds of things in secret. Now I make a point of never hiding anything.

PATTY: I count everything.

MOIRA: Everything?

PATTY: Yes, absolutely – I have to.

MOIRA: Doesn't that wring all the fun out of life – all that constant monitoring? And you never miss a day – you never have a day off? *(PATTY shakes her head.)*

PATTY: No, never! I always record what I eat and do.

OLIVIA: It makes me savour every single mouthful.

PATTY: I've just got boundaries. I've set rules for myself and I stick to them.

MOIRA: Rules? What rules?

PATTY: Rules about writing stuff down, rules about what to eat and rules about the amount of exercise I need to do each day – rules!

OLIVIA: And rules about what *not* to eat.

PATTY: I wouldn't look like this if I didn't stick to the rules.

LIZ: And you stick to them – no matter what? *(OLIVIA and PATTY nod.)* What don't you eat?

OLIVIA: Umm there are a few things like McDonalds and KFC, peanut butter, bread, mashed potatoes, custard, dressings and sauces unless it's tomato and all fried takeaways – takeaways generally actually – and I never drink stuff that's not diet.

LIZ: You never eat mashed potatoes?

PATTY: Never.

LIZ: What would happen if you did?

PATTY: I wouldn't – I'll eat potato salad or a jacket potato with a dollop of lite sour cream – just not mashed.

LIZ as NARRATOR: What? Really?

MOIRA: Surely they're the same thing

PATTY: No they're not

MOIRA: Pretty much *(to herself).*

NANCY: You have more control than I've ever had. I always find a work around.

OLIVIA: A work around?

NANCY: Yeah – like – you said you don't eat peanut butter – it's a problem food – it is for me too – peanut butter on toast especially, I love it. So ... because I don't want to deprive myself I'll make toast but spread vegemite on it first – it fills in the holes in the bread, then I put on a very thin layer of peanut butter. The vegemite intensifies the taste plus it stops me putting on too much peanut butter – it's great.

OLIVIA: Clever

MOIRA: It is clever.

NANCY: It's a compromise.

MOIRA: It's a win-win. You win because you get your peanut butter hit.

NANCY: And I also win because I only have a very small amount so I don't feel guilty.

PATTY: I don't compromise

KATE: I know you don't – but surely compromising's ok – just once in a while.

OLIVIA: When they had a cheesecake at work I had a slice and felt horrendously guilty for about a week – it was stupid – it's not worth it.

PATTY: It frightens me to think that I might ease up on myself – because then I think I'd become this runaway bus with the driver asleep at the wheel or with no driver. I can't let that happen. If I did ease up on myself I'd regret it.

MOIRA: It's exhausting.

KATE: So really you're scared – scared of slipping-up – scared of losing it all – of not being slim anymore. I never really appreciated that before but that's it, isn't it? You can't relax – you can't let go – not for one moment?

PATTY: No.

OLIVIA: Well, not if relaxing means going back to being a couch potato or eating a whole packet of biscuits…

PATTY: … or scoffing down a loaf of bread with peanut butter or a batch of fish and chips.

NANCY: Or drinking a relaxing glass of wine – or having a spoon of mashed potatoes.

PATTY: You make us sound fanatical. It's just about keeping focused on today and not having regrets later on – and keeping a close check on what I'm doing. I'll have the occasional treat – especially if I've had a really good week.

KATE: And to keep a close check you keep a food diary – every day.

PATTY: I write down more than just food. It helps me a lot – it increases my awareness of what I'm doing – I'm more aware of what I'm eating and how much exercise I'm doing, what my moods are, when my periods are – everything. With my diary I can go back and double check what I did the day before, or the day before that, especially when the scales tell me I'm too heavy. People at the gym keep them for their exercise programmes – this is just an extension of that.

LIZ: And you do this every day – you weigh yourself every day.

MOIRA and OLIVIA: Yes, everyday. *(OLIVIA looks MOIRA a little surprised)*

MOIRA: Don't look so surprised – I keep track too. For me it's about nipping a small problem in the bud rather than dealing with a depressingly large problem a week or a month down the track. Everyday checking's are a good idea – I agree with you. Although, I will say that I can stop writing things down for

several months at a time if things are going really well – but I still weigh myself every single day – I'll do that forever.

PATTY: One thing listening to you today has taught me, is that you're much more like me than I ever thought.

OLIVIA: Me too – you're just as tough on yourself as we are.

MOIRA: Anyone who has lost a lot of weight, regardless of how big they still are, has to work at it on a daily basis – on a minute-by-minute basis. They all have things they do to help them cope. What get's me is when people think there's an answer or a secret – one solution. It belittles what we do.

OLIVIA: I agree it's much more complicated.

LIZ: So it's not black and white at all.

PATTY: I suppose not.

NANCY: We should take a few more photos of us girls – us six. Let me set the camera up – move closer together and leave a space for me. *(The stage lights fade to black.)*

SCENE FIVE: After the wedding.

A spot of light falls on the lounge clock for the last time and a hand winds the clock's hands forward to 10pm. The spotlight then fades before the stage lights come up. LIZ and MOIRA carry the remains of the wedding cake inside.

LIZ: There's quite a bit left – what do you want to do with it? I know you hate having cut cake in the house.

MOIRA: I used to – it's ok now. But come to think of it – I never do. It's because it's too easy to sneak a slice with the excuse that I'm just tidying up the end.

LIZ: You used to always have to tidy up the end of a block of cheese after you'd been grating it too.

MOIRA: I did! They were excuses to eat stuff I didn't really need. If I nibbled while I was cooking dinner or whatever, the bits I ate didn't count. I don't do that now – I force myself to sit down when I eat now – doesn't matter what it is – it makes a big difference – plus I enjoy my food so much more.

LIZ: It would've been interesting to see how much all those squared ends, sneaked extras, and cleaned-up leftovers would add up to in a day.

MOIRA: I did that once – it was a sizable plateful. In any case I have a plan for this cake. *(She gets a large knife from the drawer. Smiling)*

LIZ: There's always a plan.

MOIRA: First, I need to *straighten* this up a bit like this – and then *(she goes to the fridge),* I have this sheet of icing to seal and cover this cut side – and finish it nicely – right – now it goes into a special cake box thing. *(She grabs a box from the sideboard cupboard.)* There we are, all done. I'll put it in the freezer in the garage tomorrow – well out of harm's way. It should keep for ages – Kate and Adam'll be able to have it for their first wedding anniversary if they want to. As for the rest of it, I like to have small slices wrapped up individually to have as a special treat. They just sit in the freezer.

LIZ: *(Smiling)* Out of harm's way.

MOIRA: I'll just stick a little piece in the microwave to warm it – fruitcake with a cup of coffee's perfect when I'm desperate – it can be a lifesaving treat. Do you want a couple of bits to take home?

LIZ: Please, it's a lovely cake.

MOIRA: You're staying here tonight right?

LIZ: I thought it would be easier. There are still a few things to tidy up outside – I'll give you a hand tomorrow.

MOIRA: Ok, how about a cup of chamomile tea before we go to bed?

LIZ: Yes please *(MOIRA goes to the kitchen to put on the jug as LIZ puts the teabags into the cups she takes from the cupboard.)*

MOIRA: It was a good idea having your caterer friend make up those cute food containers of all the leftover food.

LIZ: I know you hate leftovers in the house so it was a good solution. They were cheap containers and he didn't mind doing it. Everyone who got one seemed happy – and that way all the food's gone.

MOIRA: I noticed Patty and Olivia didn't take any.

LIZ: No, nor did Nance. They're like you – they prefer their own food. *(Pause and sigh)* It's been an interesting day – one thing it's shown me is how much of a project we make of ourselves. We're a work in progress that the architect is never satisfied with.

LIZ as NARRATOR: The trouble is the architect's brief keeps changing – the goal posts keep shifting. Only the other day I read about a new fashion trend – the thigh gap – a gap between your thighs when your feet are together – there's a surgical procedure to achieve this.

LIZ: Patty and Olivia are continually working on something about themselves – just the other day Olivia's arms were fine but now her thighs need work. They're never happy. They're always saying, "I could be better".

MOIRA: It's not really all that unusual though is it? What woman *is* satisfied with herself and how she looks? Seems like we're supposed to have something to be working on and *fixing (with emphasis).* Plus, wouldn't it be a bit egotistical? What would you think of someone who said, "No, no more room for improvement here, I'm precisely how I want to be – I'm perfect"?

LIZ: I suppose.

MOIRA: Who'd they be trying to convince?

LIZ: Yeah, themselves probably. *(Pause)* But I do think we should just stop.

MOIRA: I know. *(Pause)* Anyway, I think everyone had a good time though didn't they – they were all pretty tired when they left.

LIZ: I'm pretty tired too. *You* amaze me – you started at 6 o'clock this morning and you're still going.

MOIRA: I didn't do all that much, you did most of it. You did such a fantastic job – Kate was very happy and grateful. *(She brings the cups of tea to the table and they sit down.)* It's been a special day.

LIZ: It has. *(They sip their tea in silence for a few moments)* Mum, I have a confession – there's something I need to talk to you about.

MOIRA: Oh, ok, but before you do that, I've been meaning to tell you how good your speech was.

LIZ: Was it ok?

MOIRA: Yes it was, it was very good – a bit embarrassing though.

LIZ: No, it wasn't – here – what was embarrassing? *(She pulls a folded up piece of paper out of her bra and reads*) I know its unusual for the maid of honour to make a speech but this is to toast someone very special to Kate and me – and as you all know, it's hard to keep me quiet – blaa, blaa, blaa – ok here – weddings are about stuff – they're about unimportant things like dresses and flowers; food and decorations; and about presents and honeymoons. More importantly they're about things like love and promises, and family and friends. But weddings are also about wishes – they're about hopes and dreams for the future. Kate and Adam, every one of us wishes you the very best of everything and we hope you have a long happy life together. If you need examples of how to love and respect each other you need look no further than our mum and dad – they've been happy-ever-aftering for over 30 years now. Mum, Kate and I struck gold having you as our mother – we think we're the luckiest daughters on earth – your intellect, your creativity, your sense of humour, and your compassion and capacity for love. Our biggest wish is to be exactly like you in all the ways that matter – we love you. So, this special toast is to our gorgeous mother – to Moira.

MOIRA: As I said – a bit embarrassing. But thank you *(She hugs and kisses LIZ)* – it was lovely.

LIZ: You're very welcome – it's so true.

MOIRA: Ok now, *(looking at her closely)* what did you need to tell me?

LIZ: I feel like I'm 5 years old, and you've caught me playing with your makeup.

MOIRA: What is it?

LIZ: Remember we got out that blue necklace this morning.

MOIRA: Yes

LIZ: Well when Nance rang about it this morning she sent me on a wild goose chase trying to find it. She said it was in the suitcase under your bed so I went to have a look. I ended up pulling out one of the other suitcases under your bed – one with your diaries in it. And …

MOIRA: And…

LIZ: I ended up…

MOIRA: Reading my dairies.

LIZ: I'm so sorry – I invaded your privacy – I can't believe I did that.

MOIRA: What did you read?

LIZ: About how miserable it was for you when you were fat – before you lost all your weight. I had no idea how bad it was for you and how oblivious I was back then.

MOIRA: It was a long time ago.

LIZ: Anyway, you'd kept some drawings that I must've done when I was about 10 or 12 or something, but I don't even remember drawing them – but there they were. I hate to think that my stupid drawings made you unhappy.

MOIRA: What drawings?

LIZ: They were of Kate and Dad and me – you weren't in them.

MOIRA: Oh those. Goodness, I'd forgotten all about them. I've got so many photos and drawings without me in them.

LIZ: In your diary you said you'd never ask me about the drawings because you were scared of what my answer would be.

MOIRA: You read a fair bit didn't you?

LIZ: Sorry?

MOIRA: But I did ask you.

LIZ: Really, *(concerned)* what did I say?

MOIRA: You said they were drawings of the three of you running to meet me after work. *(LIZ looks confused)* Do you remember I was setting up the salon when you were quite young and dad would spend Saturdays with you while I worked from home to get the business going? It didn't work having you all at home with clients coming so he took you to playgrounds and to visit grandma and stuff.

LIZ: *(Shaking her head)* I don't remember that.

MOIRA: Ok, well anyway, you and dad would spend the whole day out and after work I'd come down to meet you and we'd go and do the shopping. When I asked you about the drawing you said it was because I'd been away from you all day and you wished I was there…

LIZ: Because it was always more fun when you were around.

MOIRA: And then when you saw me arrive…

LIZ: We were shouting, "yay she's finished – she's finished yay" and we'd all run to see who could get to you first. Oh my God – I do remember! *(Tears were running down her face)* Oh mum when I saw those drawings and read what you wrote – that you thought I didn't want you around because you were fat I was devastated. I remembered kids at school always making fun of you and feeling ashamed sometimes.

MOIRA: You can't have been any more ashamed than I was of myself. Look, there were some pretty awful dark days back then – I can remember being

miserable and grumpy when the weight wasn't coming off as I wanted it to – and woe betide if I gained any weight – all hell would break loose. I think I took some of that out on you – on all of you. It's one of the big regrets I have of my life – letting my obsession with losing weight affect my relationship with you or make you obsess about your own body.

LIZ: No, you taught us quite the opposite – all I remember is you making sure we never had a problem with our bodies and our weight like you did – and we never have. *(Pause)* Anyway, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snoop.

MOIRA: I'm glad you told me.

LIZ: You know you have enough stuff in those diaries to write a book.

MOIRA: I have enough *other stuff* to do. Besides those diaries are too personal and painful – they've served their purpose – I don't really want to relive it all over again. *(Reaching for LIZ'S cup)* Have you finished?

LIZ: Yes, thank you. That was just right. *(MOIRA puts the cups in the sink)*

MOIRA: Time for bed – goodnight sweetheart – It's been a long day.

LIZ: It has – goodnight (s*he glances at the audience then reaches up and stops the clock).*

Stage lights fade to black. Curtain down. Like the Intro, the Outro is Randy Newman's, Short People – a cleverly written song about the stupidity of prejudice and discrimination.

The End [...]

PART TWO: A book chapter

5

Defying the odds: Successful slimming

Joanna Sheridan

Ever since concern over having enough food was alleviated by the development and provision of abundant and secure food supplies, focus has shifted from not having enough food to having too much [1]. Caught in a feast-*without*-famine scenario, waistlines are expanding; we are getting too fat. Fatness is stigmatised: fat people are viewed as bad, weak-willed, self-indulgent, lazy, sloppy, and stupid [2]. These negative perceptions of fatness are common and rarely challenged in Western society. Obesity has been associated with co-morbidities such as diabetes and heart disease, and there is no shortage of concern that this "killer" threatens everyone [e.g., 3]. Obesity is big news, big entertainment, and most certainly big business. Paul Campos [4] has remarked that few projects shake money out of research fund trees more effectively than obesity research.

While obesity and the revulsion of fat are issues for both men and women, there is a definite gendered focus around weight [5]. Narrow Western beauty ideals represented in the fashion and entertainment industries among others, drive an imperative for women to diet and be slim [6-8]. Bish *et al.* [9] who looked at dieting and exercise activities of people in the United States (US), found that around 89 percent of women say they would like to be slimmer and 70 percent of obesely overweight women are actively trying to lose weight. Unfortunately, permanent or long-term maintenance of weightloss is rare [10]. A three year community-based study in the US has shown that up to 95 percent of dieters who lost a significant amount of weight regained the weight they lost within five years, and most relapses occurred within one or two years of losing the weight [11]. It was also found that of people who lost weight, over 75 percent weighed more than when they started dieting, especially when weightloss was induced by very low calorie diets [10, 12]. Given that yo-yoing of weight has significant health implications [13], it is important to understand how this cycle can be broken. It is important to know how successful slimmers stay slim.

In this chapter I will discuss some of the key findings from my research project into how a group of New Zealand women who were obesely overweight have maintained a reduced weight. The nine women involved in my study have lost amounts of weight ranging from 23 to 62 kilograms, or a significant 27 to 44 percent reduction of their body mass. For some, this was their first attempt at losing a significant amount of weight, but others had had several failed attempts before successfully maintaining their reduced weight. All participants had sustained their reduced weight for at least five years.

Over a series of four one-on-one interviews, and with the assistance of material objects such as photographs [see 14] and drawing timeline graphs [see 15], my participants told stories about such things as stigma, sacrifice, and success. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and then analysed. My analysis used a combination of different coding frames [16]. The three coding frames chosen were dramaturgical, narrative, and process coding. Each frame focused attention, or shone a light, onto the stories in slightly different ways: they provided three different lenses for analysing participants' stories. The dramaturgical frame drew attention to participant's intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences of successful slimming from a performative point of view; the narrative frame focused on storied experiences of such things as places, settings, morals, and beliefs; and the process frame helped explore how participants processed and worked to solve problems or reach goals. With these three coding frames in mind, codes in the form of words or phrases were chosen to represent excerpts of participants' stories. Examples of codes included striving, pontificating, goal setting, and monitoring weight. The codes were then grouped together into categories, subthemes and themes. I will elaborate on three key factors that have contributed to successful slimming.

The first key factor concerns goal setting, including how participants' original weightloss goals were set and achieved, along with the subsequent setting and resetting of exercise and activity goals that maintained weightloss. When one goal was reached another goal replaced it. My participants' talk revealed evidence of tenacity and dogged determination. Goals had to be interesting, enjoyable, and achievable, and congruent with the overarching plan these women had for their bodies. There was also interplay between cultural forces such as feminine beauty ideals, which Bordo [17] claims are beyond a woman's control, and my participants' personal goals for their bodies. While they pursued weightloss goals and worked to meet cultural beauty ideals, there were examples of resistance, as my participants pushed against these forces.

The second key factor, which was also related to goals, concerned how gaps between *expectation* when the goal was set, and *outcome* when the goal was reached, were managed. A gap between expectation and outcome resulted in disappointment when weightloss failed to produce the consequences hoped for. Granberg [18] suggests that disappointing weightloss outcomes could cause the impetus for losing weight to wane and lost weight to be regained. My successful slimmers ameliorated and managed disappointment by adjusting expectations and replacing unrealistic and frustrating goals. Continually setting and adjusting goals ensured that my participants never lost sight of, nor gave up on, their considerable achievements: giving up was constructed as failure.

The third factor that contributed to slimming success concerned the skills and commitment required to achieve long-term weightloss. As accomplished successful slimmers, my participants had acquired considerable knowledge about food and exercise

and how their bodies worked, although they often downplayed their commitment. With focused discipline, they meticulously balanced all aspects of their lives in order to stay slim. For example, even though weightloss had been successfully achieved they maintained strict diet regimens with "no-go zones" and "lines" drawn around foods that were "triggers" for over indulgence and "going off the diet". However, they also appreciated that "*transgressing"* or crossing some of these lines was sometimes necessary: it was a balancing act. In my discussion these three key factors are tied together arriving at a theory for successful slimming. Excerpts from participants' stories are used to illustrate key points and aid discussion.

Challenging goals

Anyone who has actively tried to change something about themselves and succeeded, has usually gone through a process involving knowing and accepting that the goal was necessary, setting the goal, working towards it, and sticking to the goal long-term. Mann, de Ridder and Fujita, [19] who reviewed research on the self-regulation of health behaviour, have argued that while health related goals such as losing weight are easy to recommend and accept, they are a challenge to achieve and often very difficult to maintain long-term.

A concept of "possible selves" relative to a "now self" has been proposed by Markus and Nurius [20] as a way of looking at motivation with respect to setting and achieving goals. Before losing weight, the "possible selves" were about an ideal body shape and size that the overweight "now self" desired to be. Possible selves are about dreams, hopes, and aspirations for the future. For my participants these possible selves were inextricably linked to a specific amount of weight they wanted to lose and a future *ideal* weight they wanted to be.

Some of my participants recalled having goals to lose weight even when they were as young as 10 years of age. For others, the desire to lose weight was precipitated by specific events such as planning to get married, the birth of a child, or the death of a parent. However, rather than being motivated by a single event or occurrence, for most participants the decision to do something about their weight was more often initiated after a series of events:

> *Life was getting hard ... [I] still hadn't really got over the loss of my granddad, I wasn't speaking to my mother, you know things were falling apart ... Oh and having to go and buy a bra and get fitted and think oh my God I'm now an 18E or something ... the other thing ... I went out with my girlfriend with all our kids and I bent over and split my pants—I was like oh my God what am I going to do? ... everything just compounded and then I went to the doctor and bang. [Becky]*

Opinion on what constitutes a suitable weightloss goal has been mixed [e.g., 21, 22]. The goals my participants set were well above the 5 and 10 percent weightloss goals generally recommended by health authorities such as the New Zealand Ministry of Health [23]. Rather, they approximated, or exceeded, the 30 percent weightloss goals desired by obesely overweight individuals generally [24]. While some researchers [22, 24] have

argued that unrealistic weightloss goals may contribute to weightloss failure, others [21, 25] have suggested that challenging or ambitious weightloss goals can inspire a more determined effort. Unaware of these quite different recommendations, my participants said they were neither deterred nor distracted by notions of challenging goals.

For most participants, the amount of weight they wanted to lose was guided by the BMI categorisation of *normal weight*. The initial weightloss goal was usually broken down into small achievable chunks and many talked about needing to be patient. For example, one participant, Charlotte, set 5-kilogram goals and took four years to achieve her 51-kilogram weightloss: she was resolute. All participants acknowledged and celebrated achievements along the way. When Becky reached her 10-kilogram and then 15-kilogram weightloss milestones, she stacked packets of butter equalling these weights on the seat beside her so she could visualise her weightloss progress.

As my participants' weight reduced, the parameters of their possible slim self, which they defined by a specific end-goal weight, was adjusted or fine-tuned. The weight chosen was a trade-off between aesthetic ideals, bodily form and function, in relation to other important goals or possible selves that included sporting endeavours, and the amount of effort and time required to maintain the weight they wanted to be. All my participants used forms of exercise to help them lose weight and maintain their reduced weight. Maintaining a reduced weight was seen as the principal or overarching goal, and it was viewed as a lifelong commitment. Consequently, diet, exercise, and activities that contributed to a reduced weight had to hold interest long-term; setting inspiring goals facilitated this. Early goals included walking to the letterbox, swimming to the end of the pool without stopping, and fitting into a pair of skinny jeans. Some goals were simple such as "taking an apple to work everyday" or complex such as "living a fit and healthy life".

Goals were often considerable challenges when they were first set. Gradually, as time passed and skills were acquired, goals changed: distances such as walking to the letterbox increased to walking to the end of the road, and jogging two kilometres became running a half-marathon. Each stage involved setting new goals: as the possible self was achieved, the now self envisaged new possible selves.

It was possible to have, and envisage, several possible selves. Sometimes, a number of different goals and activities were pursued simultaneously, like body sculpting using dumbbells, running half marathons, and learning to dance. When different activity goals were aligned and worked together to achieve the principal goal of maintaining a reduced weight, achieving that principal goal was more likely to be successful [19]. My participants emphasised that activities relating to these goals had to be looked forward to and enjoyed, so disappointing or frustrating goals were readily replaced with more pleasurable and achievable goals. The goals my participants set were challenging, like swimming across the Auckland Harbour; they focused attention, like working on increasing muscle mass for competition; they demanded the acquisition of skills, like learning how to interpret food labels; and they were empowering, they instilled confidence to pursue other, often more challenging goals. Cressida Heyes, who spent ten months participating in a Weight Watchers commercial weightloss programme, has discussed how dieting tactics "embodied the paradox Foucault highlighted so well: that normalizing disciplinary practices are also enabling of new skills and capacities" [26]. She went on to describe acquiring knowledge and skills, making changes through setting and achieving goals, and deriving considerable

satisfaction from losing weight and the process of working on oneself as "enabling acts of self-transformation"[26]. For my participants, this transformation enabled them to move beyond boundaries that they felt excess weight had confined them to.

> *Life changing sounds so cliché, but that's how it's been. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I could wear pretty clothes and do ballroom dancing with my husband. I couldn't even walk to the letterbox when I started. I still think of myself as work in progress. My health has become important … I've discovered life again. I slowly started with walking not very far at first, maybe to the end of the road—20 minutes maybe—a couple of times a week … I loved how it woke my body up and lifted my moods. I now include exercise most days with aerobics, spin bike classes, pump, and dance lessons … plus competition practice … [Guinevere]*

My participants were aware of the dominant discourses around health, weight, and beauty. It is tempting to view women who strive to meet society's narrow aesthetic ideals, and who subject themselves to rigorous weightloss, fitness, and body-shaping regimens as dupes or as Foucault's [27] obedient "docile bodies" caught in the process of transformation. But some of my participants actively resisted *obedience* and set their own body shape and size agenda. For instance, one participant questioned the dominant discourse around ideal weight and defied a prescriptive thin ideal.

> *I have a problem where they say if you are 1.72 metres tall this is what you should weigh—a lot of them say I should weigh 65 kilos … I'd be like Twiggy or Kate Moss … absolutely ridiculous! We've all got different sized hands—mine are really square … big bone structure. [Diana]*

Diana said she was a "professional couch potato" before losing weight. She took up a canoeing sport that helped maintain her significant 38-kilogram weightloss. But despite this significant loss, she was still overweight. She said that her sport and sporting goals (to win international gold medals) were more important than trying to achieve a figment of society's "ridiculous" aesthetic ideals. In the same way that Monaghan [28] talked about bodybuilding being an ongoing aesthetic project which was taken up by "embodied social agents … to create the perfect body", Diana's embodied feelings and understandings of her body encouraged her to trouble the hegemony of the dominant discourse around ideal weight. She dismissed society's thinness ideals for women in favour of having more achievable and worthwhile goals around strength and muscularity. These *other* goals made more sense to Diana. For instance, she valued how they directly impacted and improved her race times; they had a personal and rational function.

Similar examples of resistance were demonstrated as women talked about needing to moderate aesthetic ideals because of the considerable, and often unreasonable, commitment of time and effort required to achieve them. They *chose* to accept something that was less than *"perfect"* as far as society's beauty ideals were concerned. Rather than suggesting that their endeavours were defeated, I would suggest that these decisions were acts of defiance. For Markus and Nurius, a person's ability to "develop and maintain distinct possible selves" could be interpreted as agency [20]. While Bordo [17] has been sceptical of notions of choice or agency in light of the pervasive repressiveness of modern

body cultures, my participants' informed choices implied resistance. Over the course of many years of striving to be thinner, some participants, but by no means all, seemed to "see through" unrealistic aesthetic ideals. They had chosen and relied on more realistic goals and possible selves to help them work at maintaining a reduced weight.

Goal-setting theorists [29] suggest that achieving challenging goals can have a stimulating and energising effect. But while simply achieving goals was rewarding in and of itself for my participants, they emphasised the need to also link goals to rewards. Tangible rewards included things like a celebratory glass of wine, a bowl of custard with all-bran, or a new pair of shoes. There were also less tangible, but no less powerful, rewards like "feeling fantastic", getting "jealous glances from complete strangers", and "receiving compliments" from family and friends. When goals were set and achieved, there was always something new to focus on, such as improving muscle definition, reducing the time taken to run a half marathon, winning three instead of only two gold medals at the next international competition, or learning to scuba-dive. As one goal was achieved, another, often more challenging goal, replaced it:

> *In the beginning I would go for a walk maybe once a week. When I'd lost quite a bit [of weight] I walked more regularly. Then I joined the gym [for weight training] and became really good friends with my personal trainer [Maggie] – her drive keeps things going. Then I started running 10K runs and supported Maggie on her half-marathon. It got me so excited—I said, "Ok, I'm going to do one." It's just setting little challenges. I did my 5th half-marathon this year – you know, just doing little things. My next thing, which I haven't really done much about yet, is learning to dance properly. [Becky]*

While sometimes seemingly arduous, my participants said they derived considerable self-affirming pride, satisfaction, and joy from working towards and achieving goals. It was about control: controlling weight and body shape by setting, manipulating, and achieving interesting and challenging, yet achievable goals.

Through acts of self-transformation, which were achieved through the setting and manipulation of goals, and envisaging possible selves, Shilling has constructed the body as "an entity which is in the process of becoming" [30]. My participants acknowledged that their body was a work in progress. Numerous authors [17, 30, 31] have suggested that *"perfecting"* the body is a work in progress that is never finished. My participants' dieting and exercise goals were expected to always be necessary: they were a key feature of successful slimming. None of my participants talked about winding down their work activities on their bodies, even when they were old. Rather, if activity goals became too difficult for whatever reason, other activities were sought: choice was very broad. They continually took advantage of opportunities to explore interesting, different, and new activities. But this perusal for "the next thing" always had their body and weight in view. Goals and activities had an overarching purpose: to control weight and maintain a slim self.

Expectation-outcome gaps

There are two common assumptions made about weightloss [32]. The first is that the body is *infinitely* malleable and that with sufficient effort involving the right diet and suitable

exercise, the desired body shape will be achieved. The second is that this *right* shape will reap desired rewards. The visions of the "possible self" include ideals of body shape, health, fitness, attractiveness, and beauty. Misleadingly, these assumptions have ignored the significant limits imposed on body shape and weight by physiological and genetic factors [32]. How much a person's body can change is limited, so desirable, and often unreasonable, aesthetic ideals are anatomically impossible for most women [33]. Hence, a gap occurs between expectation and outcome, leaving slimmers questioning whether to continue the fight to stay slim or give up, disenchanted.

Most of my participants talked about experiencing a gap between expectation and outcome. For some it was difficult to relinquish the idealised image of the possible self that had motivated them to pursue and reach their weightloss goal. The gap between expectation and outcome involved feeling dissatisfied with the amount of weight lost, and not reaping the expected rewards that were predicted to be associated with weightloss and the *"ideal"* goal that was set.

Dissatisfaction with the amount of weight lost was an issue for most of my participants. Despite their significant weight losses, many participants said they wanted, "to weigh a bit less", which has been shown to be common for women generally, irrespective of whether they are overweight or not [17, 34].

Some participants said that their bodies seemed to "just stop" being able to lose more weight, and that they established their own "natural" plateau of reduced weight. This was sometimes only 2–3 kilograms above their desired ideal weight, which some of my participants found irksome. Several had experimented with losing these unwanted *extra* kilograms and narrowing the gap between expectation and outcome, but most had come to the conclusion that the additional effort and sacrifice needed to achieve and maintain this *"figment of perfection"* was not worth it. It involved *too much* effort. They also reasoned that, had losing these extra kilograms been more readily achievable, some other failing would have taken its place.

> *I could always be better [referring to her body shape and size]. But I'm happy. I'm happy with what I've achieved—who I am, what I look like … I think we can always find something to pick on … I think we have to sort of stop. [Becky]*

Some expectation-outcome gaps continued to disappoint several years after losing weight, and these disappointments were often rationalised. Even Charlotte, with her 51-kilogram weightloss, which had dramatically transformed her appearance, talked about the disillusionment surrounding reaching and maintaining her idealised weight. Like several other participants, Charlotte had expected her weightloss to reap romantic rewards: she wanted to find a man to share her life with. She talked about being "let down" by the gap between expectation and outcome, which she admitted was driven by society's pervasive aesthetic ideals. Charlotte also said, as authors such as Granberg [18] have, that relapse and weight regain was predictably attributable to this disappointment.

> *You do get an idea in your head that if you're skinnier you're going to get more attention. But I think it's actually worked the other way for me. I get less attention from men now than I ever have in my whole life. I don't understand it—the only thing that's different is my size. So that's been quite shocking because …*

> *the ideal—you know—what we're shown in the media—and yet I'm nearly that [ideal] and fit and healthy and yet men keep away from me. I think that can be why you sort of yo-yo a bit because you suddenly realise that it's not the fix you thought it was going to be—it hasn't cured everything and you sort of think "oh shit" … but then I think, well I'd rather be fit and healthy than have a man … My doctor wanted to see how much cholesterol I had … I had almost zero. He said it was the cleanest blood he had ever seen. He said he had patients who would pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to have what I've got. [Charlotte]*

Narrative psychologists [e.g., 35, 36] have proposed that telling a story as Charlotte has, helps create meaning out of what is effectively disappointing and confusing. In this excerpt she constructed a "now self" that has become more valuable and worthwhile than the "possible self" she had envisaged before losing weight, which had not met expectations (she even gave it a monetary value). Bruner [37] would suggest that in this way, Charlotte's storytelling reconstructs her sense of self and identity. Nevertheless, her disappointment is clear.

When aesthetic expectations were tied to significant weightloss, participants were often disappointed with outcomes: their bodies were *not* infinitely malleable. This was because for many of my participants, losing substantial amounts of weight as they had, resulted in unattractive skin laxity. They frequently talked about having to deal with unsightly sagging jelly bellies, increased wrinkles, and "lying in puddles of skin". While some had considered plastic surgery, such as breast lifts and tummy tucks, giving in to these procedures was considered somewhat vain. Plus, being considered as "unnecessary elective surgery" this "vanity" came with an exorbitant price tag. None of my participants had taken the "big step" of undergoing plastic surgery: at least not yet. Some of them feared that if they started, they might not be able to stop.

While many of my participants felt "robbed" by the consequences of an expectation-outcome gap, they said they had not dwelled on this disappointment, but instead focused on the positive aspects of the weightloss. They emphasised focusing on the pluses instead of the minuses. For instance, while Becky disliked her saggy tummy, she said it represented a physical reminder of how far she had come: hers was a big achievement. However, since disillusionment has been suggested to influence weight cycling [18], amelioration of the expectation-outcome gap was clearly important for successful slimming. The very real potential for a disappointing and unacceptable gap between expectation and outcome should certainly be made clear to women embarking on a weightloss project.

Focused discipline

My participants often dismissed staying slim as simple and effortless, minimising their day-to-day practices. Yet many of their slimming practices were time-consuming and demanded focused, if not obsessive, discipline. For example, most participants engaged in levels of physical activity considerably higher than levels recommended for general health and weight maintenance [23]. Instead of 30 minutes exercise for at least five days a week, most spent at least an hour, and often up to two hours per day engaged in physical activity, and some of this was vigorous exercise. The level of physical activity was substantial, as was the time commitment. Such a considerable commitment had to be difficult to slot into

most people's everyday lives; fewer than half of my participants worked fulltime. Nevertheless, the level and commitment of everyday exercise was often downplayed:

> *Charlotte: I'll run home from work … that's 13kms. It's a good motivator 'cause you know you can't really stop.*
> *Joanna: Gee, that's a long way, isn't it?*
> *Charlotte: It's only 13kms … Yeah, it's only 13kms.*

Negotiating food was an important part of maintaining a reduced weight. Participants had drawn clear lines around what food was allowed and what was not. Commercial weightloss programmes such as Weight Watchers, or diet plans provided by doctors, nutritionists, or personal-trainers, helped each woman devise an eating regimen and guidelines that suited her weightloss needs. Tempered by many years of fastidious weightloss monitoring, these guidelines created lines and taboos, which were rarely transgressed. For example, some of my participants refused to eat things like fried foods, chocolate, or potatoes. What constituted a forbidden food was different for each woman. Indulging in food that they described as "naughty" or "bad" seized *transgressors* with guilt and shame.

> *At work if it's your birthday or you cock up really spectacularly, you have to provide a cheesecake. So if there are things like that at work then I will have a slice but I'll feel horrendously guilty about it for a week. [Charlotte]*

While most of my participants avoided transgression entirely, some of them appreciated that denying the pleasure of a much-loved "naughty" food simply increased its fascination. Several participants had developed creative strategies to deal with this, such as keeping restricted foods in small, "harmless doses" or "treat-sized packets" that were allowed as occasional indulgences like individually wrapped parcels of pop-corn, or a small slice of fruitcake. As innocuous-sized portions, these treats were craving stoppers that were used to stave off more serious dieting transgressions.

However, compared to "naughty" foods, "really bad" foods were a different entity altogether. Some participants demonised certain foods, for instance, Charlotte refused to eat potatoes or sausages and the fat content of food was stringently restricted; choosing low-fat was standard practice. Unlike naughty foods, really bad foods such as ice cream, chocolate, and chips, were also considered unhealthy and unnecessary, so these foods were kept out of the environment (home or workplace) entirely. My participants were aware of the caloric and nutrient content of most foods. They knew what a scoop of ice cream would do to their weight and waistline and their health, and most were not prepared to suffer the consequences. When lines were crossed, penalty was swift. My participants were reactive and proactive [46]. Their indulgent transgressions were dealt with by extra doses of exercise or eating less for the next few days, all the while watching the bathroom scales.

Most of my participants weighed themselves every day. Such vigilant self-monitoring has been suggested by Butryn *et al.* [38] to be a "key component of successful weight loss maintenance". From time to time, some of my participants had their measurements checked by a third party such as a slimming organisation, personal trainer, or doctor. They

also kept food diaries and checked themselves in mirrors, which ensured that any change or escalation in weight was accounted for, reacted to, and dealt with, immediately. Most of my participants tolerated a 2–3 kilogram weight fluctuation, which was carefully policed.

While situations that encouraged transgression were actively avoided, avoidance was not always possible. Strategies were developed to cope in these situations. My participants said they had developed skills, which made no problematic situation insurmountable. For example, the "bad" casing around a beef wellington was removed, the mashed potato scraped off a t-bone steak and pushed aside, or celery and carrot sticks were put into a zip-lock bag to take to a bar and enjoyed instead of eating forbidden, fat-laden chips or crisps.

However, participants were sometimes at odds with family members and friends, many of whom thought their discipline represented inflexible and fanatical obsessiveness that was "not normal". As has also been previously observed by Fitzsimons and Finkel [39], several participants talked about family and friends undermining or trying to sabotage their weightloss control. Although capable of making the most of a bad situation, my participants admitted that *transgression* was sometimes necessary in order to "be polite" and "keep the peace" and avoid fuelling evidence of obsessiveness. Overall however, my participants said they rarely strayed across the dietary boundaries they had set; they walked a narrow path carefully balancing everything they did.

My participants frequently implied that the focused discipline required to stay slim was effortless for them. What they did had become mundane, everyday practice. My suggestion is that these day-to-day practices may have been difficult and a struggle when they were first put into practice, or before they were mastered, but with time they have become easy: my successful slimmers had learned how it was done; they had perfected and honed their skills.

> *It's not hard. I have to think about it but I don't have to struggle with it. I don't struggle that much with it—but it never leaves my mind. There are times when I think, "Oh, I'll just go and have a peanut butter sandwich for lunch" but I don't … I know what I can do and what I can't do. [Elizabeth]*

Successful slimmers, such as those recruited to The National Weight Control Registry (NWCR), have also reported that staying slim became easier with time [e.g., 40, 41]. But this does not necessarily mean that staying slim *per se* was easy. Some of my participants' mundane, everyday practices would be taxing for most *ordinary* people. Their "enabling acts of self-transformation" [26] represented the acquisition and development of extraordinary skills and commitment, which were not developed overnight. It involved what Becker [42] and Monaghan [28] have described as a process of becoming an expert, which was only possible if the individual had a clear understanding of their goals and how they were achieved, which my participants clearly did.

My participants had become experts who embodied focused discipline after many years of committed endeavour. However, it seemed that their grip on staying slim was still tenuous. While they were all adamant, and often reiterated that they would not regain their lost weight, they were never complacent. There was a definite fear of relapse and regaining weight. Thoughts about how they felt about being fat, and what their lives were like before losing weight, were ever present:

> *It is fresh in my mind like it was yesterday. It's not something that you forget about. And people say, "How long ago was it?" And you say, "Nine years ago". And they are like, "Oh, and you're still talking about it." [Elizabeth]*

Discussion

Although permanent weightloss is a seeming oxymoron [43], not one of the women in my research was aware that her long-term weightloss achievement was in any way unusual, much less exceptional. They were all surprised that anyone should perceive it as such. This is perhaps because, while losing weight *per se* is common [9], the failure of most weightloss pursuits to provide permanent solutions is often downplayed in the literature or blamed on a lack of individual resolve [43, 44]. Given that long-term weightloss is so difficult to achieve, my participants' achievements must be considered extraordinary: they are exceptional women. I find successful slimmers to be resolute and patient, skilful and hard working, self-reliant and rational, creative and strategic, committed and vigilant, and focused and disciplined. They are experts who balance all aspects of their lives to maintain a reduced weight: they are tightrope walkers.

Expert tightrope walkers perform (extra)ordinary feats of balancing effortlessly, which explains the seeming disconnect between what my participants *said* and what they *did*. For the average person, simply standing and balancing on a tightrope, let alone walking on one slung between the spires of two tall buildings, would be difficult: certainly a struggle. But for an accomplished and experienced tightrope walker, standing on a tightrope and walking its very narrow path is easy. While it requires focused discipline, this discipline has become automatic for my accomplished slimmers. It is a matter of applying years of accumulated experience and skill to what has become a mundane, everyday practice. For an expert tightrope walker, walking between two soaring spires 30 floors above a city street is certainly a challenge, but one that can be easily met.

Perched on the middle of a tightrope it is vital to maintain balance. They are focused on putting one foot precisely in front of the other as they keep an eye on the spire at the end of the rope that stretches into the future ahead of them. Their weightloss goal, which was achieved over five years ago, is the spire behind them and fatness is another spire even further behind that. Their possible self and current activity goal is the spire that is visualised front of them. They are on a trajectory or quest, which Gergen and Gergen [45] describe as a progressive narrative, which moves positively towards a goal or end point.

Falling off the rope is not an option. Rewards, compliments, dieticians' advice and so forth, are like colourful umbrellas that have facilitated balancing and staying on the rope. Other balancing devices, which are like stabilising poles, have included daily calorie counting, weighing on bathroom scales, checking bodies in mirrors, and engaging in active exercise routines. Everything is carefully balanced. As expert tightrope-walking slimmers, these women ensure there is no room for slip-ups that risk a *fatal* fall from the rope. They enjoy where they are on the rope; the experience and view are exhilarating.

The notion that as expert tightrope walkers my successful slimmers' practices and routines have become mundane and ordinary for them, helps suggest why my research findings are at odds with previous research. For instance, Sarlio-Lähteenkorva [46] has argued that weightloss maintenance is a hard fought and an ongoing battle. The suggestion

of a relentless battle and struggle goes some way towards explaining and vindicating the high failure rate of long-term weightloss [11, 47]. But a closer look at Sarlio-Lähteenkorva's [46] successful slimmers provides a possible reason why my findings are different to hers. Unlike my participants, who had maintained their weightloss without significant fluctuation for over five years, Sarlio-Lähteenkorva conceded that her participants had not managed to maintain a stable weight. Some of her participants had regained over 50 percent of the weight they had lost. This means that while my participants had *succeeded* in maintaining a reduced weight, most of Sarlio-Lähteenkorva's participants had not. I suggest that not maintaining a stable reduced weight is like not quite mastering tightrope walking. Lacking the expert skill, commitment, and focused discipline elements that tightrope walking demands, Sarlio-Lähteenkorva's participants have slipped from easily walking *on* the tightrope, to desperately clinging and hanging from it. Attempting to move forward in this way would indeed be a struggle.

Failing to maintain a reduced weight is like mis-stepping or not planting each foot safely and securely on the tightrope. It threatens wobbling, and risks losing control and falling off the rope. Situated high above the ground, falling is a fate none of my successful slimmers were prepared to risk. They had become very accomplished and maintained a controlling grip on all aspects of their lives. They enjoyed the accolades and rewards it brought, which in turn focused their resolve to continue. It had been a long journey and they had come too far, and worked too hard for success to risk falling off the tightrope, or much less jumping off it (one participant had decided not to have another baby because of what it would do to her body). My participants' focused discipline approached that of elite athletes. But, while elite athletes have on-season and off-season goals that include a break [29], successful slimmers cannot take a break; taking a break equated to stepping off the tightrope and the very real potential for weightloss relapse.

Markus and Nurius [20] have questioned whether an individual would try to reduce the discrepancy between a "now self" and a desirable or positive "possible self", or would they strive to maintain or even increase a discrepancy between a "now self" and an undesirable or negative "possible self". With reference to successful slimming, I suggest that pursuing a desirable possible self and avoiding a negative possible self are worked simultaneously. My successful slimmers continually worked towards a personal ideal of bodily "perfection" and slimness, and away from weight gain and weightloss relapse: walking on the tightrope was a trajectory towards slimness and away from fatness.

For the obesely overweight woman determined to lose weight and keep it off, learning to walk on a tightrope requires a clear understanding of how to determine, set, and achieve goals. She must appreciate that a gap between goal setting and outcome is likely and will probably be disappointing. She should also be aware that the everyday practices around diet and exercise involve constant adjustment and monitoring, and a focused discipline that must not wane. Staying on a tightrope is a moment-to-moment, day-to-day, year-to-year preoccupation. Successful weightloss is not a simple matter of eating a little less and moving a little more.

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CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

> *"Whenever you face a great problem, take a step back and look at it from a wider angle."*
> --THE DALAI LAMA, TENZIN GYATSO.

When embarking on a research project, researchers choose a research method that best suits their research question and aims. When it comes to presenting research findings, researchers are strategic: they choose a writing style and genre that best suits their agenda for the explication and dissemination of their findings to audiences. Choosing a particular form or style of writing is never neutral. For social science research, there are many different forms of writing and modes of communication that writers can utilise to talk about their research: academic books and journals (Goodall, 2008), theatre and film productions (see Saldaña, 2011), popular magazines and blogs (Vannini, 2012), art installations (e.g., Creef, 2004), and others (see Leavy, 2009). When writers write, they don a persona whose voice does the talking, and *performing,* for them (Becker, 2007).

In contrast to a privileged univocality, utilising two or more different voices to talk about research findings opens up new and different points of view, which can facilitate a more complex understanding of the research findings and hence lived experience (Curt, 1994; Denzin, 2010; Hopper et al., 2008; Sheridan & Chamberlain, 2011; Woolgar & Ashmore, 1988). As with multiple texts and multi-sensorial engagement with participants, utilising different vantage points to view, and talk about research, has advantages and disadvantages.

The output of my research analysis took me in two different directions. The first was a scholarly, conventional prose-type telling and interpretation of my findings. The second was an equally scholarly, '*performative*' playscript representation of my research. Besides their obviously different visual appearances, the book chapter and

the playscript presented two different lenses or voices on successful slimming. I will discuss the features and value of the conventional perspective of the book chapter first, and then go on to discuss the features and value of the art-based performative perspective.

A conventional perspective

Academic writers desire to share original ideas and knowledge. With a small number of exceptions, academia tends to favour a conventional prose style of writing to do academic telling, argument, and discussion. For the most part, scholarly book chapters and journal articles remain the "prototypical media" of academics (Vannini, 2013, p. 442). For representing research findings and sharing knowledge, these conventional academic outputs have advantages and limitations.

Conventional academic outputs allow the researcher's voice to tell what is meant by the research data. By utilising conventions such as referring to the academic literature, the researcher can go beyond description to give an interpretive and theorised account of the research findings. It is suggested that a theoretical lens ably opens up data to new interpretations, and a conventional academic telling facilitates this: it is the intellectualising research (Tenni, Smyth, & Boucher, 2003).

Sometimes however, complex theorisation can be coded and jargon-dense, although Richardson and St. Pierre argue that this is not a necessary feature of academic writing (2008). Nevertheless, conventional academic writing and presentation can seem reserved for elite academic audiences. It is not unusual to find that a significant proportion of academic works are read by "fewer than ten people" (M. Gergen & Gergen, 2012, p. 52). This may be a limitation for researchers who wish to disseminate their research findings and interpretations more broadly and widely.

The book chapter, "Defying the odds—Successful slimming", presented a conventional academic telling of my participants' stories about how weightloss and successful slimming gets done. An academic journal article format could have been chosen to do this work. However, the convention of providing a summarised abstract, which otherwise has a very worthwhile purpose, would have given away my plot too prematurely. Consequently, the format of a scholarly book chapter was chosen, because it suited my desire to gradually unfold my key points and theories.

My participants' stories were analysed using narrative, dramaturgical and process coding, which facilitated drawing out themes and conclusions. In "Defying the odds—Successful slimming" I identified and discussed three keys factors that contributed to successful slimming: the setting and resetting of challenging goals, the

amelioration of the gap between expectation and outcome, and the embodiment of focused discipline. These three factors led to the *tightrope walker* analogy, which provided a theoretical interpretation of the extraordinary feat of successful slimming.

Afforded through the processes of conventional academic accounting, my tightrope analogy usefully explained my participants' blithe downplaying of their extraordinary accomplishments and daily practices. It also shed light on the constant concern and worry successful slimmers had about straying or *falling* from their narrow path. As well as these, the analogy helped reveal a difference between *successful slimmers,* who had *mastered* tightrope walking, and other slimmers: a distinction that has not been appreciably clear in the literature. And, as will be discussed shortly, the identification of this distinction has implications for future research in the area of weightloss and successful slimming.

Utilising conventional academic telling, argument, discussion, and representation certainly has value. But it is not the only way that academics can share scholarly ideas and knowledge.

A performative perspective

As academic writers, researchers can also share original ideas and knowledge in a performative forum. Richardson (2008, p. 480) calls an arts-based, performative lens, "a radically interpretive form of representation". More than anything else, this perspective is about showing rather than telling. While telling can certainly inform, showing invites a different level of understanding (Goodall, 2008; Hall, 1998; Phelan & Lane, 1998; Saldaña, 2005a, 2011). With an arts-based perspective, the goal is to reach wide audiences on an emotional level (Saldaña, 2005a). Dramatic works are about drawing attention to characters, particularly the individuality of "varying character types" (M. Gergen & Gergen, 2012, p. 49).

The play, *"Wishing at a Wedding"*, presented a *'performative'* perspective on weight loss and successful slimming. Being character focused and driven, the goal was to put a face to fatness, but more particularly, to put a face to women who fight fatness by maintaining a reduced weight. The play was about the extraordinary everyday lives and efforts of (extra)ordinary women. To get to '*know'* these women, it was necessary for the play to make an impact on an emotional level: for an audience to laugh and cry with these characters. It was important to prick the audience's apathetic conscience, and have them feel a twinge of guilt at having sat in maleficent judgment of a fat woman whose story they did not know. As is typical of a performative social scientist's agenda,

the goal was to change long held prejudices and opinions, and to encourage the audience to step back and get a new perspective.

It is suggested that a performative work is more intriguing and engaging if interpretation is left open and up to the audience. A writer should show smoke but leave the audience to infer fire for themselves (Conquergood, 2003). Some academics wrestle with this (e.g., Rogers et al., 2002). The concern is that theorisation and the voices of authors and academia can be sidelined in performative works. The worry is that there is potential for misinterpretation, or a more rudimentary appreciation of the research findings. However, this need not be a concern, for the opposite is equally likely, since members of an audience may derive considerable insight and depth of understanding. For instance, a fat woman who sees herself in the characters paraded before her on stage may well derive something more insightful than either the playwright, or the researcher, could have anticipated. For this woman, a performative work may resonate more deeply than a work written from a conventional perspective could.

Conveniently, playwrights and researchers can fathom an audience's perceptions and reactions by talking to them. With ethnodrama, researchers often seek opinions and impressions from their audiences, after the play has been performed: the end of a play is "not the applause … but an animated discussion with the audience" (M. Gergen & Gergen, 2012, p. 53). Arts-based works "stimulate dialogue" (Leavy, 2009, p. 13). Finding what lingers with the audience is a valuable part of doing performative work (Mitchell et al., 2011). An animated discussion could consist of the researcher and the playwright asking the audience questions about the emotions drawn out by the play, and the audience could ask questions about a character's motives, or vice versa.

Unfortunately, neither a dramatic performance of my play, nor an animated discussion of the play, are possible within the confines of my written thesis. While this could be seen as a limitation of my work, it is important to remember that my research process has been one of discovery. Had I decided from the outset to explore my research topic using a purely performative social science approach, then the play would indeed have been performed in front of a live audience, with audience comment and critique sought, and analysed. However, this obstacle can be overcome through the able utilisation of creative nonfiction, which is increasingly considered a good way to present such viewpoints or perceptions for interpretation (Caulley, 2005, 2008; Gandolfo, 2008; Pollock, 1998; Rolfe, 2002; Saldaña, 2005a; Vickers, 2010).

Therefore, to represent comments and discussion from an audience, I will generate a fictive post-play discussion to do this work. Two excerpts of writing are created to investigate firstly, whether a woman who struggles with her weight would

derive some benefit from *'going to'* the play; and secondly, to answer some of the questions members of the audience could conceivably ask about aspects of the play.

An adjunct to performance

Two visually interesting opinions or adjuncts to the play will be presented. Like the play and the book chapter, these excerpts are stand-alone pieces of writing. The first is an excerpt called, *"A spotlight on slimming".* It is an article written for a popular magazine by a fictionalised freelance journalist. The freelance journalist's voice provides a third perspective or viewpoint on my research findings, by presenting an audience's interpretation of the play. The writer is a woman who has been to '*see'* the play, and she now writes about its impact on her. In typical journalese she uses short, vibrant sentences and paragraphs to grab attention and engage her magazine reading audience. The verbosity of academia is not found here. The playwright and the researcher, who collaborated to write the play, are particularly interested in what the journalist has to say. Her article represents an assessment of their rationalisation to represent the research findings using an ethnodrama. Their hope is that the play has made an impact.

The second excerpt of writing is a fictitious blog written by the playwright. Here the playwright's notes and thoughts, and a reflexive rationale for how and why aspects of the play appear as they do, are presented. Facets of the blog reveal why the playwright is qualified to write a play about weightloss. It provides a glimpse into her philosophical position: the blogroll, which runs down the right hand side of the blog, is particularly informative in this regard. There is also space for audience comment and questions, and an opportunity for *blog-readers* to air their views. These readers include seasoned scholars and budding ethnodramatists, actors and directors, and also women interested in weight and dieting.

Like the play and the book chapter, the magazine article and the blog are two very different forms of writing. They present an additional layer of interpretation of my play, and hence the research. Ostensibly, this layering of interpretations could continue with a reviewer's comment on the magazine article, a poem about one of the characters in the play recited by the actor who played her, or a series of sketches and notes representing an insightful journey by the play's director.

Essentially, this finds us, "standing at the edge of an infinite egress" (K Gergen, 2000, p. 136) not too dissimilar to the reflexivity found in other performative media. Gergen deftly illustrates this with an excerpt from Monty Python: John Cleese, who is desperately lost in the jungle, turns to his audience and says that all is not lost since

there is a film crew filming the movie. But the film crew reveals that it too is lost, revealing yet another film crew filming the film crew, and so on. However, for the purposes of my research project, my analysis will reach its conclusion in these last two of four perspectives on my research.

The Magazine Article

A spotlight on slimming


A SPOTLIGHT ON SLIMMING
BY NADIREHS ANNAOJ

When an actress friend gave me a ticket to Jo Sheridan's play, *Wishing At A Wedding,* I doubted that I could sit through an hour of yet another genre harping on about dieting. Like just about everybody else, I have tried just about everything. Everything short of stomach stapling that is, and I certainly wasn't interested in going there. But my friend assured me that this play was different. It was based on real life interviews and was more than a rubric for dieting. So, I went.

My friend was right—the play didn't toe the conventional line or engage in the usual rhetoric about being fat and needing to trim excess. It was thought provoking. I actually learned stuff and in the end was glad I went. A warning though—if you're looking for an evening of comedy or dislike nudity, then don't go to this play. Plus, the stage set is somewhat challenging—at least initially. With much of the action viewed as though you are looking through a one-way mirror, be prepared to crook and crane to see what's going on. I surmised it represented a dig at our society's myopic view of women.

Wishing at a Wedding does not include the usual drama of plays or films involving weddings. There are no stories of ugly bridesmaids' dresses, of a bride getting cold feet, or a philandering groom's shenanigans. In this regard the play is tame fare. Wishing at a Wedding is about a day in the life of some women who diet. It's Kate's wedding day. Her mother, sister, aunt and two friends gather. They share slimming secrets and stories.

Being about women, men are conspicuous by their absence in the play—they don't feature at all and are barely a topic of conversation. Dieting is a woman's preoccupation.

The first snippet of information that surprised me was finding that successful slimming is uncommon. Actually, it's rare—95 percent fail. Why didn't I know this? I've been to doctors for my weight but it was never mentioned. Surely this information isn't new—or is it? It's made me question the practices of a medical profession that prescribes a regime of weightloss when the probability of success is so poor. Especially when losing and then regaining weight carries health risks that are not usually discussed with patients. There would be ethical concerns had a doctor prescribed a drug with a 95 percent failure rate without discussing the possible risks with her patient. Presumably such a drug would struggle to reach the market.

The play made me think about my own vain attempts to lose weight—I thought about how I believed I was the problem. I was the failure. But the ground has shifted now—it seems failure is normal. I feel a sense of vindication—but also annoyance.

I am annoyed because due to relentless indoctrination, I've beaten myself up for most of my life for not being able to stay slim. I'd been seduced into believing that health and beauty had a certain body shape, which was not my shape. The play turned this around for me because the second snippet of information I learned was that slimness does *not* have a monopoly on health and fitness. Fat people *can* be fit, and healthy too. They can also be successful, talented, attractive and sexy. The main character in the play, Moira, was all of that. Unfortunately, in our society, health, success and sexiness are inextricably tied to a slim body shape. But they need not be. We don't need to believe the pervasive messages that suggest that losing weight is necessary if we are overweight. It's not. These messages are encouraged by a lucrative health and beauty, and weightloss industry.

Admonishment aside though, there is more at play here than planting seeds of conspiracy. Regardless of fat activists' cries of, "we're here, we're spheres, get used to it", our culture discriminates against fat people, especially fat women. So, if I want the better job, the bigger pay packet, or the best romantic relationship, I will need to get on board and become a member of the elite slimming team. I need to lose weight and keep it off. This is now more daunting than before because I've become aware of the unlikelihood of success. It means I need to conjure up more than my usual mountain of resolve and commitment—it has to be Mount Everest. I wondered if I would be

We don't need to believe the pervasive messages that suggest that losing weight *is necessary* if we are overweight. It's not!

capable of it.

Sheridan's characters had succeeded where I had failed so I welcomed their suggestions. I would have to make myself my first priority—this would be time-consuming. I would need to learn as much as I could about food and nutrition, calories and exercise—I would need to become an expert. I would need to exercise a lot. I would need to be vigilant—all the time. I would need to weigh myself every day and record all I ate and drank. With a vice like grip, I would need to avoid temptation and nip aberrations in the bud. I would need to protect and defend my dieting efforts because television, supermarket shelves, friends and family will say, "go on, just have one—one won't hurt" and try to sabotage my efforts. All of this would be forever—not for a year or until I've lost 20 kilograms, it had to be *forever*. No letting up.

Apart from a hint of fanaticism and the eternity aspect of it all, these suggestions seem quite familiar. Dieting is, and always has been, about control. There isn't really anything new here. What is different though, is how I feel about it. *Do I want to be bothered?*

After the play I stand in front of my mirror at home and look at myself. Critically. My husband has no problem with my body—quite the opposite. We enjoy walks. We eat healthily and enjoy our food. We also enjoy a relaxing glass of wine after work or in the company of friends. I delight in the occasional dollop of decadence like artisan chocolates, stinky cheese, and fresh-baked bread. These are pleasures I don't take for granted.

If I want to be slim, and if Sheridan is right, then I will need to start jogging or perhaps even running or bike riding. Since I know my husband won't be bothered, I will be doing it on my own. Indeed, I will be spending a considerable amount of time on my own, *working on myself*. Our food interests will need to change—well mine will, and as for wine—I'll be saying, "no no, not for me". The word "no" and I will need to be friends. I haven't even started a dieting regimen yet and I already feel left out and deprived. So it's not really *can I do this* but *do I want to do this*? And do I want to do it for the rest of my life? Also, would losing weight make such a difference? Would it improve my life? Where are the guarantees?

Except for my weight I find I'm happy with my life. It's really *only* my weight, or more precisely *my feelings* about my weight, that takes the shine off my life. These feelings can and do negatively impact on other aspects of my life. This needs to stop.

I need to find out whether or not I'm healthy despite my weight. In other words, am I healthy metabolically? So, I'm going to go to my doctor. I'll ask her to ignore my weight this time. I'll ask her to give me a thorough medical check-up—blood pressure, blood tests, smears—the works. If I am healthy, which is very likely, I'll accept my body for what it is—it's me.

But I will also heed Sheridan's suggestion about physical activity. She recommends finding something



I will relish doing. It could be anything at all like romantic sunset strolls, belly-dancing lessons, or weekend estuary canoeing taking along an interesting picnic basket. My new activity needs to be something that will enhance what I'm already doing. And importantly, it has to be about enjoyment.

Now some weeks after the play, I am questioning Sheridan's agenda. Perhaps I've become a little cynical. Her characters were believable and interesting enough and the information gleaned edifying. I've come to see the fat body with a kinder eye. But I feel pushed to hold slimmers who achieve elusive ideals of thinness at arms length—there has to be something wrong with these people, irrespective of how extraordinary they may be. They must be weird. I've identified an irritated dislike of slimness in Sheridan's play and a favoured acceptance of fatness—although I do question whether these were indeed her leanings or now mine. Despite my cynicism, this play has made me think—it has unsettled me. If Sheridan's agenda was to open eyes—especially those of women, she has done this for me. Mothers and daughters, aunts and nieces, sisters and girl friends need to go to this play.

AUTHOR'S BIO:

Nadirehs Annaoj has a keen interest in health and wellbeing. She writes a weekly column for a well-known pharmacy publication but is perhaps even better known for her entertaining book reviews. "A spotlight on slimming" is a departure from her usual forms of writing.

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The Playwright's Blog

Jo's World

An accusation of ventriloquy

Wednesday, April 19th 2013 at 2.16am

I need to reflect on my creative process.

Being a science-arts hybrid, most ethnodrama is a creative collaboration between a researcher and a playwright. *For Wishing at a Wedding*, I wore both hats. This had advantages but also disadvantages – both of us were close to the material but while this was valuable, we were denied a sounding board in the form of a science/arts partner. I became used to second-guessing everything I did. I felt like a jack-of-all-trades and a master-of-none – still do.

Lives are pitted with personal stories that inform who we are and what we do. My story – I'm a fat woman. I've lost and gained in excess of 50 kilograms (100 pounds) while conducting my research and writing the play. Did this affect how I saw weightloss – of course it did. Was I conscious of my body as I wrote my characters – obviously. Did it influence who the characters in my play became – there's no doubt. I reflected on these issues constantly, but there was no point being paralysed by them. I knew their influence was unavoidable and objectivity impossible. So I decided not to try to feign it.

PSS buffs will have seen *Rufus Stone*, Kip Jones's film based on a study about positioning, ageing and gay life in rural South West England and Wales. Kip has talked about how he relied on his own personal experiences to provide depth to some of the characters in his film.

When I was working on the characters of the mother and her two daughters for *Wishing at a Wedding* the easiest way to do that was to embody the character of Moira and think about my relationship with my own daughters. This was writing myself into the play. My participants' stories passed through me to get onto the page – they moved across the stage embodied as characters, and then reached out to the audience. I can't imagine doing it any other way.

I've been accused of ventriloquism. I quarrelled with the insinuation. There is a bad taste that comes with ventriloquism. There's a negative connotation of puppets and strings – the idea of manipulating a vacuous *dummy*? There is also getting away with saying things you couldn't, wouldn't and shouldn't normally say. But, what did they mean by ventriloquism? Was I the ventriloquist's dummy – were my participants *using* me? It certainly felt like that sometimes – our Albany Memory Work Collective wrote a paper[1] on the complexities of researcher-participant relationships. My participants had made a point of telling me that they took part in the research to show others how ***it*** was done. I could imagine channelling their voices – being their puppet.

Or was I the Ventriloquist? Had I pushed a personal agenda through vacuous characters and used the ruse of participants and rigorous research to legitimise ***my*** quest? This felt uncomfortably real. I held a Health at Every Size position – I was a failed slimmer.

Or had I collaborated with my participants to push a joint agenda through characters that embodied both of us. I considered my characters. I had continually questioned who they were and how they were created. I still do. Who had got the best lines? Who had the last word? Who was the most likeable character? And why?

These characters weren't real people. They were an amalgam – polarised "caricatures" of participants, of stories, of field notes, of the literature, and of me. When it came to choosing pieces from stories to create characterisation and dialogue I was suffocated by choice. I chose carefully. I weighed all my decisions. I made choices the same way an author might choose the *best* extracts from interviews to illustrate a point in an article. But, rather than scatter them across a page like shotgun bullets, I've shaped the *best extracts* into characters – living breathing, emotion-full people who engage other living breathing, emotion-full people.

These characters are very real to me. While I wore two hats, the "art" of the playwright never trumped the ethical responsibilities of the researcher despite being urged to produce good drama. It was a balancing act – it had to be.

I wanted the audience to be uncomfortable at times. I wanted them to wonder about what they saw and heard. I wanted differing opinions – for likes and dislikes. I wanted people to question my motivation and to question the research – this would keep it alive. As Kip Jones says, "A lot of research ends up on shelves in journals where it dies a slow death". Well, perhaps not on physical shelves these days, but I certainly agree with the potential for death.

[1]Hatcher, J. S. (2011). Collective reflexivity: Researchers in play. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 8*, 223

2 Comments:

Nina and Monkey April 26th 12.10pm

Jeff Dunham's Achmed is hardly vacuous—his eyes tell you that. Puppets have their own dimensions. Have a look at ventriloquism using human participants. Puppets yes, that's what we call them—collaborators definitely—also co-conspirators. Yes, and they'll resist and undermine you if you give them a chance. Umm? Who said that?

Jenny at Craig's House April 21st 3.49pm

As I said, there are no happy overweight people. At least not people I see. Why would they be? Maybe I see a lot of unhappy overweight people because that's why they come to my classes—they're unhappy with how they look and want to change. You say fat people can be fit—how is that possible—if you're fat you're unfit—that's what it means. At least I think it does. Doesn't it?

Reply

Jo's World April 21st 11.26pm

Does it? You seem unsure. Perhaps the play has unsettled you – just a little

Reflecting on metonymy

29th February 2013 at 3.10 am

I hope this will answer some your questions about my use of props in Wishing at a Wedding: namely, why the mirror?

The mirror has come to represent many things. Some ideas weren't obvious when I was conceptualising the stage set, but developed following many readings of the play. Some of you will have drawn your own meanings from the mirror and what it represents – I look forward to hearing your ideas. Here are a few of mine.

Apart from fulfilling a need to provide the audience with a window into my characters' lives, I wanted the props and set to connect to my research. The research revealed several stories about relationships with mirrors. Some women hated and avoided them when they were fat but then sought them out when they were slim. They talked about looking for their reflections when they were out shopping like in shop windows. Regardless of how much some women weighed, they maintained strained and uncomfortable relationships with mirrors, especially when they were naked.

There is the idea that as soon as we can *see* we are also aware that we can be *seen*. A mirror is audience and critic. It shows us ourselves as well as what others see. The mirror is metonymic – it represents the gaze of society. Plus examining ourselves is a good way to examine others.

Mirrors fascinated renaissance painters[1]. They were considered tools of thought and learning – some of this was to do with introspection. Mirrors also let us see more. Telescopes and microscopes use mirrors.

The mirror in the play lets the audience see into a very private world. The hope is that this will be insightful. A mirror lets us look at ourselves side-on, or from behind, we can even look around corners. It is like a third or Other eye – a view we wouldn't otherwise see – it's looking askew.

The more philosophical among us will appreciate that objects can no more be seen directly with a mirror than human experience can be researched directly – we study representations of it.

Mirrors are symbols of vanity. They also represent the (pre)occupation with watching associated with scrutiny and vigilance – Foucault's metaphor of a Panopticon fits here for me.

Looking is seen as an active male role. Being looked at is a female characteristic. Women are aware of the surveillance of an imagined male observer. This comes from John Berger's idea that "*men act, and women appear: Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at*".

But, the main character in *Wishing at a Wedding*, Liz, resists this. Liz is not passive. She's not (another one of Foucault's metaphors) a docile body. She looks back and speaks directly to the audience and then goes even further. Liz does the unexpected when she crosses conventional boundaries and steps through the mirror – she directly confronts the audiences' long held beliefs and prejudices.

Very simply – using the mirror the way I have is different. The mirror represents how I see ethnodrama – a genre that encourages the crossing of boundaries, albeit unconventionally. Ethnodrama is capable of reflecting an individual back at herself – hopefully an enlightened self.

These are just a few of my thoughts about the mirror. You will no doubt have others.

[1]Discussions of Renaissance mirrors often mention Foucault's analysis of Velásquez's Las Meninas.

6 Comments:

Jonathan @ Short + Sweet April 1st 1.30am

This play's a lot longer than our Short + Sweet offerings where you cut your teeth – surely you could knock it into a punchy 10 minutes. Why take an hour when it can be done in 10 minutes?

Reply

Jo's World April 1st 1.35am

Sometimes good things need to take longer than 10 minutes. I'll see what I can do for 2015.

Jenny at Craig's House March 22nd 4.33pm

I too diet – who doesn't. More than that, I run weight loss classes. The women in your play are nothing like the women in my classes. They're nothing like me – not that I've ever been overweight. I'm curious, where did they come from? Why are they so happy with how they are – the overweight women I mean? You don't seem to get it – thin is in. Where's the fun in being fat? How is it your fat women are smart, sexy, and successful but your thin women are stressed, shallow, and selfish? You've got it upside-down – have you done this deliberately? You need to flip it around and get into the real world. Seems to me to me you're probably a frustrated fat woman who wants the world to change to fit in with her.

Reply

Jo's World March 23rd 1.23am

I think my next post might help with some of your questions.

Norman in Champaign March 16th 5.30pm

Make your values and position clear. See: *Reading and writing performance.*

Richard Knows Stats March 9th 2.12pm

How can you call this research? It's nothing more than theatre-based reality TV. No wonder journal editors are reluctant to publish this stuff. It's a fiction – just fluff. Where's the science – where's the voice of academia?

Reply

Jo's World March 10th 12.43am

Your question is best answered this way. Did it connect with you? Did it resonate on some level? Did you learn something? Did you feel anything? If you did – job done!

Also, unlike reality TV, ethnodrama restores dignity. And don't fret, journal editors are catching on 😉

Sophie Kinsella March 1st 10.17am

Footnotes are handy. You can bung them in whenever you want – instantly you look clever.

Reply

Johnny Saldaña March 1st 12.53pm

Don't even think about including footnotes or citations into a play script. A play's not a journal article. If a play can't speak for itself, then either rewrite the script until it does, or find a more accommodating literary genre to say what you want to say. Stop thinking like a social scientist – focus on the "art" of presenting data to impact an audience. There is nothing better than taking mind-numbing data and transforming it into thought provoking drama. But, while based on rigorous research, ethnodrama **is not** an excuse for bad drama.

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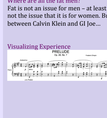
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About me:

An Audiologist in a past life, writing, let alone playwriting, is a new thing for me.

A Short + Sweet "How to" workshop prompted me to give writing a play a go.

"The Obituary" won 2011 Best Drama Script and Best New Zealand Play.



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Diana Mason:

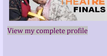
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Julia Kneerski

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Books:









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Recent Publication:

A Spotlight on Slimming

By Nadirehe Annoo

A review of Wishing at a Wedding

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JO'S WORLD

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Summarising vantage points

Being polyvocal or poly-voiced is about expanding the number of interpretations on a topic and generating a range of new options (K Gergen, 2009). Polyvocality here means talking from different perspectives by looking with new lenses, trying new positions, and writing in other ways. Andrews says that, "the more vantage points … the richer and more complex our understanding" (2008, p. 87). Using different vantage points can be advantageous for the research, for the researcher, and for the individuals the research seeks to help (Hopper et al., 2008). They can lead to deeper interpretation and understanding. The analogy of going on a variety of different dates and doing different things with a new girlfriend or boyfriend instead of only going to the movies, or more narrowly, only ever watching science fiction in the same cinema, fits well here. The interest arrives in the difference.

While polyvocality through writing from different perspectives can be insightful, writing from unfamiliar perspectives can be challenging for academics (Kitchin, 2014; Vannini, 2013). For example, writing for popular media requires getting points across quickly. Word counts are usually restricted to 700 to 1500 words per article, instead of the familiar 5000 to 8000 word count of many conventional academic outputs. Concepts and ideas need to be presented simply and engagingly, which seems contrary to notions of complexity and rigor that are synonymous with academic endeavour. However, writing to meet the requirements of nonconventional forms of writing can work towards clarifying ideas and improving understanding. Writing differently is an effective method of enquiry (Richardson, 2003a; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008; Vannini, 2013).

Writing the magazine article forced me to take a step back from my work in much the same way that squinting at paintings aids seeing greater definition of values and shapes. The *squinting,* afforded through the magazine journalist's perspective and interpretation, encouraged thinking about dieting advice as if it were a prescribed medication. This was an interesting way to think about *going on a diet* that had not been drawn directly from my research data. It was a new perspective that had value and implication for my topic. For instance, it is conceivable that being required to discuss the risks and complications of losing weight as if it were a risky drug could encourage doctors to think twice about blithely prescribing a 'course' of dieting for their overweight patients: a practice that is all too common (Glenn, 2012).

Writing the magazine article also forced me to think again. The line in the article, "there isn't really anything new here" rocked me back on my heels when it first

appeared on the page as I wrote the magazine article. The words hung with me for several days. The notion that discipline and control were necessary for successful slimming was indeed already understood and accepted (e.g., Bordo, 2003; Butryn et al., 2007; Crescioni et al., 2011; Wing & Hill, 2001). This was not new. Going back to my book chapter, "Defying the odds—Successful slimming", immediately revealed a trap of simplifying complex ideas for popular media: over simplification; that which academic writing strives to avoid. This experience emphasised that while popularising research can provide a valuable new perspective, a rein needs to be kept on the content of magazine articles to ensure that the integrity of the research is properly represented. Not unexpectedly, complex concepts and theories can be difficult to explain simply (Richardson, 1990; Vannini, 2013).

Concerns can also arise around engaging with social media like weblogs. There is no doubt that blogging is a useful way to express views and opinions in a social realm (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004). Writing weblogs is becoming increasingly accepted in academic spheres where there is now a particular genre of blogging called "Blogademia" (Saper, 2006, p. 1).

Some researchers use blogging as a way to develop and formalise ideas, with blogs seen as an open-source of information and advice (Carrigan, 2013; Lupton, 2013). This openness was illustrated in my fictitious blog, *"Jo's World"*, through comments where members of the public, fellow researchers, and academics and scholars, who were interested in the play, usefully engaged each other in conversation. Through this iterative dialogue and notion of "continuous publishing", blogging has the potential to encourage the development of new ideas (Carrigan, 2013, p. 1). Moreover, it has become part of a do-it-yourself publishing world where information can be out into the world very quickly (Vannini, 2013).

A concern over blogging that also applies to writing for popular media generally, is that these forms of representation leave academics vulnerable. There is a potential to make mistakes that cannot be readily rectified (see Annemarie Jutel's comments in Lupton, 2013), and also a risk of plagiarism (Williams, 2013). Blogging and popular media do not pass through a peer-review and editorial process. Among other things, this review process carries a mark of scholarship, and functions as a backstop or safety net to protect academic writers and their reputations from themselves. Without this, some academics find writing for popular media like blogging too confronting (Kirkup, 2010). Nevertheless, academics who are active in the blogosphere espouse its merits. They see blogging as a useful way to readily share interest and increase awareness (e.g., Jones, 2011; Lupton, 2013; Vannini, 2013).

Writing in different ways is useful. Skills developed in writing for a popular medium like a magazine or blog require learning how to grab attention and maintain an audience's interest, which was valuable. Pragmatically, such skills generalise very effectively into conventional academic writing (Vannini, 2013). Choosing to explore different voices, vantage points, and perspectives through different forms of writing, improves writing generally (Richardson, 2003a). They have different strengths and weaknesses, they utilise different voices, and they speak to different audiences. Utilising different perspectives trumps the advantages of utilising only one perspective when it comes to understanding the complexity of lived experience.

Seeking new ways and opportunities that facilitate finding out something new has value. It also has the potential to be interesting and even enjoyable. However, just as for using multiple methods to collect data, using multiple perspectives to (re)present research findings leads to continually asking "is there [another] better way to do this" (Chamberlain, Cain, Sheridan, & Dupuis, 2011, p. 158). It leads to feelings of not having done enough and always wanting do more: not that this is necessarily a bad thing.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

> *"...'tis true that a good play needs no epilogue; yet ... good plays prove the better by the help of good epilogues."*
> --WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, As You Like It

I believe we live in a storied world. We shape and are shaped by the stories we tell and hear, and through them we understand and make sense of our lives and the lives of others. They are the very fabric of who we are: we are our stories and our stories are us. This thesis too is a story. True to narrative form, it boasts a past, a present, and a future. The past is represented through a review of the background underpinning both my topic of weightloss and successful slimming, and my methodology. The present is in my creative and innovative research methods around eliciting and representing stories and narratives about the everydayness of successful slimming. It is in using materiality to engage with participants and facilitate the production and collection of rich data. It is also in my analysis and interpretation, and the multiple forms of (re)presentation I have chosen to explicate my research findings. The future will arrive out of the impact my research findings will make: first, on fat women my participants sought to help; second, on how weightloss research is conducted and presented; third, on researchers encouraged to explore creative arts-based ways of doing research; and finally, on persuading research writers to consider arts-based and non-conventional, alongside and *as well as* conventional academic forums, to disseminate research findings.

Arriving at this conclusion section of my thesis, I look back over my work and find that it is also a (bri)collage. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) say a researcher who extends her research beyond the limitations of a single research method can be seen as a *bricoleur*. They suggest that such a *bricoleur* is like a quilt maker, an improvising jazz musician, or a filmmaker who creates montages out of a series of images. The product

created is a bricolage: a "pieced-together set of representations that is fitted to the specifics of a complex situation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 5). This does not mean haphazardly pulling or pushing things together. Instead, each part is carefully auditioned and chosen for its fit and contribution. As a researcher interested in creativity and arts-based methods, I have carefully pieced-together multiple methods and collected multiple types of data to encourage a broad and deep exploration of my complex topic, and then presented my findings and interpretations using different forms of writing. As is claimed for bricolage, these multiple methods have been a process of "learning from difference" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 686).

As a representation of my research, this thesis has been a challenging journey of daring to do things differently. Some challenges were envisioned at the start of the project, but others were not, and had to be dealt with as they arose. This process was messy. With its various challenges in mind, the different facets or components of my research project are discussed as I reflect on the contributions my research has made.

I will talk about the aspects and contributions of my research under three headings. The first one pertains to my *topic* of weightloss and successful slimming, the second relates to my *process* of developing creative ways to elicit storytelling and collecting multiple types of data, and the third one concerns exploring multiple forms and perspectives of representing research findings. Although the facets of my research are presented under separate headings, it was not possible to entirely separate them without being somewhat repetitive. This final chapter is an epilogue of sorts, which, according to Shakespeare, provides a finishing touch that benefits all that has come before it.

Challenging successful slimming

Body image and slimming are especially concerns for women (Bordo, 2003; Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012; Germov & Williams, 1999), but successful slimming, meaning maintaining a reduced weight long-term, is exceptional (Jeffery et al., 2000). Until now, little was known about the day-to-dayness of successful slimming (e.g., Byrne, 2002; Sarlio-Lähteenkorva, 2000). To investigate this complex topic, my research questions were deceptively simple: how did successful slimmers lose their weight, and more importantly, how did they maintain their reduced weight year after year? I sought answers to these questions by looking at the commonplace ordinariness of the everyday practices of a group of successful slimmers, and I did this by using extraordinary methods.

Nine extraordinary women took part in my research. They had lost differing amounts of weight, ranging from 23 to 62 kilograms, and sustained their reduced weights for varying lengths of time, from 5 to 17 years. None of these women appreciated how unusual their achievements were. They dismissed their exceptional accomplishments, and blithely downplayed the complex and (extra)ordinary day-to-day practices that helped them maintain their reduced weight. My challenge as a researcher was to make these taken-for-granted practices and processes visible.

Dramatising my research findings in a play drew attention to, and shone a light on women who were successful slimmers. These women were all very different. Not only were they sisters and mothers who were older and younger, they were also strong and vulnerable, reasoning and irrational, scared and brave, intolerant and caring, naïve and intelligent, unwavering and compromising, selfish and selfless, sad and funny, fanatical and flexible, fit and active, dissatisfied and accepting, competitive and self-assured, and slim and not slim. Successful slimming was not about slenderness *per se,* but these women fully appreciated that the society they lived in valued and privileged a slim ideal. This slim ideal dictated that they should try to contort their bodies into shapes that were entirely impossible to achieve, and do so on a daily basis. The play portrayed and re-evaluated beauty and success, and showed that such features need not be tied to a slim ideal.

These extraordinary women personified success. They measured and policed their success each morning when they got out of bed and stood on their bathroom scales; when they planned how much exercise they needed to do; and when they monitored what they ate, like weighing how much cheese they were allowed on a pizza. Success was *'simple'*. It was about doggedly sticking to the rules of a well-rehearsed plan that had proven itself over many years. It was time-consuming. It was about putting *me* first and not feeling guilty about allowing everything else to come second.

The more conventional representation of my research, produced in a book chapter, focused on three key factors found for weightloss and successful slimming. The first concerned setting and resetting challenging goals, where a "now self" set its sights on a future "possible self" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). These goals were challenges such as weighing less, swimming further, running faster, dancing better, or fitting less snugly into a pair of skinny jeans. Importantly, goals had to be challenging but achievable, enjoyable, and able to sustain interest long-term. If they did not possess all these attributes, the goals were readily exchanged for ones that did.

With the body constructed as an entity always in a "process of becoming" (Shilling, 2003, p. 4), the successful slimmer *continually* seeks an improved future slim self through setting, achieving, and resetting challenging goals. Successful slimming

means the body is a continual work in progress. Rather than just goal setting, successful slimming is more about the *relentlessness* of goal setting: the process is never over.

The second factor for weightloss and successful slimming concerned the amelioration of a gap between what was expected when a goal was set, and the result or outcome when the goal was reached. When the outcome was disappointingly disparate from the imagined ideal; this was a problem. Gaps between weightloss expectations and outcomes, and aesthetic expectations and outcomes, were common. The challenge for successful slimmers was to forgive these discrepancies, and focus on the positive aspects of weightloss, because disillusionment could contribute to weightloss relapse (Granberg, 2006).

The third factor concerned the concept of focused discipline. Notions of control and discipline around weight and dieting are not new (Wing & Hill, 2001). What was new however, was an appreciation of how discipline was constructed by women who had maintained a reduced weight. Successful slimmers often dismissed and downplayed staying slim as simple and easy. They implied that the focused discipline required to stay slim was effortless for them. There was a disconnect between what these successful slimmers *said* and what they *did*. How and what they did had become mundane, everyday practice for them. Yet, many of their practices were far from *ordinary*. They were very time-consuming and demanded considerable discipline. Likened to elite athletes, successful slimmers engaged in high levels of physical activity, they abided by strict eating guidelines, and vigilantly monitored what exercise and food did to their bodies. These had become elaborate practices. Often, work, family, and friends had to flex to fit in around them. It was a balancing act.

Such significant commitments are not easily slotted into most people's everyday lives. Fitting in upwards of two hours of exercise each day, which many successful slimmers considered rudimentary, would be challenging for most ordinary people. I have suggested that despite claims of ease and effortlessness, the substantive day-to-day practices of successful slimming may well have been difficult, and a struggle to implement, when they were first put into practice and before they were mastered. But they became easier as skills were perfected and honed: effective focused discipline was shaped by time.

Notions of ease and effortlessness, balancing and control, and the development of skill and expertise, led to my analogy of tightrope walking. Expert tightrope walkers perform (extra)ordinary feats of balancing seemingly effortlessly. Tightrope walking is a '*perfect*' analogy for how losing weight and successful slimming is done. For overweight women who want to lose weight, understanding the implications of this analogy is important because it puts the difficulty of becoming a successful slimmer

into perspective. Becoming a tightrope walker is no mean feat. Not just anybody can become a tightrope walker. It demands extraordinary commitment, focused discipline, and especially patience and perseverance. A person attempting it deserves respect and support. The tightrope walker analogy challenges the stigmatisation around fatness and weightloss because of how extraordinarily difficult the task is. It is so difficult that falling off the tightrope rope is easily understandable and not at all shameful. A tightrope is, and will always be, precariously narrow.

But *expert* tightrope walkers are another entity entirely: they are more than casual or ordinary tightrope walkers. *Expert* tightrope walkers are *(freakishly)* relentless. They walk the rope everyday. Doing tightrope walking is who they are. Committing to the everydayness of tightrope walking is what makes them so successful year after year.

My tightrope walking analogy makes a significant contribution towards understanding successful slimming: it is very difficult. Because of this, a woman attempting it needs a clear understanding of factors that contribute to successful slimming. She needs to know how to determine, set, achieve, and *relentlessly* reset challenging goals. She also has to understand that a gap between goal setting and outcome is likely, and would probably be disappointing: it would need rationalising. She has to know that the everyday practices around exercise and diet require vigilant monitoring, constant adjustment, and she must have focused discipline that cannot wane. Once mastered, successful slimming could never be an end point, but would always be an ongoing trajectory. Staying on the tightrope had to be understood as a moment-to-moment, day-to-day, year-to-year preoccupation. Successful slimming certainly is not just a simple matter of eating a little less and moving a little more.

As well as exploring the everyday practices of maintaining a reduced weight, my research also drew attention to weightloss research itself. More particularly, I was critical of using loose definitions of successful slimming. Unlike previous research (e.g., Sarlio-Lähteenkorva, 2000, 2007; Wing & Hill, 2001) where weightloss success was defined rather broadly, my definition of long-term weightloss maintenance was perhaps strict. This was justified because I wanted to be confident that I was looking at reduced weight that was being *maintained*, and not a reduced weight that was surreptitiously increasing or fluctuating. Time spent at *any* reduced weight should not, on its own, determine whether a reduced weight had been successfully maintained. The weight itself needed to be stable, which also of course has implications for health (Amigo & Fernandez, 2005).

Consequently, it was not surprising that my successful slimmers' claims of ease and effortlessness around maintaining their reduced weight were at odds with

researchers arguing that long-term weightloss was a never-ending struggle and battle (Sarlio-Lähteenkorva, 2000). My analogy of expert tightrope walking was insightful here. Not maintaining a stable reduced weight was likened to not quite mastering tightrope walking. Lacking sufficient skill, commitment, and focused discipline, which expert tightrope walking demands, Sarlio-Lähteenkorva's slimmers had slipped from effortlessly walking *on* the tightrope, to desperately clinging and hanging from it. Attempting to move forward in this way would indeed be a struggle. Therefore, I would agree with Stevens *et al.* (2006) that it is difficult to meaningfully discuss and draw comparisons from research in this area without a clear consensus on what constitutes weightloss maintenance.

Challenging research method

My research methods were complex. Not bounded by commonly used qualitative data-gathering methods, I chose to evolve a diverse but congruent multiple-method research approach. For qualitative researchers, *the interview* is a good way to draw out participants' stories, gain insight into their lived experiences, and ascertain their understandings of reality and their place in that reality (Hiles & Cermak, 2008; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, 2000). For my research, it was a good way to obtain in-depth description and understandings of successful slimming.

Face-to-face, *one-off* interviews are common in qualitative research (Darbyshire et al., 2005; Kvale, 2006). However, instead of using only a one-off interview, my research method derived an in-depth knowledge and understanding of successful slimming by having participants take part in a set of multiple interviews. This provided significant advantages. A sense of ease and familiarity developed through meeting with my successful slimmers on a number of occasions. It established a rapport, which encouraged them to speak more freely and candidly: I was someone they knew.

Multiple interviews also gave them opportunities, and importantly time, to reflect on aspects of the research. Having time to think about the research and talk about it with family and friends encouraged participants to become researchers of their own lives (Chamberlain et al., 2011; Sheridan et al., 2011). By being researchers of their own lives, my participants were actively involved in my research project. They were not mere objects of study (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), rather, they were collaborators and co-conspirators.

While my multiple interview approach had significant advantages (Sheridan et al., 2011; Shirani & Henwood, 2011), the challenge was also to reduce the one-sidedness of interviews, and facilitate a dominance-free dialogue between me and my

participants. Viewing my participants as collaborators and co-conspirators but also as *the experts* of successful slimming, and having them engage in a creative and innovative research method, helped achieve this.

An important component of this creative research method was to use material objects in the research to draw out storytelling. Material objects surround us. They are the souvenirs of travelling through life, and some gain extraordinary status, meaning, and value (Miller, 2002). Much of materiality has a story surrounding it; we tell stories with objects. Yet, when we conduct research we usually expect our participants to recount stories of lived experience separated from the raft of material things that surround them. But material things can impact talk by adding significantly to the intricacy of the stories participants tell. They can grant access to deeper, richer and potentially transforming data (Sheridan & Chamberlain, 2011).

As part of the interview process, my participants produced material objects that held special meaning for them from a perspective of weightloss and slimming. Informed by these objects, they plotted a graph of their weight over time: *timelining* (Sheridan et al., 2011). An innovative, reflexive method of graphic elicitation, timelining provided a focus for my participants and prompted their storytelling. As a new method of graphic elicitation, developing timelining has been a significant contribution of my research.

More than a simple heuristic tool, timelining was a central feature of my research. It kept time clearly in view and provided interpretations and understandings of the past, and how pasts shape the presents and futures. It was especially good at focusing attention on events that change over time and helped *visualise* the important temporal dimension of storytelling. This was very valuable for exploring the temporal aspects of successful slimming. For instance, all too frequently, before-and-after photographs are used to represent evidence of achievable weightloss success. Such photographs, which have been suggested to exacerbate stigmatisation (Geier, Schwartz, & Brownell, 2003), unjustly squash a protracted journey into a stagnant instant. Timelining was useful for exploring the trajectory and negotiation of losing weight and successful slimming: more than a before-and after snapshot, it explored everything before-and-after, while-and-during, and in between.

By laying out and presenting a visualisation of lived experience, timelining promoted narrative accounting. It allowed focusing on specific events and aspects of my participants' lives to deepen and enrich storytelling. It provided a vehicle to explore my participants' lives from a different and new perspective, which was valuable.

The multi-sensorial, multi-dimensional engagement of listening to stories, looking at photographs, feeling and trying on clothes, smelling old objects like diaries

and journals, and drawing graphs, impacted on my relationship with my participants. *Doing* things together was a worthwhile *distraction* that bridged the gap between strangers, but it also shrunk the hierarchical gap between participant and researcher. The interview was removed from the typically sterile, contrived, research interview environment: it was more like ordinary, everyday for my participants.

The multiple methods approach I have used in my research was new and innovative. It ably assisted my participants to tell stories about successful slimming. The methods I used, such as timelining, are valuable for narrative research generally. Innovation can be creative, stimulating, and functional. But because innovative methods can be very engaging and captivating, they are capable of distracting both researchers and participants from their purpose. It is important to not let the horse run away with the cart. Innovation is novel and fashionable. However, researchers need to ensure that innovation is not introduced simply for innovation's sake (Travers, 2009). It is imperative to carefully define, and keep hold of a clear and workable methodology. Methods themselves should not drive research (Chamberlain, 2000; Curt, 1994).

Challenging research presentation

As writers, we can share original ideas and knowledge in a variety of ways. No one form of representation need be privileged over any other to do this work, rather, there are different forms of representation that perform different functions for their authors and audiences (Denzin, 2010). I chose two ways to represent my research: as an academic book chapter and as an arts-based play. With neither of these representations privileged over the other, they are presented in the discussion chapter above as separate, stand-alone excerpts of writing. The book chapter could have been read before the play, and vice versa. Pitching these representations side by side draws attention to the advantages and disadvantages of both. They are both equally valuable: they both have different strengths and weaknesses. By utilising different voices, they both sought to engage and inform their respective audiences differently.

These two different ways of writing both have creativity at their heart. This might seem paradoxical. Perhaps this is because academic investigation and especially scientific study, typically represented by academic journals and book chapters, is often presumed to be about objectivity, neutrality, and fact. According to the conventions of most traditional, scholarly publications, such investigation and writing should distance itself from subjectivity, imagination, and creativity.

While I claim that creativity is central to both my play and my book chapter, I suggest that the creativeness of conventional academic writing can be overlooked. In

comparing the play with the book chapter, a notion of creativeness fits easily with the play. It is a widely accepted form of arts-based representation (Leavy, 2009). And the arts are synonymous with creativity. A scholarly book chapter on the other hand, seems removed from concepts of art and creativity. However, being the writer of both encouraged me to see academic writing differently.

Writing the play certainly felt creative as I was doing it. But interestingly, I found that writing my book chapter demanded just as much, if not more, creative thought, as writing the play did. Even in comparison to the other creative components of my research, including the worthwhile development of timelining, I would suggest that forming and developing my tightrope analogy has been *the most* creative part of my research. This was insightful because a high level of creativity was pursued and utilised where I had least expected to find it.

I accept that my creative tightrope walker analogy could have arisen in the play. After all, the play and the book chapter were both drawn from the same data analysis. But the fact is, it did not arise in the play. The analogy arose out of utilising academic writing, as Richardson has described, as a "method of enquiry" (2003a, p. 379). Utilising academic writing in this way facilitates a deep level of interpretation and theorisation. As I have discussed in the chapter above, this level of interpretation has been invaluable for my research. The tightrope walker analogy has been insightful on many levels. If the notion of tightrope walking had indeed arisen in my play, it would have been represented quite differently. Playwrights, and authors of academic book chapters, are motivated very differently, so ideas and concepts would also be represented quite differently. This is simply a reminder that different forms of representation perform different functions for their authors and audiences. There is clear value in utilising and engaging in different forms of representation.

Some conventional academic writing and representation has been found "to be—yes—boring" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008, p. 474). Avoiding boredom, among other things, has been a ground to suggest exploring more creative, arts-based forms of representation. I certainly agree with this pursuit. But looking back over my thesis, I find I may have been guilty of putting arts-based methods and creativity upon a pedestal. They do not warrant this elevation, in and of themselves. They are *'tools'* and vehicles. Rather than focus on creative tools *per se*, it is what we as researchers *do with* arts-based methods and creativity which is more important. All forms of representation are about engaging, 'entertaining', and importantly, edifying our audiences: it is about doing it well.

The End

I have previously talked about how before-and-after photographs tell us little about the messy and convoluted journey of losing weight. In the same way, the chapters of this thesis, which tidily wend their way from preface to conclusion, show little of the messy and convoluted process of writing a PhD thesis. The bounds of a conventional thesis made it difficult to adequately bring this complex journey to life.

My thesis is unusual and unorthodox for a PhD thesis in psychology. It is a science-arts hybrid. When I talked about it with people in the School of Psychology where I worked, heads often shook in disbelief. But their interest in what I was doing never waned; there was always a lot to talk about, and the discussion was never dull. My thesis is about richness: in the complexity of my topic; in the diversely different participants who took part in my research who became researchers of their own lives; in the elaborate collection of participants' photographs and objects that were produced; in the interesting timelines participants drew, and the detailed stories they told; and in the creative and multiple forms of representation that were used to explicate my research.

My PhD journey has taken me beyond anything I ever imagined when I first started my study. Every turn has been about discovering something new and standing on unfamiliar ground. It has been an unsettling process of becoming. The journey has been interesting, *and* it has changed me. Perhaps the biggest, and most important, outcome for me has been discovering a passion for arts-based methods. While I most certainly appreciate the value of conventional representation for academic scholarship, I find that performative social science has a new devotee.

However, as such, my pseudo-performative effort leaves me somewhat dissatisfied. But, I have to remind myself that this thesis is a story of a journey: a process of discovery. It has certainly been a messy process. For now "*Wishing at a Wedding"* remains a closeted drama. To present it as a performed dramatic work would be another story. Among other things, it would require my participants' permission and collaboration, so that the researcher I have become could seek to create a piece of powerful ethnotheatre. It would no doubt be another interesting story.

> *HELENA: Yet, I pray you: But with the word the time will bring on summer, When briars shall have leaves as well as thorns, And be as sweet as sharp. We must away; Our wagon is prepared, and time revives us: All's well that ends well; still the fine's the crown; Whate'er the course, the end is the renown."*
> --WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, All's Well That Ends Well, Act 4, Scene IV

APPENDICES

Research Participant Recruitment

Appendix A: Advertisement

It is estimated that up to

95%

of people who lose a significant amount of weight will return to their initial weight within 5 years



Research Participants Wanted

If you are a woman who has lost a significant amount of weight and managed to keep it off for at least 5 years then I would like to talk to you. If you are keen to talk about your experiences and be part of a research project conducted by Massey University then please e-mail Joanna at

weightloss.research@hotmail.com

Write to P O Box 301020, Albany, Auckland

Or phone 09-441-4947

Research Information for Participants

Appendix B: Project introduction sheet

(presented on Massey University letterhead paper)

**Losing weight
and successfully maintaining
weightloss.**

PROJECT INTRODUCTION SHEET

I am hoping you would like to be a part of an interesting research project. These pages will provide you with preliminary information on the purpose, risks and benefits of this project.

Who is doing this research?

This research is being conducted by me. My name is Joanna Sheridan and I am a student in the PhD programme at Massey University in Auckland.
I am supervised in this project by Professor Kerry Chamberlain from the School of Psychology and Associate Professor Ann Dupuis from the School of Social and Cultural Studies.

What is this research about?

The weightloss industry brims with so called 'experts' on weightloss. Yet it is estimated that up to 95% of people who have lost a significant amount of weight return to their initial weight within five years. I think that better 'experts' might be the 5% of people who have successfully maintained their weightloss.
I would like to ask women who have lost a significant amount of weight and managed to keep it off for at least five years, what that process has been like for them. If you are one of these women, I would very much like to hear your story in the hope that it will help me make sense of something, which for so many people seems impossible to achieve – losing weight and successfully maintaining weightloss.

Who is a suitable participant?

You could be a suitable participant if you meet the following criteria:

- Female
- Have had a Body Mass Index (BMI)* of 30 or over.
- Have lost at least 20 kilograms.
- Have managed to keep the weight off for at least 5 years.
- Keen to talk about your experiences.

*BMI is calculated by dividing your height squared into your weight.
For example if you weigh 80kgs and are 1.6m tall your BMI would be 80 divided by 2.56 = 31.25

I would like to have between eight and 12 participants for this project. If more than 12 women meet these criteria and are keen to take part then I will choose as my participants those women who have lost the greatest amount of weight.

What are participants expected to do?

I would like to meet with participants individually on four occasions. These meetings will be held at a time and place which is convenient to you. We could meet at your home or at Massey University – somewhere where you feel comfortable.
The first one will be for us to meet each other and for me to explain and show you what the project will involve. I will give you a detailed information sheet about the project and you will have a chance to ask questions. If after this meeting you would like to be a part of this project I will ask you to sign a consent form. (About 20 minutes.)

The second meeting will begin the project. For this meeting I would like you to bring along any records you have of how your weight has changed over time. (About 30 to 60 minutes.)

The third meeting will be up to 2 hours long. For this session you will be invited to bring along any items such as photographs, clothing, jewellery, anything which for you has special meaning relating to losing weight and managing to keep it off.

The fourth meeting will be an 'end of project', wind-up session. (About 30 to 60 minutes.)

The second, third and fourth meetings will be audio-tape-recorded.

What are the risks of this project?

As the second, third and fourth meetings will be audio-tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim there is a risk that people known or unknown to you may be able to identify you. I have the following safeguards to protect your identify.

- All information that you give me will be treated confidentially.
- Only my supervisors and I will have access to your identity and contact details.
- Tape transcripts will not include your name but will be identified by anonymous codes.

It is possible that in the course of telling your personal story emotional feelings may be triggered. If this happens and you feel uncomfortable you have the right to:

- Ask that the taping be stopped.
- Decide not to talk about any specific subject or topic.
- Withdraw from the project.

What are the benefits of this project?

I hope that this project will be an interesting and enjoyable experience for you. By taking part you could be contributing to the advancement of understanding the process of losing weight and maintaining weightloss, which is the main benefit of the findings of this research.

What happens to the data collected?

The data collected are for research purposes only; specifically for my PhD thesis and scholarly outputs (for example, academic journal publications, seminars and conferences). They will not be used for commercial or other non-research purposes.
At the end of the project I will send you a summary of the findings.

What are your rights?

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation to participate in this project. If you decide to participate you have the following rights:

- To provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to do so.
- To ask any questions about the study at any time during participation.
- To decide not to talk about any specific subject or topic.
- To ask for the tape to be turned off at any time during the meetings.
- To withdraw from the project at any time up to one week after the final meeting.
- To receive a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

NB: Participants will be reimbursed for travel expenses incurred as a result of taking part in this project to a maximum to $50.00 per participant.

Please contact me if you would like to take part in this project or would like to have more information. I look forward to hearing from you.

You are also welcome to contact Professor Kerry Chamberlain or Associate Professor Ann Dupuis at any stage during this project.

Joanna Sheridan **P O Box 301020** **Albany** **North Shore City** **09 4414947** weightloss.research@hotmail.com	Kerry Chamberlain School of Psychology Massey University Private Bag 102904 North Shore MSC Auckland 09 4140800 ext.41224 K.Chamberlain@massey.ac.nz	Ann Dupuis School of Social and Cultural Studies Massey University Private Bag 102904 North Shore MSC Auckland 09 4140800 ext.9054 A.Dupuis@massey.ac.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application MUHECN 07/043.
If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research please contact:
Dr Dianne Gardner,
Acting Chair,
Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern.
Telephone 09 441 0800 ext.41225,
email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

Appendix C: Information sheet

(presented on Massey University letterhead paper)

Losing weight and successfully maintaining weightloss.

INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you for coming along to this meeting. I hope this INFORMATION SHEET will tell you all you need to know about this project. Some of it you will have already read in the Project Introduction Sheet but other parts will be new, please ask questions if there is anything you are not sure about.

Who is doing this research and what is it about?

This research is being conducted by me, Joanna Sheridan. I am a student in the PhD programme at Massey University in Auckland. After many years of being obesely overweight I lost 40kgs and for the most part have managed to maintain my reduced weight. My weightloss journey has led me to ask whether or not other women who have maintained a significant weightloss will account stories in any way similar to mine.
I think you are one of the 'experts' on losing weight and maintaining that weightloss. I would very much like to hear your story. The more information and detail you are able to give me the better.
I am supervised in this project by Professor Kerry Chamberlain from the School of Psychology, and Associate Professor Ann Dupuis from the School of Social and Cultural Studies.

What are participants expected to do?
At the end of today's first meeting, if you are still happy to be a part of this research project, I will ask you to sign a consent form. I will also give you a notebook in which I would like you to write down any thoughts and feelings or memories about losing weight for the time we are working on this project together. You could write down something that occurs to you while having lunch, or in the middle of the night. It could be one or two words or it could be a whole page. The things you write in your notebook don't have to make sense to anyone but you.

We will meet together on three more occasions. These meetings will be held at a time and place which is convenient to you. We could meet at your home or at Massey University – somewhere where you feel comfortable. It would need to be somewhere quiet where we won't be disturbed and where we feel we can talk confidentially.

Our Second Meeting:
Our next meeting begins the project and it will be audiotape-recorded.
At this meeting I would like to create a 'map' of your weightloss journey. First of all we will draw a graph of your weight over as many years of your life as possible. In order to do this please bring along as many records as you can find of your weight measurements. These could be from doctors' appointments, places like Weight Watchers or Jenny Craig, anywhere where you have been weighed. If you have kept a record of weighing yourself at home then please bring that too. The more records you have the better. Then I would like to jot important events in your life onto the graph. These could be anything from big birthday parties to having children, illnesses, new jobs, menopause, weddings and funerals or even trying to fit into a swimsuit for a special holiday. Anything that relates to your weight is especially interesting. Again – the more information the better. You may need time to think about these things so I would like you to take the map home and add as many snippets of information to it as you can. If you agree I would like to take photographic copies (scan) of records, for example weighing booklets, which hold special meaning to you.
Remember to write notes in your notebook.

Our Third Meeting:
Please bring the map back with you to our third meeting. This meeting will also be tape-recorded.
I would also like you to bring along any items that for you hold special meaning to do with your weight. They could be clothes, photographs such as 'before and after photos', or jewellery, anything at all which is important to you. I would again like to take photos and copies of these items with the understanding that you will choose which photographs I am able to use for this project.
We will refer to the map and the items you have brought as you talk about what it has been like for you to lose weight and how you have managed to keep the weight off.
Remember to write more notes in your notebook.

Our Fourth Meeting:
The fourth meeting will be the 'end of project' wind-up session which will also be tape-recorded. I will bring a print out of all the photos I have taken during our meetings. You will have a chance to choose photos, which you are happy for me to use in my thesis and in scholarly outputs (for example, academic journal publications, seminars and conferences) arising from this project.

What are the risks of this project?

As our meetings will be tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim there is a risk that people known or unknown to you may be able to identify you. I have the following safeguards to protect your identity:

- All information that you give to me will be treated confidentially.
- Only my supervisors and I will have access to your identity and contact details. These will be stored in a locked filing cabinet separately from tape recordings and transcripts.
- Transcripts will not include your name but will be identified by anonymous codes.

It is possible that in the course of telling your personal story some emotional feelings may be triggered. If this happens and you feel uncomfortable you have the right to:

- Ask that the tape be stopped.
- To decide not to talk about any particular subject or topic.
- Withdraw from this project.

What are the benefits of this project?

I hope that this project will be an interesting and enjoyable experience for you. By taking part you could be contributing to the advancement of understanding of the process of losing weight and maintaining weightloss, which is the main benefit of the findings of this work.

What happens to the data collected?

The data collected are for research purposes only; specifically for my PhD thesis and scholarly outputs. They will not be used for commercial or other non-research purposes.
At the end of the project I will send you a summary of the findings.

What are your rights?

You are under no obligation to take part in this project. If you do decide to participate, you will have the following rights:

- To provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to do so.
- To ask any questions about the project at any time during participation.
- To decide not to talk about any particular subject or topic.
- To ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time during the meetings.
- To choose the photographic images that can be used for this project.
- To withdraw from the project at any time up to one week after the fourth, wind-up meeting.
- To receive a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

NB: Participants will be reimbursed for travel expenses incurred as a result of taking part in this project to a maximum to $50.00 per participant.

Please do not hesitate to phone me on
09- 441 4947 or TXT me on 027-388-2434 at anytime if you have any questions.

You are also welcome to contact Professor Kerry Chamberlain or Associate Professor Ann Dupuis at any stage during this project.

Joanna Sheridan
P O Box 301020
Albany
Auckland

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weightloss.research@hotmail.com

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A.Dupuis@massey.ac.nz

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Northern, Application MUHECN 07/043.
If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research please contact:
Dr Dianne Gardner,
Acting Chair,
Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern.
Telephone 09 441 0800 ext.41225,
email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

Appendix D: Interview schedule

Losing weight and successfully maintaining weightloss.

Interview (Meeting) Schedule

Interview One: The first meeting.

After discussing the project in detail and answering any questions which participants may have I will invite them to join the project and sign Consent Form A. They will be asked to bring any records they have of how their weight has changed over time, to the next meeting. These could be of scale measurements done at home, booklets of weight recordings from weightloss organisations, or weight measurements taken by doctors or at other medical checkups.

Participants will be given a notebook and encouraged to, throughout this project, write down any thoughts, feelings and recollections about losing weight and successfully maintaining weightloss. While this notebook is not an essential part of data collection I will only ask to be able to use it at the end of the project.

(20 minutes)

Interview Two: The second meeting.

This meeting will be tape-recorded.

Using the weight measurements mentioned above I will help participants create a 'map' of their weightloss journey. Plotting weight (in kilograms) over time (in years) on a large sheet of graph paper and adding notes about significant events (called landmarks) which happened during that time for example, getting married, having children, illness, trips, etc creates the 'map'. Participants are encouraged to take the map home and add as much detail as possible by jotting pieces of information onto the map. They are also asked to bring it, along with items such as photos, clothing, jewellery etc which hold special meaning (also called landmarks), to the next meeting.

Photographic images (including scanning of documents) will be taken of items participants bring to this meeting (see Consent Form A).

(30-60 minutes)

Interview Three: The third meeting – The Narrative.

This narrative producing interview will be tape-recorded.

The map will be used to guide the story making/telling process.

The primary aim of this qualitative narrative study is to obtain participants' very personal accounts of losing weight and maintaining weightloss. Consequently I am very aware of not imposing a rigid structure by asking a standardised set of questions since this tends to encourage participants to try to provide the type of responses that they think I am looking for. I am anticipating that specific points on the map, along with the

memorable items participants bring with them, will elicit narratives on their own without the need for structured questions. Hopefully referring to specific points on the map and asking "Tell me what was happening here" will provide more unexpected, interesting and varied narratives than asking a specific question such as, "Can you tell me about when you first decided to do something about your weight?"
Photographic images (including scanning of documents) will be taken of items participants bring to this meeting (see Consent Form A).
(Up to 2 hours)

Interview Four: The fourth meeting.

This fourth and final meeting will also be tape-recorded.
This is an informal, end of project, wind-up meeting. Participants will be shown all photographs taken during the previous sessions and asked to sign on individual photographs indicating that they agree to these photographs being used for my thesis and for scholarly outputs (for example, academic journal publications, seminars and conferences) arising from this project (see Consent Form B).
Secondly the notebook used throughout this project will be discussed. Permission will be sort to use the notebook as data for my thesis and scholarly outputs. Participant's choice to edit the notebook or to refuse to allow the notebook to be used will be emphasised (see Consent Form B).
(30-60 minutes)

Consent Forms

Appendix E: Consent form A

Losing weight and successfully maintaining weightloss.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (A)

I have read the INFORMATION SHEET and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the INFORMATION SHEET.

I agree to direct quotations from tape recordings made during this project being used for Joanna's thesis and scholarly outputs (for example, academic journal publications, seminars and conferences) which may arise from this research.

I agree to photographs and copies being taken of items selected by me that I bring to meetings with the understanding that I will choose specifically which photographs may be used for this project.

Signature…… **Date** ……..

Full Name – Printed……..

Appendix F: Consent form B

Losing weight and successfully maintaining weightloss.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (B)

I have agreed to photographs being taken of items selected by me that I have brought to meetings with the understanding that I will choose specifically which photographs will be used for this project.

The photographs that I have signed can be used for Joanna's thesis and scholarly outputs (for example academic journal publications, seminars and conferences), which may arise from this project.
I understand that photographs I leave unsigned will not be used for this project and will be destroyed.

NB This is a generic form - the photograph below will be replaced by participants' photographs



I have checked and edited my notebook and have removed details I do not want used for this project.

I agree/do not agree to my notebook being used for Joanna's thesis and scholarly outputs which may arise from this project.

I agree/do not agree to small excerpts from my tape recording being used for Joanna's thesis and scholarly outputs which may arise from this project

☐ I have received $50.00 towards travel expenses incurred while participating in the 'Losing weight and successfully maintaining weightloss' research project.

Signature…… **Date** ……..

Full Name – Printed……..

Appendix G: Consent form C

Losing weight and successfully maintaining weightloss.

Photographic image
CONSENT FORM (C)

You have been asked to sign this form because your image appears in a photograph I would like to use in my research project about losing weight and successfully maintaining weightloss.
NB: You are under no obligation to agree to your image being used for this project.
If you would like to know more about this project please do not hesitate to contact me.
Joanna Sheridan. 09 441-4947
weightloss.research@hotmail.com

The photograph(s) that I have signed can be used for Joanna's thesis and scholarly outputs (for example journal publications, seminars and conferences) which may arise from this project.

NB This is a generic form - the photograph here will be replaced by participants' photographs



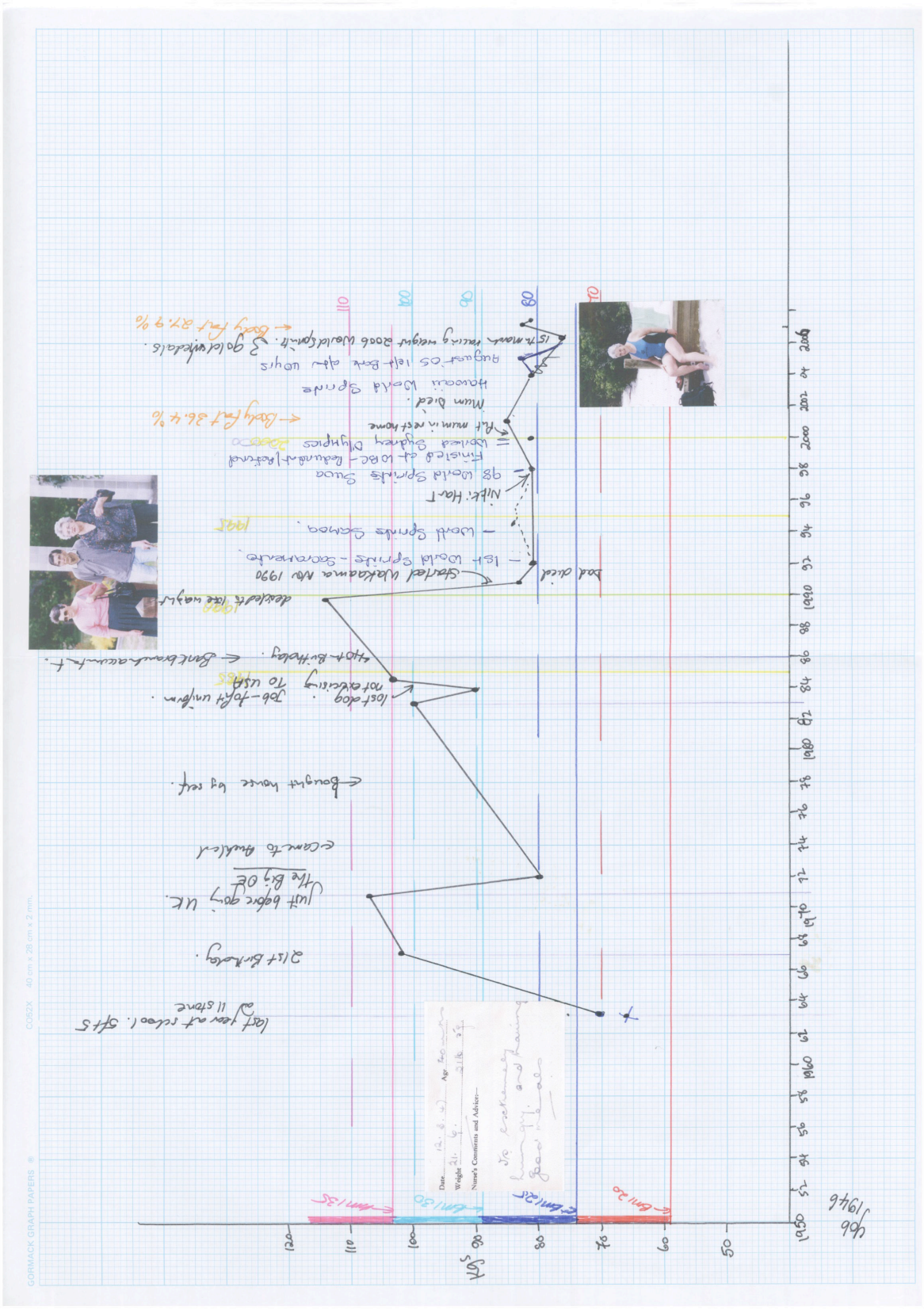
I understand that my name will NOT be used

Signature…… **Date** ……

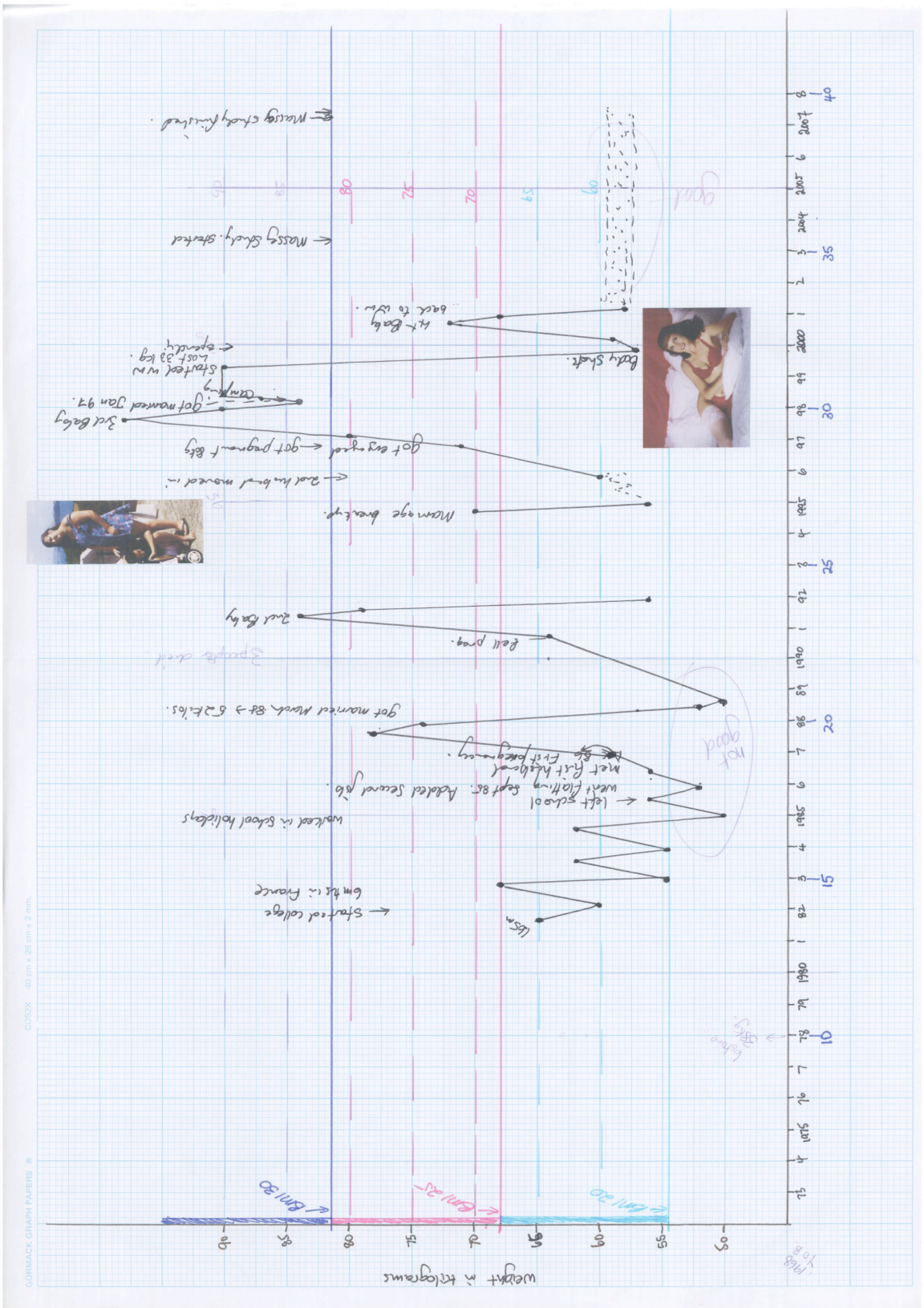
Full Name – Printed……

Timeline Examples

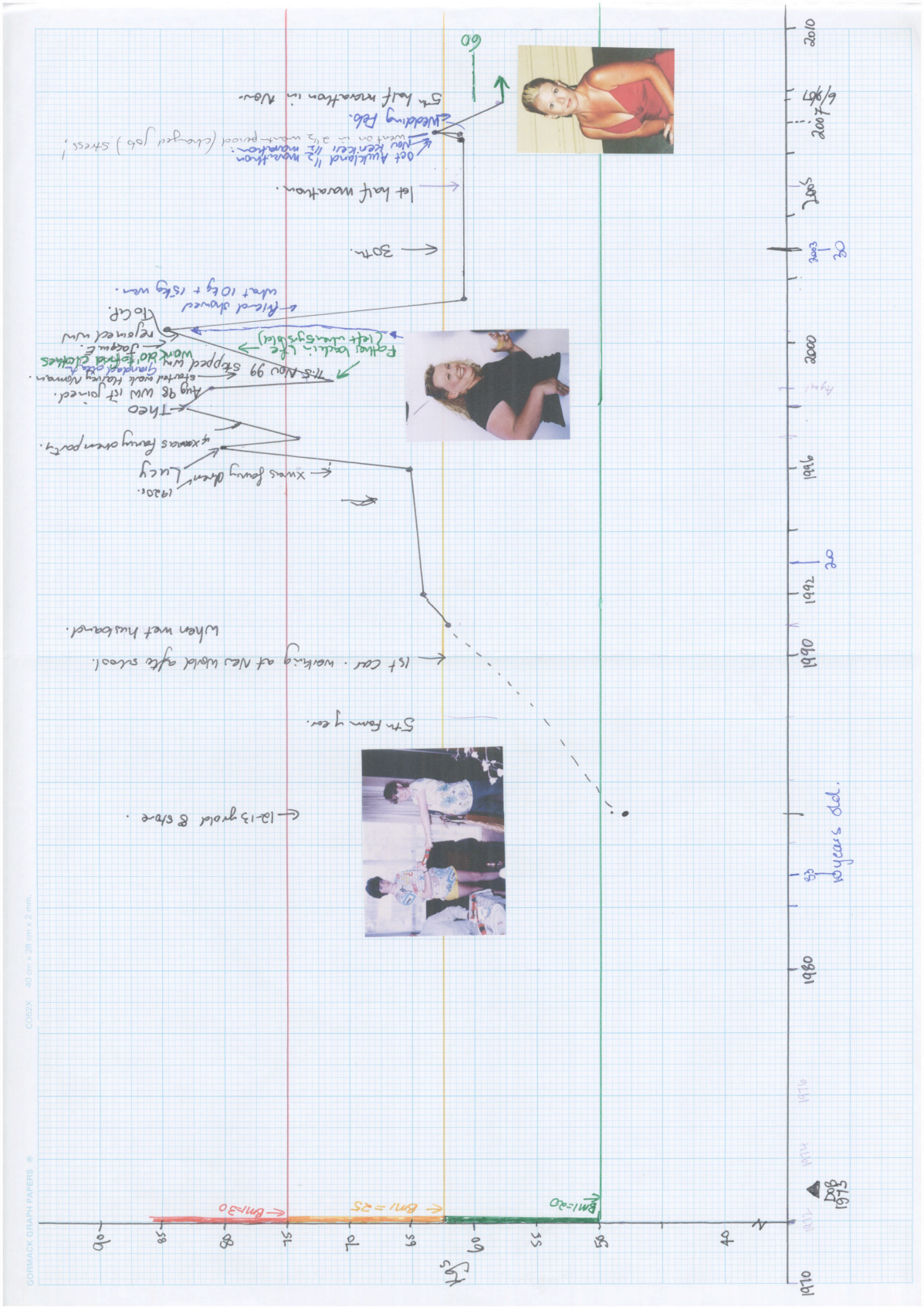
Appendix H: Diana's timeline



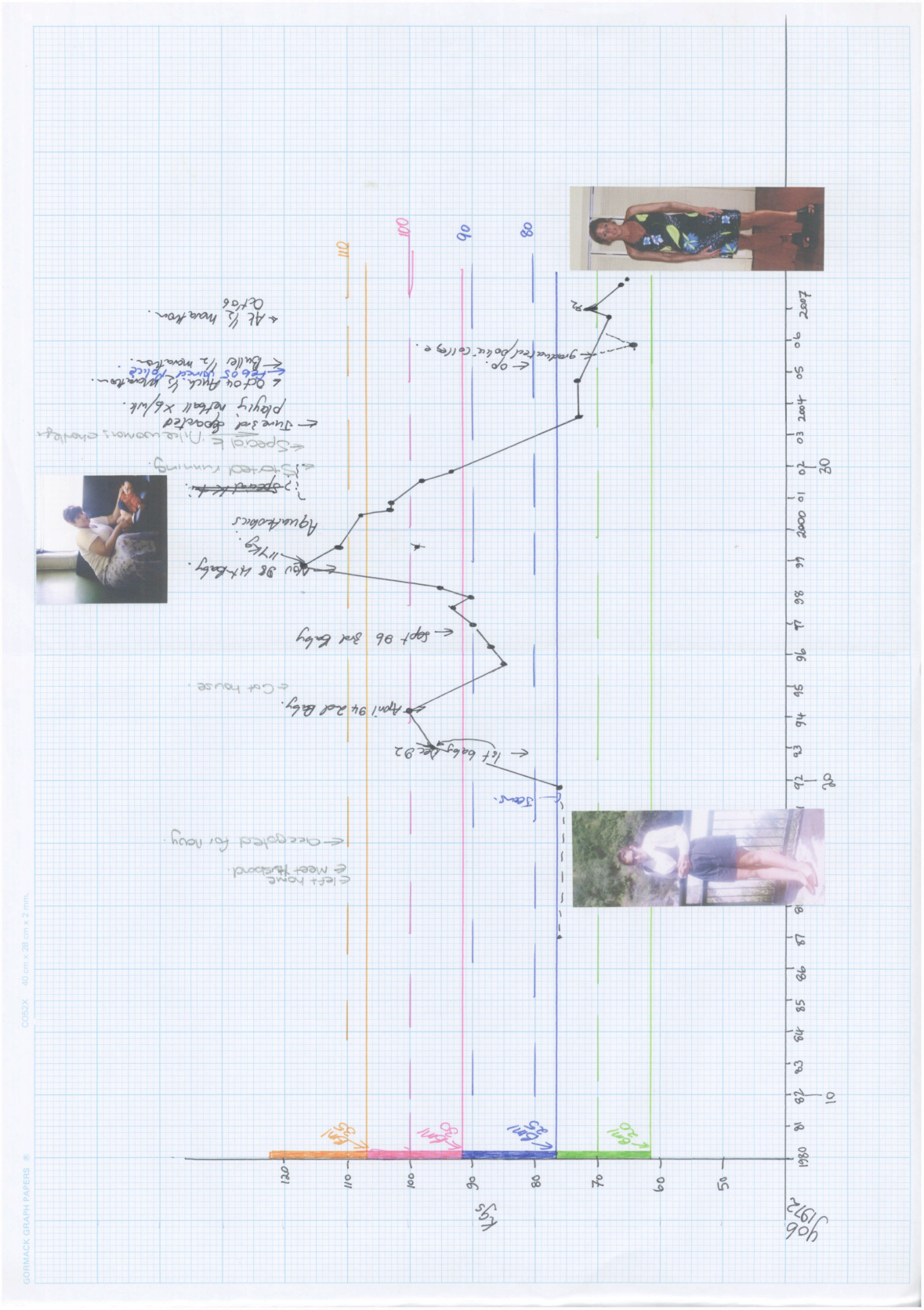
Appendix I: Alice's timeline


weight in kilograms
Met first boyfriend.
Got pregnant
Got married
Baby born
Left school
Went flatting
Met first husband
Got married
Started college
Birth of Fiance
Moving check finished.
Moving slowly started
Baby shark.
Started uni
Lost 33 kg
Got married Jan 97.
Jack Baby
Moving house.
Fell prey.
Got married Mark 8th → 5 Kids.
Worked in school holidays
Lisa
Got Fit
Got Fit
Got Fit

Appendix J: Becky's timeline



Appendix K: Charlotte's timeline



Publications:

Appendix L: The Power of Things

Qualitative Research in Psychology, 8:315–332, 2011
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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The Power of Things

JOANNA SHERIDAN AND KERRY CHAMBERLAIN

School of Psychology, Massey University, North Shore City, New Zealand

Qualitative research extensively utilises interviews to gain insight into the intricacy and texture of lived experience. However, there is growing recognition of the limitations of interviewing as a data-gathering method. Popular alternatives include a move to visual methods, such as photo-production, to enhance the interviewing process. In this article, we argue for the power of materiality in this process. We propose that material objects, such as photographs, items of clothing, and personal journals, have power to simultaneously provide proof of the past, produce increased narrative depth, force change in narratives, and change the interview process and the relationships caught up within it. We illustrate these issues by drawing on data from a research project about weight loss. We conclude by considering the implications and value of using material things in research.

Keywords: materiality; objects; photographs; visual methods; memory; narrative; talk

Downloaded by [Massey University Library] at 18:42 20 October 2012

Introduction

A good deal of qualitative research utilises talk, interpreted by the researcher, to gain insight into the intricacy and texture of participants' experiences. However, the collection of talk as data is guided by context since talk is frequently constructed dialectically to deliver what is sought by the researcher. Viewing a participant in a particular light, for instance as a model mother, dedicated doctor, or successful slimmer, encourages the performative nature of the multifaceted negotiation of talk. These performative aspects and the creation and renegotiation attributes recognised in talk are widely acknowledged, as researchers continue to be interested in narrative forms of inquiry in qualitative research (Smith & Sparkes 2006).

When participants are asked to talk about themselves and to explore aspects of their everyday lives, they provide accounts which often fall into a narrative mode of discourse and structure (Frank 1995). We live in a storied world, and the stories that we tell and hear shape the very fabric of who we are and what we do (Bruner 1990; Polkinghorne 1988; Sarbin 2005). Stories are an interchange between talker and audience which shape our identities and guide our actions. We understand ourselves through talk, and through narrative we are constantly engaged in a process of creating and recreating ourselves.

Discussions and conversations, and particularly semi-structured and unstructured interviews, are a good way to draw out participants' stories, their understandings of reality, and their place in that reality (Hiles & Cermak 2008). Talk can be general and abstract or more specific and focused, and it can also be observed at a distance or from near and close in time. For instance, general or abstract talk about being fat and losing weight might

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be 'what I think about dieting' whereas more specific and focused talk could be 'how I feel about depriving and punishing myself in order to stay slim'. Talk at a distance in time could be 'what was it like to be a fat teenager' as compared to near and close 'how do I feel about myself now that I am slim'. However, whether talk is abstract or specific, it is certainly clumsy when compared to the subtle distinctions evoked through smell, touch, taste, and especially sight (Miller 2002). This is obvious when, say, verbally trying to describe a change in body shape or size over time as opposed to seeing the difference in shape or size realised in photographs, or even more starkly in trying to describe the difference in smell between roses and carnations. Nevertheless, no matter how clumsy talk may be, it can convey the differences and subtleties of experience which other senses are unable to do. For example, it would be difficult to convey the romance of a sunset through a particular fragrance whereas a verbal description of the scene and the romantic feelings it arouses will grant some insight into the experience. And if the verbal description is augmented with a visual image of the scene, such as provided by a photograph, an extra dimension is added. While we do not dispute that talk is capable of conveying the subtleties of experience, we suggest that with the assistance of material objects talk can become part of a multi-dimensional, multi-sensorial mode of representation and expression (Pink 2004).

Material objects surround us. They can be made, bought and sold, collected and disposed of, acquired through inheritance, and given and received as gifts. They are able to provide pleasure and security, can reflect personal tastes, and manifest moral principles and social ideals (Miller 1987). Some objects gain extraordinary status and value, such as photographs which encode memories, commemorate personal histories and have implications for identity (Morgan & Pritchard 2005).

Visual studies, a large and diverse field of study where material objects are often used to aid the production of talk, is not new (Collier 1957). Anthropology and human geography have used photographs, diagrams, maps, and films for many years, and more recently sociology, nursing, psychology, and tourism have used visual methods as research tools (Bell 2002; Collier & Collier 1986; Harper 2002; Hodgetts, Radley, Chamberlain & Hodgetts 2007a; Hurdley 2007; Keller et al. 2008; Morgan & Pritchard 2005; Pink 2001; Radley & Taylor 2003; Rose 2007). Researchers have recently also involved a range of new activities around the interview to deepen talk, such as the use of multiple texts (Keats 2009), the 'go-along interview' (Brown & Durrheim 2009; Carpiano 2008; Pink 2008), participatory mapping (Emmel & Clark 2009), and the use of drawing and arts-based methods (Bagnoli 2009). The majority of this research has focused on the use of photographic elicitation, with photos created specifically for the research. Photographic images, when combined with an interview, not only act as aide-memoires by sharpening the talker's focus and prodding latent memories but also add richness beyond the possibilities of talk alone (Harper 2002). Objects other than photographs which have been used to elicit and enrich narratives have included such things as paintings and letters (Tamboukou 2008), cherished objects in homes (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981), possessions in homes (Noble 2004), and even Lego (Gauntlett 2007). As Appadurai (1986, p. 5) has claimed, 'Things are the stuff of material culture and the meanings things have are inscribed in their form, their use and their trajectory'. Focussing on things, and especially on those that hold relevance for the talker, encourages narratives to be extended and elaborated, thus offering greater leverage for interpretation and insight.

We focus here on these processes and discuss how they operate, illustrating their function with data from a study exploring women's experiences and meanings of substantial weight loss maintained over a considerable period of time. This specific weight loss project will not be discussed in this paper. Rather, we show how incidents involving material

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objects that occurred during this project provided access to data that goes well beyond recollected talk and afforded more nuanced, reconsidered, and elaborated stories for analysis. We consider that too much qualitative research relies on interviews alone for data generation and argue that material objects can be used to enhance the research in a variety of ways. Thus, in this article we illustrate the power of things to illuminate research. We show how they can enrich data, deepen researcher insight and interpretation, and alter participants' perceptions of themselves and their experiences as they talk.

Backgrounding: The Weight Loss Project

This analysis of the power of things arose out a project currently in progress on the narrative analysis of stories told by women who have lost significant amounts of weight (more than 20 kg) and kept the weight off over a long period (more than five years). As an integral part of this research, we request participants to plot a graphical timeline of their weight over the course of their lives. Participants had no trouble doing this and provided indications of what they weighed at different times in their lives, based on such things as doctors' records, maternity measurements and health checks, weight-loss and fitness organisation records, and recollections of self-measurement.

> Yep. You always know how much you weigh on your wedding day! So it's just one of those things you do. You hop on the scales and it's committed to memory forever. [Alice]

As this graph is created, the timeline is punctuated with various life events such as the death of a parent, getting married, becoming pregnant, or activities such as needing to find an outfit to wear to a fancy dress party, all of which can be used as a basis for discussion. These life events and periods of weight change were significant for drawing out stories of weight loss and gain.

As part of the interview process, participants were asked to produce material objects (e.g., photographs, clothing, mementos) to facilitate the discussion. These objects functioned to accent their life events and activities and consequently prod and aid memories of being fat, losing weight, and maintaining a reduced weight. During our research planning, we were given several anecdotal accounts about items of clothing kept in the hope that the now-fat person would one day be slim enough to wear them again. Talk of desires to fit into a wedding gown worn 20 years previously or to one day wear a prized pair of 'skinny jeans' led us to expect that participants would produce articles of clothing that aid talk about body-shape-change. However, few such items were produced, probably because our participants have managed to remain slim for at least five years by which time it might be expected that unfashionable, oversized, no longer worn items of clothing would have disappeared from wardrobes. Also, a wedding gown or pair of 'skinny jeans' may be associated with good memories and a past which someone may wish to recapture and not forget whereas 'fat clothes' may not.

> I've moved house a couple of times in that time. In doing so you get rid of a lot of things and I just had no use for it [fat clothes] any more. I'm just not going back there. And to be honest I was really embarrassed I didn't want to see that clothing anymore. It was just [the] throwing out of it [which] actually made me feel good. No it did, oh honestly did. Just picking it up and just tossing it in the bin was fantastic. [Alice]

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The predominant form of material object produced by far was photographs, although some clothing, diaries, journals, and other objects were produced. Photographs were predominant perhaps because, as Sontag (1977, p. 3) has said, 'To collect photographs is to collect the world . . . with photographs the image is also an object, light-weight, cheap to produce, easy to carry about, accumulate, store'. We suggest that photographs may be a very ordinary, everyday way to effortlessly show how things were and are. They are perhaps kept longer than other items might be. Photographs, although fragile and easily damaged, are often kept for generations in frames, albums and boxes.

Four interviews were held at weekly or fortnightly intervals so that participants were afforded sufficient time to reflect on their talk and to seek out any material objects that they wished to talk about in the interviews. Interview sessions were recorded, with participants' permission, and transcribed. The material objects produced were also recorded as part of the data set: scanned copies were made of photographs, excerpts from diaries, and written material, and photographs taken of objects such as clothing. Participants consented to allow excerpts from interviews and images to be used in publications. Names used are pseudonyms.

For the purposes of this article we are interested in the power of material objects to enrich and enhance the research process. This includes revealing taken-for-granted states of being, mundane realities, and misremembered or misinterpreted aspects of past lives. We use illustrative data from the weight loss project to show how participants reflexively use material things to (re)create experiences of what it was to be fat, to lose weight, and now to stay slim. However, the utility of materiality in research has wide application, and the weight loss project merely serves as illustration. As the following discussion will show, touching materiality changes what we as researchers see and are given, and how we interpret and understand talk. We structure our discussion around four issues: how things provide 'proof' of the past; how things produce more narrative depth; how things force change in the narrative; and finally, how things change the interview process and the relationships caught up in it.

Documenting the Narrative: Things Prove the Story

Material objects are produced during an interview to illustrate, document, and support participants' talk about aspects of their past experience. For instance, 'fat clothes' or 'fat and slim photos' are shown to illustrate that the weight loss talked about has indeed occurred. A participant, Alice, produced a favourite, polka-dot outfit that had been refashioned by her and made smaller; interestingly, she had still kept the original large size clothing identification tag inside the garment. Although the reworked garment is now a size 10 the size tag is for a size 20, testifying to the largeness of the body it once clothed. For weight loss, photographic images are a good way to show a physical difference in body shape and size.

> They [these photographs] really show you the full amount of what you've done [Becky]

The extent of the physical, bodily transformation is now visually as well as verbally evidenced and documented. The things shown become 'points of reference' for time passing and are the product of doing something (Morgan & Pritchard 2005, p. 5). As Sontag (2003, p. 6) has argued for photographs, objects vivify, they are a way of making life and experience 'real or more real'. Things are a (re)presentation of past experience and provide a

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glimpse, a visual (in)sight, to those who have not witnessed the experience firsthand, but they also serve as a memento for those who have.

The experience of losing a great deal of weight can take many months and in some cases years to achieve. So a photograph, which seemingly brings this experience to life, misleads and unjustly condenses it into an instant. This instant can misrepresent a journey that perhaps has been convoluted and protracted. However, this glimpsed instance of the past combined with the present can startle and surprise and is powerful. Because, as photographs bear witness to experience, and even though they may only be of instances of time, they are points of entry into narrative and demand talk and explanation. Some excerpts of talk illustrate how participants use these instantaneous moments. First, they use them to inform themselves, as a reminder of the person they used to be and as a prod to the memory of what they were doing at a particular point in the past.

> No, I know you [the researcher] don't need to see that [photograph] but it's a case of by looking at them I can remember what was going on in my life at the time. [Fiona]

Photographic images are a resource for remembering (Radley & Taylor 2003). Fiona's use of the photograph is much like using a magnifying glass to scrutinise a scene. Without the magnifying glass much of the scene remains blurred, small, and skimmed over. With its help, however, she pauses and picks out specific detail, enlarging it, drawing and focussing all attention on it. Second, photos are used to inform others and allow them to bear witness to the participant's feat.

> Yeah, but no one believes me that I used to be that big. I have to have the photos in my locker at work because people come up to me and go . . . "can we see your photos?" [Charlotte]

Besides documenting and illustrating talk about being fat, photographs are also used to verify and validate the slim talker's authority to talk about losing weight since the visual impact of the change in body shape evidenced by the photographs attest to being a successful slimmer. In other words, the material evidence lends an air of authenticity to a participant's claim of lived experience. The visual impact of being a successful slimmer afforded by photographs is, however, achieved somewhat serendipitously and perhaps even fraudulently. Visual methods research emphasises the need to 'pay particular attention to the context in which images are produced' (Keller et al. 2007, p. 760). However, in our research this is not the case since the images framed by these photographs are taken out of the context in which they were originally made. The photographs chosen to illustrate body shape change were rarely framed for that purpose but instead tended to commemorate other events in the person's life such as Christmas, birthdays, holidays, and so on. Certainly, photos taken in the past, being pre-existing, were out of focus as far as the research is concerned. For instance, rather than being framed for fatness they could be framed around 'me and my sister'. Now, by requiring participants to talk about fatness, a re-viewing occurs with the focus shifting to a feature within the photograph's frame which may not have been obvious before. A 'metamorphosis' has occurred; things intended for one purpose are used for another (Appadurai 1986). For example, the focus of a 40-year-old family snapshot of 'that's me and my sister' shifts to 'look at my legs' and captures talk not previously caught by the old photograph (see Figure 1).

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Figure 1. Metamorphosis—changing the frame/focus of the photograph.

> That's when I got my Queen's Guide so that's when I'm 15. That's me and my sister. See, but look at my legs! (Fiona)

In the context of this research, Fiona searches through dozens of family snapshots intending to find evidence of fatness and finds this one. This photo, taken decades earlier of a particular scene, is brought into the present and is being looked at with a different eye and a different motivation. An 'image' of fatness is only produced in the context of the research. The frame of the photograph is fluid; it expands to expose and create narrative previously not told and images not seen of events and feelings now related to body shape. This research method avails participants of the opportunity to select *any* photo they wish. Therefore, encouraged by a need to perform the successful slimmer role, they may well choose an image for its visual impact alone. It would be easy here to enter an argument about the 'myth of photographic truth' (Bell 2002, p. 8) and note that a particular choice shapes the storying and interpretation of the photograph. Ultimately, what is valuable here is the richness of talk surrounding the image, not the photograph itself.

This is true of other objects as well. One participant, Diana, presented a 61-year-old baby booklet documenting her development from birth (see Figure 2). She pointed out several entries in the old, fragile book that documented a babyhood of insatiable hunger and appetite. For Diana this was new found evidence; the entry 'is extremely hungry and

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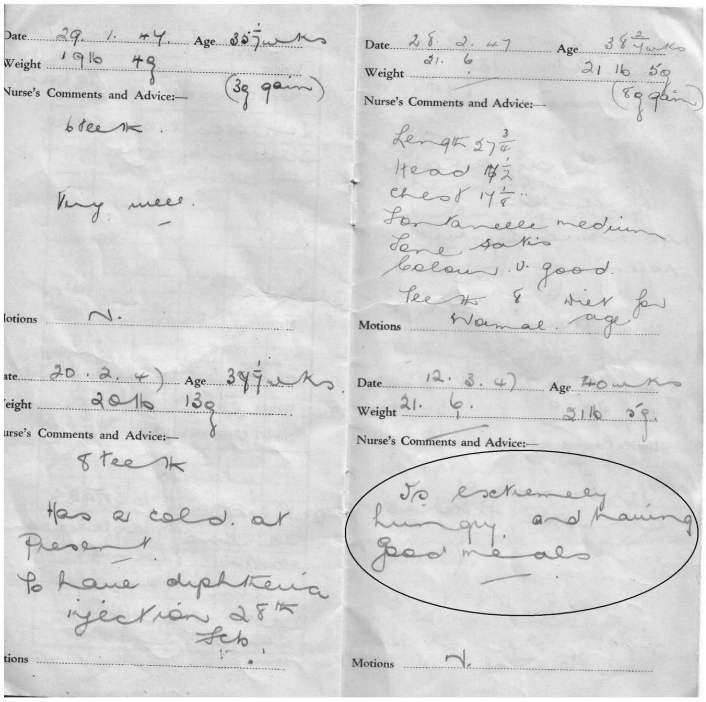


Figure 2. Extract from Diana's baby book.

having good meals' at age 40 weeks gives credence to her life-long struggle with weight and her current daily battle with food. For the researcher it evidenced how far back a person could reach to justify the present day-to-day struggle to be slim. The research called the baby book back to the present, but, as with fat and slim photographic images, the book was neither created as an indicator of fatness nor of weight loss, but now becomes the thing through which the thin struggle is validated and proven.

In this research we have seen objects bear witness and illustrate and document narratives. Once produced, they authoritatively enter into talk. Their presence provides a talker with a route of evidence to 'prove' past experience as well as justify present life. However, the power of things is not limited solely to documenting and proving; they also function to develop and extend narratives.

Thickening the Narrative: Things Elaborate the Story

The predominant form of material object produced to inflect important events and activities were photographs. However, there were instances where photographs were absent and could not be found. Sontag (2003, p. 116) suggests that it is understandable 'to turn away from images which simply make us feel bad', and we certainly had accounts from

participants admitting they had destroyed or avoided keeping 'fat photos' which were unflattering.

> I've got rid of plenty of photographs in which I thought I looked too fat. I've even asked friends to get rid of their photos of me. [Ismene]

Besides destroying evidence there were also times when photographs were not taken or not kept (Brookfield, Brown & Reavey 2008; Hodgetts, Chamberlain & Radley 2007b). These lacks of materiality worked to expand the narrative as participants attempted to explain them. One participant, Becky, could not remember thinking negatively about her body shape and size, and attempts to explain her inability to provide photographic evidence of her body when she was fat.

> These [photographs] are the *only* ones I can find. I actually have no other photos. And even with the kids; I went through their photograph albums and there's heaps of the kids and the kids and Tom. I think I would be lucky to find two of me, and that was when I was hiding behind the kids so you've just got my face. So yeah, there's obviously, you know, and that's quite sad, that I just didn't get myself involved in the photos and things like that because it must have been in the back of my mind how big I was. But, I actually don't ever remember saying to myself 'my God I'm really huge'.

Becky's inability to find herself in family photographs forces her to talk about whether she actively avoided putting herself into the photographs. The narrative is broadened by an unexpected absence within, as well as an absence of, photographs.

Journals and diaries featured significantly as examples of the power of things to extend and elaborate stories about experience. One participant, Ismene, documented periods of weight fluctuation on her timeline, but these were ignored and glossed over in her talk, with the claim they did not reveal any particular memories. Pressed further, and asked if she had any material objects that might provide insight into these periods, she produced an old box-suitcase containing daily journals that she had kept for many years, including the periods in question. The excerpt below illustrates how returning to these journal entries extended Ismene's story.

> Lots of times I mentioned things about that I've started going to the gym or that I worried about what to wear . . . or that I felt guilty for having eaten too much the previous day or during the day . . . like eating whole packets of ginger kisses and stuff like that. I don't think that was a common occurrence and I actually don't even remember those, but they are in the journal so can only assume that they happened. The journals don't lie except when I wanted them to . . . I've got that whole suitcase full of them. There are dozens and dozens of them now. Reading through the journals is really quite hard now because I kind of look back and think was I really that kind of person? I seem really immature to me now. I think gosh I was 20, 21, why couldn't I just grow up? But yeah, I really did kind of get stuck in just a bad cycle of being unhappy and not going anywhere and feeling like it was out of my control for a few years.

Capable of telling the truth but also of lying, the journals open a window into a part of Ismene's life which would have been ignored completely in a standard interview, and added

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considerably to the scope and richness of the data collected. The journals literally opened up and uncovered experiences which had not been exposed by talk alone, attesting to the power of material things to elaborate and extend participants' stories of themselves and their experiences.

Not unexpectedly for research about dieting and weight control, issues around managing and keeping track of food intake arose. Several participants talked about keeping records of what was eaten. Hence food diaries, records of calorie counting and exercise regimes were not uncommon. Often these records were only kept for short periods of time, usually when dieting was difficult or if weight was not coming off as expected. Some were kept on a weekly chart provided by a weight loss organisation and others were in personal diaries or on calendars. One interesting example is provided by Heidi (see Figure 3) to prove and document the story she tells in much the same way as photographs illustrate a change in body shape.

Although each page seems to provide very little detail, Heidi felt completing these entries contributed significantly to her success of losing weight and staying slim. The *need* to fill out this food diary was not fully realised by us as researchers until she produced eight years of identically stark A5 diaries. Flicking through page after page and year after year of identical diaries reiterated the value of experiencing objects first hand. Had Heidi simply talked about keeping a diary, the insight they provided into ritualistic practices may have completely eluded us. However, the production of these diaries did not elaborate Heidi's narrative substantially, since their keeping was a mundane and necessary task for her. Rather, they served to open new insights and perspectives in understanding the research and the story we can tell. These diaries, and the manner in which they were recorded, revealed the ritualistic practices that underlay Heidi's weight loss, an understanding which

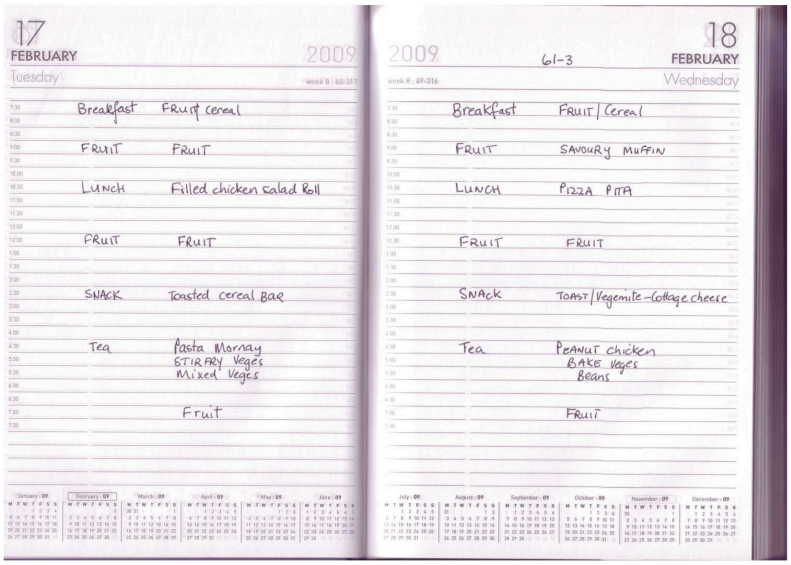


Figure 3. Two pages from Heidi's food diary.

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has become central for our interpretation in the project. The deeper meanings gained from this encounter reach beyond the interview to enter the realm of analysis since we begin to draw assumptions from the objects themselves rather than the talk surrounding them.

Material things can document and authenticate as well as deepen and enhance the story a participant tells, and also the story we as researchers tell. However, while things can enrich and enhance narratives they are also capable of disrupting narratives and encouraging a different story to be told.

Unhinging the Narrative: Things Force a Different Story

Some things, particularly unexpected or especially interesting objects, can distract talk and shift the frame and flow of an interview or conversation. An example of this involved a series of epistolary journal entries and letters that Guinevere had written but put away some 10 years previously. During the time-line interview she had difficulty remembering details about a particular time. She did, however, remember writing a letter around that time to a woman who offered advice on losing weight. The original, rough copy of the letter had been put inside a journal she was keeping at the time. The following is an excerpt from this interview, during which she reads excerpts (italicised) from the journal and the letter she wrote.

J: Do you often keep journals?
G: I go through fits and starts of it. Do you want me to read you some of this?
J: Whatever you would like, whatever you want to do.
G: This goes back to 1998
J: Yeah that's exactly where we are [indicating on the time-line]
G: Yeah '*Binged on Irish cream thins last night - ate the whole box couldn't stop till they were all gone. Felt lonely*' [she starts to cry]
J: Is it too hard? [Pause]
G: It's a bit fresh mainly because um, of feeling like I've been relapsing lately
J: Do you want to leave it?
G: Um, just such mental torture you know when I look at this stuff. Um, and then we've jumped to a couple of weeks later after that . . . '*and bought fruit and vege and flowers for myself*' and I've underlined flowers because it would have been something that I wouldn't normally do. '*More hopeful had a hair cut on Friday and felt good about that. Had wholemeal roll at Subway instead of Burger King didn't enjoy it as much though, still felt hungry*'.
I don't even remember ever eating Burger King but obviously I did.
When I really decided to make a change I wrote a letter to Yvonne and it was in here. I'll just find it. A lot of this stuff was written in the middle of the night too. So later that year, so this is September 1998:
Dear Yvonne,
I am writing this at 2.30 am another disturbed night for me . . . I'm not a very good role model for her [her daughter] I'm afraid. Not only do I want to help her but I am very aware that unless I get weight off I will die . . . feel pretty desperate Yvonne, and I've had thoughts of easier ways out of my misery. Knowing my daughter needs me in her life and is asking me for help, keeps me on track but how can I help her when I need help so badly myself.

Reading the journal entries and letter reconstructs the intensity of Guinevere's emotional state during a particularly sad and difficult time in her life 10 years previously (but also how

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she is feeling today). This reconnects her to feelings and thoughts she had forgotten about and demonstrates Morgan and Pritchard's (2005, p. 46) argument that an 'object has the power to temporarily detach an individual from the present through memory'. There is a 'pulling and pushing' from past to present and present to past; the object pulls Guinevere to the past and pushes memories of sadness into the present. It is questionable whether talking alone could touch as intensely or connect as personally to how she was feeling at that time. The journal 'opens wounds' and the ethical concerns raised for us as researchers are palpable. The journal also brought up issues and feelings forgotten and misremembered. For example, she did not remember having eaten at Burger King, so without the journal a different story may have been told.

Things are not only capable of detaching an individual from the present, they are also capable of detaching narratives and carving through layers of talk which have been told and retold for many years. During her second interview, Becky talked about being 'a chunkier, chubby child' when she was young, some 20 years previously. She was asked to bring objects to show this, and she expected her photographs would support her story.

> I found some photos cos I thought 'Oh I'm going to go and see what I was actually like as a kid' and I haven't looked at these. I don't even think my children have ever seen these photos . . . . But then I looked and thought, God I wasn't actually that big.
>
> But I, I mean I had these visions that actually, that I was huge, but – well not huge but just thought hmm, in comparison I must have been quite a bit bigger but now that I look at it I think 'no I don't think I was'. And yet I always had a vision that I was never a good size, always, always . . . you know I always thought . . . that I was big . . . It's taken me 20 years to go back and actually look at my photos and think – 'There was nothing wrong with me'. [Becky]

In another example, Fiona recalled being a fat child but believed that other children of her age were not fat. She believed that fatness and obesity were problems of society today and not a problem in the past. However, while looking at an old school photograph, she begins to tell a different story.

> And I was telling everybody that kids weren't podgy at school. Well I know this one at the back she certainly hid herself there because she was. [This one] she's quite tubby. And this girl here, we used to have a fight 'who's the weightiest?' So she was chubby too. So actually in our year there actually were quite a few chubby kids. And I was telling everybody cos in those days there weren't – but there were! . . . So it actually wasn't so unusual as people would have thought in those days. I didn't realise that until I saw this photo last week. I thought 'no, I wasn't the only one'. [Fiona]

These participants were surprised at how wrong their recollections of the past had been since in both cases the photographs did not support their talk; there is a mismatch between the visual evidence and their stories. When Becky talks about her recollections, she draws on construed visual images from her past. Such images are not constructed entirely from 'seeing' and it is likely that material and verbal aspects of the past; for example, name calling, the way clothes fitted, or simply being larger than a sibling also contribute to these visions. This visualising engages with Barthes' (1982, p. 6) concept of the 'photograph itself being invisible; it is not *it* that we see'; rather the photograph becomes an 'invisible'

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vehicle for carrying an essence or trace of a person, place or thing. Becky herself also carries a trace of the child she used to be but chooses to believe the one the photograph brings, illustrating the power of photographs – seeing is believing. Merely being *told* she was wrong about her perception of being a fat child could not have had the impact that *seeing* the images for herself did. At the end of her fourth interview, Becky commented on how significant the visual impact of the photographs had been. Our methods had encouraged her to seek out evidence that reached beyond the bounds of her recollected talk. Her reaction to being visually confronted with her past emphasises for us the power that material objects have in the construction of talk.

These participants used the things they produced as vehicles for reflection. While these things were viewed outside the context in which they were made, they clearly forced different perspectives and dimensions into the interview. Further, they produced a disconnection or unhinging of the narrative that has been (re)told until now, and instigated a different story for the researcher and a different narrative for the future.

Touching Materiality: Things Change Relationships

When researchers ask participants to produce material things, objects enter the interview and distort the space between participant and researcher. Things are capable of changing the dynamics of an interview, the relationships between participant and researcher, and between the researcher and the research itself. Fingering through objects such as diaries, books, or photographs with another person causes the physical and emotional distance between people to shrink; they can be 'communication bridges between strangers' (Collier & Collier 1986, p. 99).

An excerpt from the baby book conversation with Diana exemplifies how the gap between researcher and participant can shrink:

D: Look what I found.
J: Oh my goodness – it's your baby record.
D: Yes!
J: What does it say?
D: Oh I was a good eater, it's wonderful. These books are incredible you know.
J: They are aren't they?
D: There we are 'hungry and having good meals. Is extremely hungry and having good meals' [both laughing]. Now you see.
J: 'Is extremely hungry' yes look at that [both laughing].
D: I must have been eating like a little pig!
J: You must have been starving.
D: I'm not even a year old and look at it [both laughing while pointing at what is written].
J: You were hungry then.
D: Hungry all my life! See, some people say weight loss is something because of what you're eating; I've had it all my life! I've had an eating problem all my life! I've been hungry all my life!

For several minutes, researcher and participant become collaborative surveyors as they sit close to each other sharing what the small book unveils as each page is turned.

In some cases, old objects have not been looked at for many years. So looking, touching, and even smelling as things are taken out of boxes or suitcases in which they have been stored becomes a shared, sensorial experience. The object informs the talk and takes over the participant's performative role. By drawing attention onto itself, the object becomes a

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third party in the interview (Collier & Collier 1986). It can take pressure off participants by becoming the 'active player' in the interview. Another example of this was provided by a piece of clothing. As Charlotte stood up and held a pair of old pants in front of her, the amount of weight she had lost (51 kg), was visually obvious:

C: This is a pair of pants that I liked, because purple is my favourite colour. And these are my favourite pants. They are a size 20. And I fitted them.
J: And now you can fit into one leg [both laughing]
C: Yeah.
J: Unbelievable, can I just see you stand up . . . [both laughing and wrapping the fabric around Charlotte]. And you've kept that.
C: Yeah.
J: Because?
C: Just in case . . . I used to think that maybe if I ever got fat again, they were purple and I wouldn't find another pair of purple pants that would look good on me [laughing] . . . now they're just in my wardrobe. I don't have any reason to hold on to them. It's just in case I get big. But I don't think I will. I don't think I could let myself, or would let myself.

The pair of pants functions in the same way as fat and slim photographs do, that is, to document and support talk and illustrate a narrative about bodily change. However, they do more than prove the narrative. By physically wrapping volumes of fabric from a garment, which barely clothed the fat body but now copiously envelops its smaller slim manifestation, the distance between the two parties is shifted. The atmosphere of the interview also changes, becoming almost intimate as the object beguiles participant and researcher in their combined endeavour to uncover the past. And this can carry throughout the interview process, and influence how comfortable a participant feels about exposing, in some cases, very personal and private information. It is materiality which touches and encourages what otherwise may not have been revealed or shown. We encountered several photographs that also did this.

Many photographs were talked about with participants, but all photographs are not the same. There are certainly no good, bad, or better photographs for eliciting narrative. However, despite Sontag's (1977, p. 28) comment that 'no moment [captured by a photograph] is more important than any other moment', some photographs can have more power than others. This was particularly evident when a participant presented an unexpectedly revealing photograph and explained the story and motivation behind having it taken (see Figure 4). During her second interview, Alice produced a box containing a beautiful, hand-crafted photograph album displaying a series of professionally taken photographs.

We were surprised at her choice and eagerness to have this particular image represent her victory over fatness. Our reaction, steeped in concern over objectifying women's bodies, was that this photograph reveals too much and should be kept private. This reveals the duality underlying the research methodology. By encouraging participants to select relevant things we have given them control over what objects to present and what to withhold. Our purpose in encouraging participants to bring things to the interviews was a belief that these objects would, as Collier (1957) suggests, prod, focus, and enrich talk of lived experience. However, our participants' purpose may be quite different.

Can words do justice to or represent Alice's victory over weight with as much impact as this single photograph? Perhaps not for her. But without the story behind it, the photograph lacks meaning for us. There is no depth in an image, it cannot unfold, explain, or elaborate, in contrast to the narrative Alice tells while she is holding the photograph:

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Figure 4. Alice, the risqué photograph.

> My first husband did eventually leave. He said three things that really hurt. He said he didn't love me anymore. He said he wasn't attracted to me anymore, and that he didn't care about me anymore . . . at the time I was a little over weight um yeah and the comments just sapped all my self confidence . . . my appearance was always important to him. I had to be slim, I had to dress right, I had to look good, um he's a very um artificial type of person – like I was some kind of possession. He was not attracted to me anymore. That was the most hurtful one of all to be honest. It didn't matter that he didn't love me or didn't care. But that he wasn't attracted to me, that made me feel ugly, horrible, that hurt. I just, I felt so disappointed for my wedding [to second husband]. I couldn't do it [lose weight] for my wedding. If only I could've done it for my wedding! It was such a gorgeous dress. And honestly I would've looked better if I wasn't carrying the weight. It [having the photograph taken] was what I did once I got to my goal weight. This is sort of my, my reward. But yeah I've come a *long* way to get that. [Alice]

Alice's story sheds light on the photograph, and the photograph informs the story, but it does more. Because of its nature, this photograph disrupted the interview and distracted both participant and researcher from their purpose; it became an 'overactive player' in the interview. The photograph became the focus of an ethical debate both during the interview and for some time afterwards. Although offered as data, the photograph required negotiation to be accepted as such. Alice did not consider the photograph to be as private as we initially did and was adamant that we use it and keen that we publish it without disguise. The nature of the photograph, therefore, forced a reflexive consideration of these issues,

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balancing our concerns about objectification against her informed choice and determination to represent her success in this overtly visual way (Harrison 2004).

As researchers we conduct the research and decide how it comes to be represented; we decide which voices to quell and which texts to choose. The ethical consideration of using such images needs careful reflection, as do decisions to exclude them from publication. While excerpts of talk can capture 'anybody', images like this capture 'somebody'. As Sontag (2003, p. 81) notes, 'photographs objectify and turn a person into something that can be possessed'. Such reflection can change understandings of research boundaries, considerations of what can be data and how interpretations are shaped. These issues demonstrate the power of things to bring the relationship between participants and researchers and between researcher and research to the fore.

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Discussion

Our consideration of the power of things has so far been structured around four issues: how things provide proof of the past; how things produce more narrative depth; how things force change in the narrative; and finally, how things change the interview process and the relationships caught up in it. However, it is clear that the power of things does not fall easily into these separate modes; introducing materiality into talk never impacts on narratives in only one way. Rather, things 'multitask', and these processes are interwoven and simultaneous. While changing narratives, they change relationships; while illustrating talk, they also uncover previously forgotten experiences.

We live in a material world; we keep diaries, collect souvenirs, keep cards and letters, record events such as weddings and festivals, take holiday snapshots, and keep family memorabilia. Over a lifetime of accumulation, our materiality is replete with stories (Miller 1987; Noble 2004). Yet we often expect our participants to recount their stories separated from the multitude of material things which surround them. But these things can add significantly to the intricacies of the stories told. The work done by material objects demands our attention: they are metonymic, they have a presence that is talked about, they stand in for the past, they represent, they problematise the boundaries between people and their things (Noble 2004). Here, we have focussed on how they enhance and encourage talk, are a vehicle for reflexivity, add colour, richness and depth to accounts of lived experience, and offer researchers greater leverage for interpretation and insight. However, along with others (Frith & Harcourt 2007; Morgan & Pritchard 2005), we make no suggestion that involving materiality uncovers the essential nature of experience or the past; things are not objective representations of reality but are both material and symbolic representations simultaneously. Similarly, narratives themselves can become 'thing-like' and objectified, but we should be mindful that, like things, they are always provisional and changing, not singular and 'truthful' (Hendry 2007).

As we have shown, when material things appear, they can open up and shift memories and narratives. They carry traces of the past and of the person producing them and can force the renegotiation of identity. Not only is the present changed as the talker reconciles their past, but also their future will be changed as a different story is instituted. By challenging and changing narratives, things have the power to reconstitute the past, alter the present, and change the future. It should be emphasised that meanings are not brought by the objects because, as Radley and Taylor (2003) note, people make sense *with* objects, not *of* them. Yet things have 'humility' (Miller 2002, p. 408); they are often out of view, quietly hiding in boxes or wardrobes and avoiding attention. Sometimes they have been lost, destroyed, or discarded and cannot be produced. However, their very absence can demand attention and

be effective. This need not result in lost opportunities but can encourage reflection on the absent object and on the research process (Brookfield et al. 2008; Frith & Harcourt 2007; Hodgetts et al. 2007b).

Incorporating material objects into research can function to privilege the visual. However, the visual is not the only sense impacted when material objects are produced; the tactile impact derived from passing photographs from hand to hand or spreading them out on a table, the smell of old boxes or suitcases which house precious things, the feel of fabric, can all affect talk. Talking with and about things becomes a multidimensional, multisensorial experience for both participant and researcher (Mason & Davies 2009; Pink 2008). The process of sensing and touching materiality informs both the aesthetic and narrative-eliciting power of things.

However, we do emphasise that, with a potential plethora of things able to creep into research, care must be taken to keep the objectives of the research in view. As researchers, we need to be disciplined and try to ensure that the material things produced for our research aid rather than hinder our purpose. We should not be tempted to introduce materiality simply because it is novel or fashionable (Mason & Davies 2009; Travers 2009). Things can demand too much attention and distract both participant and researcher. However, this is not the fault of things, with their 'innately gregarious' nature, but rather reflects the need for researchers to define and hold to a clear and workable methodology.

We have focussed our attention here on the power of things for the collection of narrative data, but materiality will have value for other methodological approaches. However, things can have a variety of effects, often in combination. As we noted above, they can multitask. Whether and how the involvement of things will be beneficial in any particular research project will depend upon the things produced, their meaning for the producer, and what is made of them in the context of the production. Although things are useful for research, their explicit value for any research project cannot be known in advance.

Material objects enable us to extend the dimensions of talk, and their involvement in research allows us to recognize that the process through which things gain meaning is the same process by which meaning is given to lived experience (Miller 2002). This article adds to the growing argument for the analytical power of things in research, and we consider that it is important to connect with the material world and seek opportunities to use the power of things to grant access to deeper, richer and potentially transforming data.

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STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION
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Name of Candidate: Joanna Gemma Maria Sheridan

Name/Title of Principal Supervisor: Kerry Chamberlain

Name of Published Research Output and full reference:

The power of things.

Sheridan, J., & Chamberlain, K. (2011) The power of things. Qualitative Research in Psychology 8, 315-332

In which Chapter is the Published Work: Appendices

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Appendix M: Timelining: Visualizing experience

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Timelining: visualizing experience

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Abstract

This article discusses the uses and benefits of an innovative method of graphic elicitation; timelining. The method was developed in the context of a narrative-based research project on fatness and weight loss. Participants' weight over time was plotted on a graph, informed and elaborated by a variety of material objects such as photographs, diaries, and medical records. The timeline provided a focus for participants and prompted their stories of weight loss experiences over time. While initially intended as a simple heuristic tool for eliciting talk, over the course of the research the process of timelining became a central feature of the project. Timelining is a subtle and malleable research method. While keeping time in view, timelining documents, records, extends and deepens understandings of participants' past experiences. It encourages the construction of rich temporal narratives. It also provides opportunity for a deeper researcher-participant relationship to develop. This form of graphic elicitation has particular value for narrative forms of research.
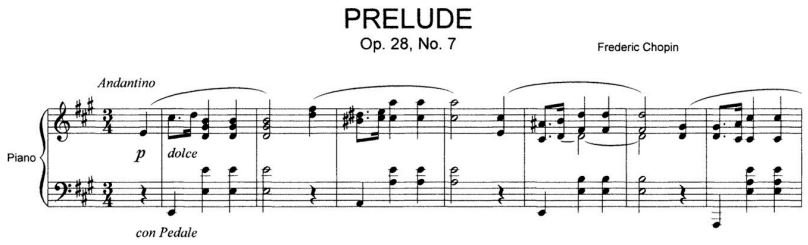
Keywords

graphic elicitation, narrative, reflexivity, time, timeline, timelining, visual methods, weight loss

In western musical notation, the music stave is a graphical (re)presentation of pitch over time. It visually represents the aural experience of music through the written symbols on a graph. A musical stave specifies the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic and

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dynamic intentions of a composer. However, each piece of written music is laid open to interpretation by a musician. No two interpretations, performances or experiences of a piece of music are ever exactly the same. We use this musical stave analogy to draw attention to the use and (re)presentation of timelining in visual research methods.

The use of visual (re)presentation and visual methods in social science research is not new (Collier, 1957). It has been used to encourage memories and stories about experience to be extended and elaborated. Visual methods research has largely used photographs, often made or created specifically for the research (Bell, 2002; Collier and Collier, 1986; Harper, 2002; Hodgetts et al., 2007; Hurdley, 2007; Keller et al., 2008; Morgan and Pritchard, 2005; Pink, 2001; Radley and Taylor, 2003; Rose, 2007). However, visual methods have also used already existing photographs, retrieved from archives and collections, albums and computers, or boxes, suitcases and the like (Creef, 2004; Sheridan and Chamberlain, in press). Besides photographs, visual researchers have used other material objects such as possessions in homes (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Miller, 2008; Noble, 2004), Lego (Gauntlett, 2007) and paintings and artworks (Bellof, 1997; Irving, 2009; Radley and Bell, 2007; Tamboukou, 2008), to encourage storytelling about past experiences.

Graphic elicitation is a drawing and arts-based form of visual methods research which tends to use diagrams and drawings created specifically for the research. Although less well-established than photo-elicitation, there is growing interest in the use of graphic elicitation in research (Bagnoli, 2009; Crilly et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 2007). The diagrams and drawings created for graphic elicitation research can represent anything from corporeal and physical objects to intangible perceptions, impressions and relationships, and can stretch the creativity and innovativeness of researchers and participants alike.

These diagrams and drawings can act as a vehicle for focusing participants' attention during interviewing and help them better understand the scope of the research (Crilly et al., 2006). By combining visual methods with talk, graphic elicitation can uncover layers of past and present experience that may not be readily represented through language alone (Gauntlett, 2007; Henwood and Shirani, in press). Nevertheless, researchers need to be mindful of the limitations of interviews and talk, since 'experience and subjectivity cannot fully make its way into language' (Squire et al., 2008: 9). While we agree that stories are only ever partial, we would argue that graphic elicitation is a valuable method for uncovering the layering and subtlety of lived experience. It has considerable value in situations where there are literacy or language limitations (Gauntlett, 2007) or the subject matter is of a sensitive nature (Cornwall, 1992). For

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instance, asking participants to draw pictures has been helpful in research with children, where such young participants may not be able to express themselves adequately in words (Bagnoli, 2009; Driessnack, 2006; Whetton and McWhirter, 1998). Dealing with the sensitive issue of contraception in a rural area of Zimbabwe, Cornwall (1992) used graphic elicitation in the form of body maps to help women gain reproductive knowledge and change contraceptive behaviour. In addition, graphic elicitation methods, used in participatory action research (Alexander et al., 2007; Cornwall, 1992; Kesby, 2000; Wienand, 2007), can facilitate a more active role for participants to 'recognize their own agency' (Kesby, 2000: 425) since researcher and participant become more reciprocally engaged in the research. Overall, graphic elicitation methods have substantial potential to contribute to qualitative research practice in a range of ways.

Time is an important feature of graph elicitation and a defining characteristic of life and of stories (Brockmeier, 2000; Murray, 1999). Time and narrative are inextricably woven together, in that narrative almost always involves time and requires a temporal component to be meaningful. Time is organized through narrative and narrative humanizes time. As Ricoeur (1984: 52) comments, 'time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence'. Also, stories can change over time as new situations and life experiences are encountered (Riessman, 2008; Sheridan and Chamberlain, in press). As for narrative, time is necessarily embedded in graphic elicitation processes of drawing and visually exploring life experience. Various researchers have drawn attention to the value of time by using timelines, life grids, event history calendars and memory books (Bagnoli, 2009; Martyn and Belli, 2002; Thomson and Holland, 2005; Wilson et al., 2007), as well as through the use of repeated interactions in longitudinal qualitative research (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003; Plumridge and Thomson, 2003; Shirani and Henwood, 2011) to encourage participants to tell stories about their lives and past experiences

In this article we explore the value of timelining as a form of graphic elicitation in research, drawing on data from a major research project about fatness and weight loss over time. Analogous to the musical stave and plotting pitch over time to offer a visual (re)presentation of music, our research uses a graphical timeline and plots weight over time to visually record and (re)present body weight, fatness and weight loss. For us the production of a timeline has a value far beyond simply plotting and recording participants' weight. The timeline was used to encourage narratives and explore the content and dimensions of a participant's memories about being fat and losing weight. When combined with interviews, it acted as an aide-memoire, focusing attention beyond what is possible through talk alone, thus becoming not only a piece of data in its own right but a vehicle through which further data were produced. Using the timeline for graphic elicitation offered us, as researchers, greater leverage for interpretation and insight.

The research project used here to illustrate these issues is a narrative analysis of stories told by nine women who were obesely overweight. These women had lost an amount of weight ranging from 23 to 62 kilograms which represented 27 to 44 percent of their body mass and had sustained their weight loss for at least five years; a difficult task (Crawford et al., 2000; Elfhag and Rossner, 2005). As an integral part of this research, participants graphically plotted their weight over time. The initial idea of plotting weight

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over time was informed by Gergen and Gergen's (1986) theoretical representations of narrative form, and in particular the 'temporal arrangement of events relevant to goal' (p. 37). Stories about weight loss are very often stories about struggling to reach a goal weight. Hence, the concept of plotting weight over time, to explore the experience of living with issues around fatness and weight, was formed.

All data collection was conducted by the first author over the course of four one-on-one interviews held at weekly or fortnightly intervals. As part of the interview process, participants were asked to produce material objects which, from a perspective of fatness and weight loss, held special meaning. These objects were used to help plot data points on the timeline and elicit stories. The sorts of objects produced included fat and slim photographs, items of clothing, personal diaries and medical records. The material objects produced were recorded as part of the data set by making copies of photographs and written material, and taking photographs of objects such as clothing and jewellery. Towards the conclusion of the interviews the participant and researcher chose objects that could be added to the graph to illustrate the timeline. Interview sessions were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed. Participants consented to allow excerpts from interviews, written texts and specific images to be used in publications. Names used here are pseudonyms.

We present our discussion of timelining in two parts. In the first, we discuss what is involved in the graphic elicitation process of creating the timeline as an object for facilitating participants' storytelling. In the second, we discuss timelining itself to show how it functions as a subtle, malleable and reflexive research method.

The machinations of graphic elicitation: plotting the timeline

In this section we discuss the mechanisms and processes of creating the timeline; the machinations involved in using this version of graphic elicitation. In our research, each participant, with the researcher's help, constructed a timeline on a sheet of A3 size graph paper. Time in years was plotted on the horizontal axis and weight in kilograms was plotted on the vertical axis. These axes provided the scaffolding around which participants framed a visual (re)presentation of their experience of fatness and weight loss and constructed their talk. Although mindful of the critical research and commentary around obesity (Campos, 2004; Flegal et al., 2005; Gard and Wright, 2005), and the use of the Body Mass Index (BMI) as a measure (Evans and Colls, 2009; Jutel, 2006), we chose to depict the familiar BMI 'categories' of underweight, normal, overweight and obese on the graph. Participants often referred to these categories in their discussions about weight before timeline plotting began and for us, as researchers, it was a way of indirectly and surreptitiously alluding to, and troubling the categorization of weight and health, and encouraging further talk around these issues. This subtle feature of plotting the timeline was especially valuable given the sensitive subject matter of this research; fatness and weight loss.

The extent of the time frame was left up to participants who were encouraged to focus the timeline on the period of their lives when weight was of interest or concern. The time frames ranged from 10 years to a whole lifetime, including childhood and a participant's

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earliest memories. The timelines were often extended out by participants as plotting of the timeline progressed.

The production of the timeline was a co-constructed endeavour. During the initial plotting session, the researcher took on the role of plotting the graph. However, what was entered onto the graph was at the discretion of the participants, who provided the details to be plotted. Each data point of weight was contemplated by the participant, discussed with the researcher and then plotted on the graph. The sequence for plotting data points was also not researcher directed but left to participants. Some participants preferred to plot memories of weight around a specific theme, whereas others were guided by time. For example, one participant used a series of sporting events to focus the development of her timeline, while another systematically plotted weight changes starting from her teenage years and moving to the present. Participants had no trouble providing data points for the graph:

> Yep. You always know how much you weigh on your wedding day! So it's just one of those things you do. You hop on the scales and it's committed to memory forever. (*Alice*)

After the initial plotting session, participants took their graphs home giving them opportunity to alter or add to details on their timelines. By leaving the graph in a prominent place at home, such as a dining room table, the timeline became the focus of further comment, questioning and revision. Participants also used the timeline to elicit stories about themselves from family members and friends, encouraging further augmentation and providing more material for discussion during subsequent interviews. Participants thus became researchers of their own lives.

When planning this research project the intention had been to complete the timeline before eliciting stories about experiences of fatness and weight loss. However, in practice the process was more complicated and less linear. When data points were plotted, every detail added to the graph provided an opportunity for participants to talk about their life experiences generally and their weight experiences in particular. Often, as one data point was plotted, or life event or activity discussed, it would draw out a story about a similar experience at a different time in the participant's life:

> I would've been weighing about 65 [kilograms] when I first saw my midwife. And then through the pregnancy with her [Amy] I got up to 80, so I was lighter than what I was with [Adam], and she was born in September 1996. Then in 1998, in August, after Adam's birth, I was at 81.8. (*Becky*)

The need to plot a data point while it was being talked about meant that plotting sometimes jumped backwards and forwards, seemingly chaotically, all over the timeline. While this process appeared somewhat haphazard it was held together by the story the participant was telling as the plotting of data points progressed. Besides plotting weight over time, participants were also asked to describe, draw or write details about various life events, activities and experiences directly onto the graph to facilitate these discussions. Examples of experiences which punctuated the timeline included surgery

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and illness, holidays and employment, shopping and leisure, birthdays and weddings, the birth of babies and the death of parents. In addition, participants were asked to produce material objects to illustrate their experiences. These objects were spread out on the table with the graph and could be called up in discussion as the timeline was developed. The objects also helped participants focus on time periods they had previously glossed over. As one participant who, for years, had kept a personal diary remarked:

> I actually don't even remember those [periods of binge eating] but they're in the journal so can only assume that they happened. The journals don't lie . . . (*Ismene*)

Involving material objects was not, as Gauntlett argues for graphic elicitation procedures, 'so much used for triangulation or to improve reliability' (2007: 110) but rather to explore experience in a variety of ways. The timeline creation process and the subsequent talk it provoked ensured a deeper, richer and more nuanced (re)presentation of experience.

The timeline alleviated the need for a list of interview questions or prompts. Like material objects generally, it was used as a point of entry into narrative about past experience (Carpiano, 2008; Henwood and Shirani, in press; Pink, 2008). Typically, while doing the timeline, the researcher could simply point to areas on the graph and ask 'What's happening here?', or, 'Tell me about this'. Such questions were all that was needed to encourage storytelling. Researcher comments like, 'that was when your second baby was born' unobtrusively connected the timeline to the storytelling to facilitate later analysis. Another strength of our timeline creation process was the utility of time. The use of multiple interviews not only delivered some of the strengths of qualitative longitudinal research (Corden and Millar, 2007; Neale and Flowerdew, 2003; Saldaña, 2003; Shirani and Henwood, 2011) but also served to ensure that time was central to our graphic elicitation process on several levels. The availability of time afforded participant and researcher occasions and opportunities to get to know each other better and to develop a more open, closer relationship. Also, the physicality of drawing the graph forced them to sit close together as they plotted each data point. This encouraged the physical and emotional distance between them to shrink: the timeline became a bridge between two strangers. Our research process also allowed participants time to reflect on past experiences, time to seek out material objects, time to reflect on what they had said in previous interviews, and time to think about what they were doing as the timeline was drawn, changed and augmented over several interview sessions. The timeline, with its constant construction and reconstruction, rather than being an initial pre-interview stage, became a central focus for the research.

It is important to note that graphic elicitation may not be valuable or suitable for all participants or all situations. Being confronted by visual (re)presentations of life experiences can be illuminating for some participants, but upsetting and disturbing for others (Sheridan and Chamberlain, in press). For example, in our research one participant's weight ranged from 60 to 199 kilograms, thus finding a workable scale for the vertical axis for the graph was problematic. The graphical scale could not allow the subtleties of

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smaller weight losses and gains, essential to the method and personally important to the participant, to be shown. In this case, plotting the timeline became disruptive and unhelpful. However, by developing two graphs with different scales, plotting could continue. Just as a researcher carefully adapts questions in an interview according to previous participant responses, a researcher using graphic elicitation needs to modify or abandon drawing if it becomes a nuisance or an impediment. Graphic elicitation is not a prescriptive method for research and its value must be continually evaluated.

In the planning stages of this research the timeline was conceived of as a heuristic tool to promote narrative and encourage participants' storytelling about fatness and weight loss. However, this pragmatic approach to our graphical elicitation method proved too simplistic and linear. In practice the creation of the timeline developed into a process we call timelining and became an integral part of the research. The following section discusses the complexities of both the timeline as a resource for documenting and recording past experience, and the process of timelining as a vehicle for reaching beyond and between mere dots and lines on a graph to enrich and deepen storytelling.

The process of timelining: unravelling the complexities

The evolution and unexpected layering and complexity of timelining are explored in this next section. For our purposes we have chosen to discuss the process of timelining in three phases of documentation, extension and reflection. Visual data are often discussed in this way, especially in biographical and memory-based research (Sheridan and Chamberlain, in press; Thomson and Holland, 2005). However, although we consider these phases separately, the processes of timelining need not be sequential, nor are they easily separable. Timelining can document, extend and reflect simultaneously.

Documentation and record: drawing the lines

It can be difficult to separate the object of the timeline from the process of timelining, yet documenting and recording is a necessary first step of the timelining process. As previously shown, the plotting of data points onto the graph documents and records what a participant weighed at a particular time in their life. For a composer and musician a manuscript documents how a piece of music should be played and for a participant the timeline documents some very specific information about a very specific part of their life:

> I got my doctor to print this out for me. Um, he hasn't got all of my weights but that's just from 1995 to September 2006. (*Charlotte*)

Dot by dot as the graph is plotted the timeline documents what a person weighed, but it also documents when babies were born, what a person looked like in photographs and where and when a wedding took place and so on. For this research the documentation of weight, objects and events provided a framework which participants regularly referred back to when seeking support for storytelling.

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Extension and distraction: beyond the lines

The timeline, as a completed document, is singular and object-like, but the *process* of timelining is multiply faceted. It is this process that reaches beyond the mundane, using the timeline to explore interesting perspectives on experience, storytelling and time. Construction of a timeline can begin with a single dot. However, in our research, *doing timelining* became a complex amalgam of: interrogating weight data, life events and activities; finding and discussing the meaning of material objects; a focus for talk; a means to capture the importance of time; as well as producing an object for discussion in its own right.

Participants were not asked to restrict themselves to any form of temporal linearity while creating the timeline, but they were guided by the grid of the graph. It is worth pointing out that the linearity of the timeline, suggested by the stricture of the axes on the graph, is probably no different from the constraint imposed on storying by a list of questions during interviewing (Kvale, 2006). In practice, the graph's axes did not curb the unfettered nature of plotting the timeline. As more and more data points were plotted participants were able to join the dots together and the graph began to picture a neat and tidy, linear display of the fluctuation of weight over time. However, the messiness of timelining is hidden by the tidy, albeit zig-zaggy, upward and downward movement of time passing on the timeline.

Timelining has the power to attend to small details and skim over others. With music, the conductor of an orchestra can pull apart one of Chopin's concerti to draw attention to the nuance and detail within a single bar of music. The musicians can practise this bar over and over again and derive much from its intricacies. Yet, at other times, whole sections of the concerto are not laboured over but instead skimmed over. Similarly, timelining makes possible the scrutiny of small details of past experience, times past, but also time passing. On some occasions single weight-related events can be elaborated and expanded upon; at other times many years are glossed over with little comment. In contrast to Alice knowing what she weighed on her wedding day, the following excerpt demonstrates how periods of time can be skimmed over:

> I've got lots of little photographs, this is probably the most important one of me which sounds stupid but that's me hovering around 11–12 stone-ish which I'm always. This is where I started this and it seems to last . . . to put a date on that; that's my dear old dad who's gone. Um this would be um just before I left, 1980. I left in July 1980 so it's my last photograph where I was hovering 11–12 [70 to 76 kilograms] I couldn't give you the exact [date] but it was always 11 or 12 and it was like that from here so that's some 15 years worth.
>
> And then I came to NZ and I still was wearing this [a dress she is wearing in the photograph] um when I first started so um 10 years worth. So I'm obviously the same person. Although, I think it [the dress] was perhaps a bit slimmer on me there. Yeah, but having said that, I actually look slimmer there (in one photograph) than I was there (in another photograph) and yet that was only a month apart. That's actually quite interesting could be the dress – looking horrible in it. It's the same me but that's a month later. (*Fiona*)

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Fiona used the events in photographs to identify and guide where particular data points should be positioned on the graph, although they are snapshots of events in her life unrelated to being fat or losing weight. She uses features within them, such as the dress she was wearing, to determine what she weighed at different times in her life. As others (Collier and Collier, 1986; Sontag, 2003) have noted, these images, as a source of information, are bridges to events in the past; the story Fiona builds connects her past experience to her present need to plot the graph. Had her motivation for looking at these photographs been anything other than our research about weight, then the story may well have been very different. An image produced by a photograph, although representative of an event in the past, is seen differently every time a story is told. In other words, it is the present which shapes the past, but it is also stories about the past which shape the present. Timelining pulls time, events, photographic images and storytelling together.

Previously (Sheridan and Chamberlain, in press), we have discussed how fat and slim photographs misleadingly and unjustly condense the experience of losing weight, which can take months and in some cases years to achieve. The instants of time captured by fat and then slim photographs, when used to represent the success of dieting, often oversimplify a journey of change that may have been convoluted and protracted. An instant, captured by a photograph, can confine and define experience (Barthes, 1982; Sontag, 2003). In the excerpt above, Fiona says the image is her; 'it is the same me'. Unlike the significance of Alice's wedding day, the period Fiona talks about here may have been unmarked and ordinary so time escaped; certainly time pertaining to weight was unremarkable. The image she talks about is given responsibility for 15 years of lived experience during which little has changed except time. While time did not stand still, with this photograph 15 years have (col)lapsed in an instant.

The timeline keeps time in view. The stricture of the horizontal time axis is a constant reminder of the traditional mode of temporality: an arrow-shaped, chronologically linear procession of past, present, and future. However, as Polkinghorne (1988: 132) argues, time is not simply a 'series of "nows," instants that exist along a timeline' but an abstract (re)presentation of time. While the *timeline* in our research can appear to promote this notion of time as a series of 'nows', in practice *doing timelining* plays with and manipulates this linear (pro)portioning of time.

Time is not simply a chronological construct; the subjective experience of time is more complex and varied (Brockmeier, 2000). As Neale and Flowerdew (2003: 192) argue, 'Understanding how people move through time, use time or relate to time – their strategies for making sense of the past or navigating their futures – requires an understanding of the varied and individualized circumstances of their day-to-day lives.' This was true for our participants who, at various points during timelining, located themselves in different contours of time (Brockmeier, 2000; Neale and Flowerdew, 2003), historical time (talking about weight during childhood compared to the present), circular time (talking about knowing why previous attempts to lose weight failed), cyclical time (talk about weight change at Christmas), spiral time (talking about weight being out of control), personal time (talk that linked weight to mortality, provoked by the death of a parent), and future time (talking about losing weight to find a partner).

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The time signature of a piece of music stipulates the number of beats in a bar but the number of notes within a bar can vary substantially. Some bars of music can be very simple and uncomplicated whereas others are elaborate and detailed. Similarly, timelining reveals how the experience of time can be one of fits and starts; large pieces of time can be compressed while others are expanded. Through storytelling, time is measured by what has happened; how much weight a participant has lost or how much something has changed. For researchers interested in narrative, change is of great interest (Denzin, 2001; Gergen and Gergen, 1986). Since time is at a storyteller's mercy, it can be tempting to read a lack of change as time when nothing is happening. However, with timelining it is possible to draw attention to spaces on the timeline where data points are conspicuous by their absence. Drawing attention to such spaces in our research provided a versatile vehicle for elaboration, explanation and discussion, similar to the value missing photographs have in photo-elicitation and photo-production research (Brookfield et al., 2008; Hodgetts et al., 2007; Sheridan and Chamberlain, in press). Periods of absences or lack of change are significant, for like periods of silence in a piece of music, they can be very poignant indeed.

The timeline can also serve as a distraction, especially for participants concerned or shy about being interviewed. Intensive probing during interviews can make participants uncomfortable and uneasy, whereas an object like a timeline can distract, and by providing something to talk about, make a participant's need to perform less arduous (Sheridan and Chamberlain, in press). By drawing attention to itself, the timeline became a third and active player in the interview, since elicitation took place around the timeline instead of around the participant. In particular, timelining made it possible to interrogate the timeline's coherence, compare one part of it with another, and compare its story with the stories told through the photographs and other objects produced, to more deeply explore aspects of experience. Throughout this process, participant and researcher almost take a backseat to the timeline's centrality; their relationship is changed as the timeline comes more strongly into view. Also, as has been found when using photographs (Collier and Collier, 1986), the timeline's active role meant that repeated interviews were never stilted or stale. Timelines are malleable objects which are open to change, fine-tuning, and augmentation; they need never be finished but can continue to add freshness and newness, like the stories that are drawn from them.

Reflection and insight: between the lines

An important feature of timelining is that it allows considerable time for reflection and contemplation. Through timelining participants became researchers of their own lives by reading between the lines of the timeline and gaining insight into aspects of the past and the present and making plans for the future.

Details about participants' experiences, such as events and activities, could be interrogated and discussed before, during, and after they were incorporated into the timeline. They could be discussed on their own, or in relation to other details plotted on the graph, as well as in relation to material objects produced, like photographs and previous talk. Participants often talked about enjoying the complex nature of timelining. Sometimes it was the combination of using material objects, drawing the timeline, and the utility of

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time for contemplation that was valuable. The following participant mentions the insight derived through taking part in the research:

> Yeah, well it was a big opening by going through these photos and sitting there [at home] chatting about it [the timeline]. It's interesting. And getting their [family] feedback on things and what they thought. No, it's an interesting game. It's been a big eye-opener this whole study has. Never ever thought about it; why I was large . . . it was because I was so lonely. So it's an amazing opening to see that. (*Becky*)

Becky does not credit her insight to any one aspect of our research method; she is grateful to the whole study. It was the demands of timelining, the to-ing and fro-ing between weight records, photographs, material objects, events and activities, talk, and time for reflection, which enabled her insight.

Timelining provided participants with a variety of perspectives from which to view their lives. For example, sometimes it allowed the close scrutiny of important events like a wedding or the death of a parent. These events were frequently significant turning-points in a participant's life and can be described as life-changing epiphanal moments (Denzin, 2001; Turner, 1986). However, participants can be so involved and caught up in the immediacy of these experiences that events are only recognized as life changing or insightful some time after the fact (Ellis and Bochner, 1992; Frank, 1993). For example, by graphically plotting weight and events and connecting them to time, timelining provided Becky with a vehicle for hindsight. She attributes her decision to change her life to a string of specific events:

> If you look at it [the timeline], there were so many trigger points over such a short period, of over, you know, like a couple of months, there were so many little things . . . and then the doctor finalized it. That's why I ended up doing it [losing weight]. There was the Jacque E [a bad experience in a clothing store], there was splitting of my pants, there was my husband's work-do – trying to find something to buy [clothes], and then my doctor. And they were just such – so many little things. (*Becky*)

At other times, timelining encouraged participants to stand back and take a bird's-eye view of the timeline as a whole; the picturing of a lifetime. Here a participant talks about the melancholy she experienced as she nostalgically looks at her life:

> It's been quite interesting for me for reflection I think. It's been really funny, really, really, strange, not sad, not emotional . . . it was just, I suppose going back 50 odd years, I suppose in a nutshell . . . going through my life. (*Fiona*)

For many participants creating the timeline and coming face-to-face with a visual (re) presentation of life was powerful, if not a little disconcerting.

Timelining also encouraged participants to compare one part of the timeline with another, or one part of life-experience with another. In the following excerpt Ismene discovers a portion of the graph she had not noticed while plotting her weight. She did not give any significance to it until she looked at the timeline as a whole. Through

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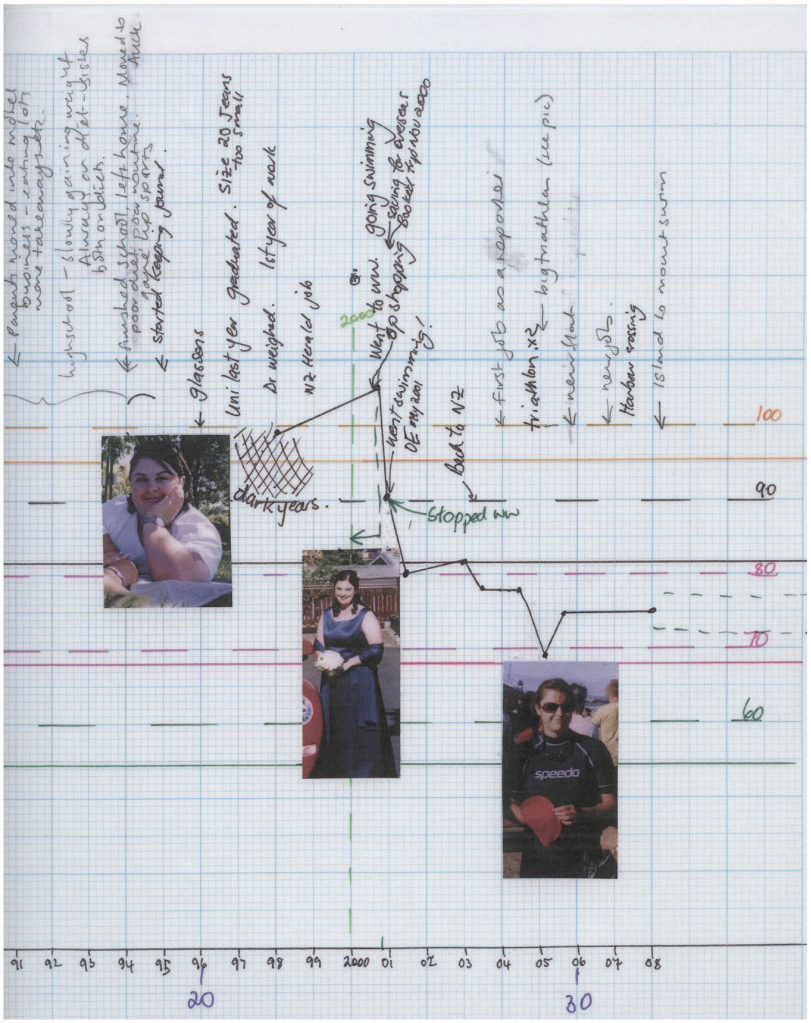


Figure 1. A segment of the timeline created by Ismene
The graph is accented with events, activities and photographs important to her. The horizontal axis spans the years of her life from 1993 to 2008. The vertical axis is weight in kilograms.

timelining she became captivated by what she described as a 'wiggle in the line', and compared it with other sections of the timeline. The portion of the timeline she is talking about is shown in Figure 1 and refers to the more recent, right-hand section of her graph. Ismene uses this section of the timeline to reflect on the past, and, in the present, she makes plans for the future:

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> I thought that it [drawing the timeline] was quite helpful. I'd never looked at it in that way before. I think, looking at that and seeing how I did have that little kind of wiggle in the line in the last five years. It reinforced for me that I really don't want to do that. I don't want to be yo-yoing around and that if I can just keep that nice steady line within the weight range I am in, then that will be fine. (*Ismene*)

The wiggle in the line is a fluctuation in Ismene's weight, and while the wiggle may appear to be a minor aberration in the timeline, the lack of control it represents is not minor for her:

> All of those feelings came back and it was really a bit sort of panicky and you start to think, 'Oh my God is this going to spiral out of control. Am I going to lose it all? All that hard work that I did, is it going to be lost?' (*Ismene*)

For Ismene, fluctuation in weight is very undesirable and noticing the wiggle in the timeline elicited concerns about being able to keep control of her weight. Seeing this small section of her timeline reinforces her resolve to maintain control in the future, to avoid fluctuation and to maintain a nice steady line.

The timeline is a valuable tool for reflection. It can work to reveal, uncover and expose. However, it can also work to conceal, hide and disguise. 'The nice steady line' which Ismene desires hides her anxiety about losing control and the constant dissatisfaction she feels; she can never relax:

> [I] never consciously stopped wanting to lose weight – still think I need to lose 5–10kg more. Probably stops me from feeling too relaxed. (*Ismene*)

Timelining also provides insights for us as researchers. For example, the story elicited by the 'wiggle' in the timeline gave insight into the never-ending-struggle participant's face in trying to maintain significant weight loss. If Ismene had not focused on, and discussed this 'wiggle' we would have read this section of her timeline as success given that she had maintained her major weight loss for seven years. However, timelining provided insight into her fear of losing control. This illustrated how for successfully maintaining significant weight loss the fear of major failure is ever present; the battle is never won (Sarlio-Lahteenkorva, 2000). The complexities of timelining allowed us to extend, elaborate and deepen storytelling, and enabled insights into the meanings of fatness and weight loss.

Conclusion

The music analogy is apt for timelining. Writing music is similar to plotting a timeline; both require a composer. As a musical manuscript has a time signature, similarly timelining keeps time in view. Rehearsing specific sections and sequences of a piece of music is analogous to the close scrutiny or glossing over of events and episodes on a timeline. As music invites interpretation so too does timelining. Being laid open to interpretation by musicians and storytellers, no two performances of a piece of music or a story are ever

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exactly the same. Neither are the understandings of different audiences. A piece of music can stir up memories deep within us as can the process of timelining. When musical instruments play together each makes a contribution to the music produced, and different instruments create different harmonies. Equally, the instruments of timelining – talk, the timeline, photographs, objects, notes, participants and researchers – all contribute to the process of timelining and the facilitation of storytelling.

This article opened with a prelude by Chopin, who mostly composed for the piano. In the few cases where he also composed for an orchestra, the piano was still the star, albeit ably assisted and supported by the other instruments. Similarly, a good deal of qualitative research relies on talk to gain insight into the intricacy and texture of lived experience. However, talk can be very ably assisted and supported by visual methods (Bagnoli, 2009; Collier and Collier, 1986; Frith and Harcourt, 2007; Harper, 2002; Hurdley, 2006, 2007; Irving, 2009; Keightley and Pickering, 2006; Mannay, 2010; Pink, 2001; Rose, 2007; Sheridan and Chamberlain, in press) and, as this article has shown, by timelining in particular.

In this article we have described how a timeline, a simple graph of weight augmented with life events and photographs, developed into an informative, reflexive, method of graphic elicitation which we call timelining. As a form of graphic elicitation, timelining has a number of important features. First, timelining keeps time directly in view, providing understandings and interpretations of the past, and how pasts shape presents and futures. As Brockmeier (2000: 51) states, time is omnipresent; there is 'no aspect of human reality that is without temporal dimension'. Unlike most forms of visual research, which tend to treat time as unobtrusive, timelining retains a clear focus on time in all its varied dimensions, including historical time, circular time, cyclical time, spiral time, personal time and future time. Further, the timelining process demands time; time for participants to plot and extend the timeline, time to seek out material objects and link them to the timeline, time for the development of closer participant-researcher relationships, and time for reflection and insight by both participants and researchers.

Second, timelining is a malleable and adaptable method. It is malleable because it can be used in different ways across a single project, with different components of the timeline coming in and out of view at different times. For example, at one time it can focus on the changes in a person across a series of photographs or at another the timeline can be left out in view for family members to embellish. Timelining is adaptable because it has the potential for use in different ways across different research projects. As one example, it could be used in migration research, drawing on time, photographs and material objects, to explore the ways that transnational links are forged and maintained.

Third, timelining has particular value for narrative research. The timeline provides a means to lay out for a participant a comprehensive, multi-textual (re)presentation of her life. It pulls together rich data, promotes narrative accounting, and allows both participants and researchers to focus in on specific aspects of the data to deepen and enrich storytelling. It is a particularly effective means of highlighting turning points and epiphanies in people's lives.

Fourth, timelining is a highly reflexive research process, for researchers but especially for participants. The systematic agglomeration of data onto the timeline allows participants to contemplate the life (re)presented, to gain insights into their experiences,

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to explore dimensions of continuity and change in their lives and often to see things from new perspectives. In so doing, participants can effectively become researchers of their own lives.

In this article we have used a project about weight to illustrate the value of timelining for cultivating and advancing storytelling about fatness and weight loss. However, we would argue that timelining is a generic method, particularly valuable when the focus of attention is on events changing over time. Timelining is a form of graphic elicitation that extends graphic elicitation methodology, and is particularly relevant for narratively-driven research, with all the advantages we have discussed for visualizing experience.

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DRC 16

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STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION
TO DOCTORAL THESIS CONTAINING PUBLICATIONS

(To appear at the end of each thesis chapter/section/appendix submitted as an article/paper or collected as an appendix at the end of the thesis)

We, the candidate and the candidate's Principal Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

Name of Candidate: Joanna Gemma Maria Sheridan

Name/Title of Principal Supervisor: Kerry Chamberlain

Name of Published Research Output and full reference:

Timelining: Visualizing experience

Sheridan, J., Chamberlain, K., & Dupuis, A. (2011). Timelining: Visualizing experience. Qualitative Research, 11(5), 552-569

In which Chapter is the Published Work: Appendices

Please indicate either:

- The percentage of the Published Work that was contributed by the candidate: 75%

  and / or
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