

“My Mother Hates Her Body, She Swears She Loves Mine”: The Effects of Socialization
Through Mothering on Daughters’ Body Talk and Intuitive Eating.

By

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ABSTRACT:

This study examines the effects of early socialization about the body within mother/daughter relationships and its impact on the practice of Intuitive Eating (a practice of listening to one's own body regarding food, rather than following dieting rules). Though researchers have widely explored mother/daughter relationships and dieting, this study seeks to build on this previous research, while also examining it through a new lens of adult women's experiences with Intuitive Eating. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 adult women who identify as Intuitive Eaters. Interviews focused on answering three research questions; (1) how does early socialization about food and the body shape how adult women think and talk about their bodies? (2) how do the interactions daughters have with their mothers impact adult women's body satisfaction? (3) how do these early experiences play a role in women's current practices of Intuitive Eating? Findings show that women remember being heavily socialized as young girls about the body and dieting, and that they recall their mothers playing an important role in this socialization. Even without open discussion on such topics, women recall as children observing their mothers' feelings about their own bodies and dieting practices. Early communication patterns about the body between mothers and daughters continue into adulthood and shape Intuitive Eating practices. Although Intuitive Eating changes practitioners' approach to food and the body, the women in this study remain guarded about body talk. Intuitive Eaters who are now mothers, however, express the desire to establish new communication patterns about the body with their own children based on Intuitive Eating principles.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	4
RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	12
METHODS.....	14
Table 1. Respondent Demographics.....	14
FINDINGS.....	17
Gender Roles & Diet Culture.....	17
Awareness of Body.....	19
Mothers Build Body Talk.....	23
Making Sense of Mom.....	30
Guarding & Sharing Intuitive Eating.....	32
Doing Things Differently.....	38
CONCLUSION & FURTHER RESEARCH.....	41
REFERENCES.....	46
APPENDIX.....	49
Recruitment Materials: Initial Post.....	49
Recruitment Materials: Initial Inquirers Reply Email	50
Interview Guide.....	51

Introduction

Socialization is the process through which we build our ideas, habits, and understanding of ourselves that is often unique to our experiences in society (Cooley 1922; Goffman 1990; Mead et al. 2015; Shilling 2012). Early experiences within families help children build a sense of self, creating a framework for how they will view and talk about their bodies as adults (Bandura 1986; Boyd 1989; Kagan 1958). Mothers often play an important role in the lives of daughters regarding early socialization about the body (Chodorow 1978a; Fischer 1981). Mothers are often at the forefront of daughters' experiences around food and building an understanding of their bodies because of traditional gender roles, and many sociologists have written about the role that mothers play in the production and consumption of food. DeVault (1994) details how feeding became "women's work" along with the other household and childcare work due to gender roles within dominant, Western, industrial society.

The conversation about food in the U.S. includes a complicated discussion about diet and what makes for a "healthy body." Through feminist scholars seeking to define the social pressures on women to lose weight in the 1980s, the term 'diet culture' came to indicate the social expectations that dictate how women should eat and look (Bordo 2013; Frost 2001). Research has shown that women engage in extreme dieting techniques and suffer eating disorders far more so than men, and much has been written about the generational experience of dieting trends for mothers and daughters (Benedikt, Wertheim, and Love 1998; Faw et al. 2021).

In response to U.S. diet culture, a new approach to food and health emerged in the late 1990s called "Intuitive Eating," a practice that encourages people to listen to their bodies' cues about hunger instead of following dietary rules and restrictions (10 Principles of Intuitive Eating). However, Intuitive Eating did not become a popular practice until recently. For many

women, Intuitive Eating challenges early socialization about the body, which they often learned through their mothers. The way that daughters communicate about their bodies and eating habits with their mothers, as adult women practicing Intuitive Eating now, is an important new area of research to explore.

Though studies have looked at whether mothers who diet pass on those habits to their daughters (Benedikt et al. 1998), the role of Intuitive Eating in mother-daughter relationships has not been examined in the sociological literature. I believe this to be due to Intuitive Eating being a somewhat new trend in popular culture. Studies on body dissatisfaction and female relationships have found women were able to bond with each other through the ability to talk about their diet or “co-ruminate” about issues they have with their bodies and that women connect through this diet culture (Benedikt et al. 1998; Faw et al. 2021; Ogle and Damhorst 2004).

So, how might the practice of Intuitive Eating be affected by the early understandings young women form about their bodies? Relatedly, what role does the often-complex relationship daughters build with their mothers play in daughters’ ability or willingness to communicate with their mothers as adults about their new view on food and weight loss? Equally important are the social implications Intuitive Eating may have on the women who practice it for their anti-diet beliefs, and how they might think others may perceive them in social interactions going forward.

This thesis adds to the sociological literature on the process of socialization, particularly about the sense of self and the body. Using in-depth interviews with 15 adult women practicing Intuitive Eating, I highlight the unique role of mother/daughter relationships in the lives of daughters. I also explore the way that body image is created and discussed within these relationships, and its later impacts on Intuitive Eating. First, I explore early memories in

women's lives of diet culture, especially those involving their mothers. I show that in the absence of discussion about the body with their mothers, young women look to others around them to build their understandings. Secondly, I confirm and further previous research that finds young women's body image are greatly impacted by their mothers' dieting practices and what mothers say about their own bodies (Jones and Young 2021; Ogle and Damhorst 2004). I also highlight how daughters continue childhood patterns of communication into adulthood and Intuitive Eating. Findings also show that although the women who practice Intuitive Eating display a change in body image beliefs from their mothers, similar childhood rules about body talk continue even after this shift away from diet culture. Furthermore, women feel guarded about discussing Intuitive Eating, often perceiving themselves as stigmatized for their new beliefs. Finally, Intuitive Eaters who are now mothers often recognize this pattern of communication around the body established with their mothers, and they stress the desire to change it with their own children. This study highlights an important area of social concern for women's body image: how early experiences learning how to talk and interact with others, especially mothers, about the body, shape current body image.

Literature Review

Socialization and Building the Body

Sociologists have long been interested in the process through which people form their ideas about the self through others around them (Cooley 1922; Goffman 1990; Mead et al. 2015; Shilling 2012). Symbolic Interactionism is a framework for understanding how social institutions and interactions with other people in society can shape personal perceptions and behavior (Mead et al. 2015). Within this framework, Shilling (2012:103) outlines how the self is ‘embodied,’ meaning that people ‘have a body and are a body,’ that is created and shaped within the social influences that they exist around (Merleau-Ponty et al. 2011). Characteristics that are typically thought of as biological, such as the body, are products of this socialization process and societal standards. The body can also form a foundation for and contribute to social relationships, in that the meanings one subscribes to their body and other bodies around them impact the interactions they might have (Shilling 2012:64). Foucault (1990) also discussed how ideas about the body and sexuality are cultural constructs, with external standards for the body regulating whether they meet societal norms. This framework is important to this study in which I examine how social norms about weight and body standards are imposed on the body for women.

As this understanding of oneself and the body is formed, the individual can become self-consciousness about others’ viewpoints of them (Cooley 1922). Cooley (1922:208) outlined in the ‘Looking Glass Self’ how monitoring oneself from the perspective of others becomes a process through which one “lives in the minds of others.” Through this process, we can develop emotions, particularly pride and shame, based on how we believe others see us. This is similar to the way women can form strong feelings around what they believe about perceptions of their size and weight and use dieting as a way to meet social standards in order to feel pride about their

body (Bordo 2013). Goffman also theorized about the experience of societal standards, particularly when it comes to what he saw as social stigma, in which an individual experiences social disapproval due to “an attribute that is deeply discrediting,” going against the norm (Goffman 1963:3). Discredited stigma is the process by which we assume we have a known or visible stigma that others will judge us for, affecting how we approach and interact with others (1963:42). For Intuitive Eating, which rejects the norms of diet culture, this principle of stigma is important to understanding Intuitive Eaters’ role in society. The social context and norms in which the body and sense of the body are created is important to forming how one believes one’s body should look. This groundwork is important to this study as motherhood can be a crucial social institution through which daughters are taught and experience this sense of body and ultimately diet culture.

Mothers and Daughters

Much has been written about the relationship between mothers and daughters through the various stages of life (Boyd 1989; Chodorow 1978; Fischer 1981). Regarding socialization, some theorists see the bond between mothers and daughters as particularly important in childhood as it is such a unique relationship. Nancy Chodorow (1978) writes that mothers are more likely to form a unique connection with their daughters compared to their sons due to mothers caring for them through a “oneness” of the relationship because of their similar sex and reflection of themselves (Chodorow 1978). Although many sociological studies examine families from a Western perspective, there are likely to be cross-cultural differences within families.

Social psychologists have also examined the ways children form ideas about themselves through experiences with adults (Bandura 1986; Kagan 1958). Children identify with adults

around them by watching others who they perceive as similar to themselves and can ultimately adopt their habits and values, which can lead daughters to mirror their mothers' ideas about the body (Kagan 1958). The identification girls have with their mothers continues throughout their life as they transition into adulthood and mothers often see themselves in their daughters (Fischer 1981). These theories around the connection that daughters form with their mothers, and how it affects their understanding of themselves and the standards they believe they should embody, help readers to understand the findings within this study.

The perspective of mother/daughter relationships from the viewpoint of daughters as adults has been an area of interest for sociologists. In a study of women in London, ages 20-42, respondents reported feeling a high level of physical contact and shared identity with their mothers, but not similar levels of intimacy in their relationships with them (O'Connor 1990). The perceptions daughters have of their relationships with their mothers and possible struggles can also be important to the relationships eventually formed with their own daughters. Research has found that women perform a "double-identification process" (Chodorow 1999:204) in which a mother re-experiences the issues she had with her own mother through experiences with her daughter (Smith et al. 1998). A daughter's awareness of her mother extends not just to the relationship formed between the two of them, but also to the choices she sees her mother make in life. Mothers can have a significant impact on their daughters through their own career and marriage choices, leading daughters to similar life-role decisions modeled by their mothers (Rollins and White 1982). This research about daughters' perceptions of their mothers and the impact they can have on their life is an important foundation this study builds upon. As daughters begin to make their own decisions in their adult years, the experiences and

understanding of their mothers can prove to be a significant factor in the way daughters now operate in other situations and relationships.

Mothers and Food Work

In regard to socialization around food and the body, mothers often play a crucial role in young girls' early ideas about what they eat and what constitutes health (DeVault 1994). DeVault (1994) studied how cooking and preparing family meals became women's work that was defined as an act of love and crucial to good mothering. Dinner time becomes a place where mothers can "produce the family" by providing a space for them to come together at the end of the day, around a meal that they have prepared based on their families' preferences of food (1994:91). Likewise, sociologists have also written about the way even non-normative families such as single mothers strive to maintain traditional family roles, coining the term "doing family" as they produce and support appropriate family behaviors (Hertz 2006; Sarkisian 2006). Mothers are more often the ones to enforce family norms about appearance on their children instead of fathers, and more likely to comment on their daughters' weight rather than their sons' weight (Smetana 1988; Smolak, Levine, and Schermer 1999). Through all of this, mothers can become expected to be experts about what their children should be eating. For example, Harman and Cappellini (2018) found that mothers associated emotional expression with the way they pack their kids' lunchboxes. Within this study, the authors discuss how sociologist Sharon Hays' (1996) concept of "Intensive Mothering," in which mothers spend ample amounts of their time and resources caring for their child to protect them from any harm, has made it a requirement that they know what their child should be eating and which foods are seen as "harmful" (Harman and Cappellini 2018:468). Though I only interview daughters, the historical role that mothers

have often taken in socialization within the family unit is important in this study due to the fact that most respondents learned about the topics of food and the body from their own mothers, as shown in my findings.

When it comes to diet culture, mothers are also more responsible for their daughter's weight, leaving them to navigate different approaches to addressing it when their girls reach their teen years, and their bodies begin to change. Damhorst (2004) conducted interviews with twenty mothers and their daughters regarding this issue, ultimately assigning four different methods by which mothers approach the conversation on weight: (1) direct encouragement to diet or continue dieting through praise or instruction; (2) avoidance of fat phobia in which they try to direct their daughter away from dieting; (3) modeling their own dietary behaviors for them; (4) a hands-off posturing to the complicated subject. Within these different types of communication, both a bonding and a tension can be created between daughters and their mothers. Regardless of the communication method, what is most common is that daughters can specifically identify what their mothers dislike about their own bodies and the need to change themselves through dieting. Damhorst suggests that mothers are impactful to ideas about the body and help build them through how they communicate with their daughters about it, whether they are direct or indirect in this discourse.

Diet Culture

There are two opposing ideas about health and bodies contained in the labels “Diet Culture” and “Intuitive Eating” practiced by women. The research on these two approaches to health is heavily disproportional, with more available research on diet culture than intuitive eating. Diet culture is a term that exists due to feminist theorists who sought to define it, as

researchers continually tried to explain the position of anti-diet culture but lacked a comprehensive definition that scholars could agree upon. Through the use of qualitative surveys, some feminist researchers have come to define diet culture as myths about the health of certain foods and eating practices that promote a hierarchy of bodies based on societal standards of weight (Jovanovski and Jaeger 2022). However, dieting and the effects of disordered eating have long been a concern for feminists.

Bordo (2013) details the early efforts by feminists to bring attention to how eating disorders were socially fueled by the expectations and pressure that women faced. Prior to this, eating disorders were looked at by clinicians from purely a medical standpoint, and being diagnosed as such. Many feminist scholars sought to highlight how many of these dangerous eating patterns were fueled by women trying to achieve the “cultural construction of femininity” that stipulated what women should weigh and how they should eat (Bordo 2013:47). Even as these eating and body image disorder diagnoses have been developed by medical and mental health professionals, treatments have continued to address those struggling at mostly individual levels. Frost (2001) outlines the different psychological approaches to body-hatred and disordered eating in young women, highlighting that the social and cultural context that contribute to these problems are often not the focus of these treatments.

Body dissatisfaction is not an uncommon feeling for women, with evidence suggesting 84% of women in the U.S. are unhappy with their bodies (Faw et al. 2021). In fact, many women use their dissatisfaction with the way their bodies look or shame around their weight as a way to create solidarity between one another by participating in repeated discussions over what they see as negative parts of their body and not ideal thinness (Faw et al. 2021; Runfola et al. 2013).

Mothers also play an important role in creating and reinforcing diet culture for young girls, as Chelsea Jones and Stacy Young (2021) found in their research about the strong effects that mothers can have on their daughters' body image issues due to how they talk about their body around them. Young women take cues and build their understandings about how the body can and should be talked about from not only other women in their lives, but also from their mother. Similar to this study is how Rachel Benedikt and colleagues (1998) found that while moderate weight loss attempts (calorie counting and exercising) in daughters correlated to encouragement to diet from their mothers, extreme weight loss tactics (crash dieting and starvation) in daughters correlated more with mothers talking negatively about their own bodies. Given these concerns about women's worsening body image leading to concerning dieting techniques and the social factors that often propel women to these actions, this study seeks to provide a clearer picture of how cultural ideas about femininity are an area for socialization about the body.

Intuitive Eating

Intuitive Eating is presently being defined by anti-diet dietitians, licensed dietitians who do not believe in weight loss as a main goal of nutrition and health counseling, and those who seek to dissuade people from diet culture and eventual disordered eating. The concept of Intuitive Eating emerged in the 1990s as two nutritionists, Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch, created a movement around a new approach to food that encouraged people to listen to their bodies rather than follow diet rules (Tribole and Resch 1996). Following the publication of their book, *Intuitive Eating: a Recovery Book for the Chronic Dieter*, many have attempted to further this movement and at

times it has been turned into a coaching system in which women are guided through its founding principles to create a better relationship with food and are taught to listen to their bodies.

Christy Harrison, writer of *ANTI-DIET: Reclaim Your Time, Money, Well-Being, and Happiness Through Intuitive Eating*, runs the prominent podcast Food Psych, in which she hosts other anti-diet and Intuitive Eating dietitians and health experts, where much of Intuitive Eating is being defined (Harrison). She stresses that being anti-diet is not being anti-health, and that by choosing to Intuitively Eat people can avoid the backwards equation of “healthy to thinness” and free themselves to pursue true mental and emotional health in life that exists outside of dieting (Harrison).

There is a lack of research on Intuitive Eating in the sociological literature, especially regarding how food and diets are a social action people do and a way for many women to connect. Some of what has been examined about Intuitive Eating is through the lens of health initiatives such as education for kids in schools, and the experience of middle-aged women adopting some of the principles in their daily life. Healy (2015), a health education researcher, and colleagues, looked at the difference between implementing Intuitive Eating versus traditional restrictive diets in high school teenagers, and concluded that those practicing Intuitive Eating had far more positive attitudes towards eating than the comparison group. Another study, conducted by Emma Barraclough and colleagues (2019), examines the experiences of women in mid-life who used an online program to practice Intuitive Eating. They found that these women did face social barriers, such as judgement from peers, when prioritizing eating intuitively rather than listening to diet culture influences around food that might cause them to feel like they could not grab more dessert at a party or eat until they were full. However, some women within this study also stressed that they wanted to continue to make this change to protect their daughters from

diet culture. Still there is much to be researched about where Intuitive Eating falls in regard to the dynamics of mother/daughter relationships, variations in Intuitive Eating practices, and changes being made between Intuitive Eating mothers and their own children.

Research Questions

This study adds to the long history of sociological theories and research regarding the experience and effect of socialization about the body (Bordo 2013; Cooley 1922; Foucault 1990; Goffman 1963; Mead et al. 2015; Ogle and Damhorst 2004). Children experience many of their early moments of socialization around this subject with their parents as they are in charge of raising and teaching them; however mothers' influences are often elevated in this regard because of how traditional gender roles place them in charge of preparing food and upholding norms for the family (DeVault 1994; Harman and Cappellini 2018; Hertz 2006; Sarkisian 2006). Research has also shown how diet culture and anxiety about weight is disproportionately carried by women in society with messages about how weighing less is upholding true femininity, and behaviors of dieting and body hatred are often modeled by mothers for daughters (Bordo 2013; Faw et al. 2021; Ogle and Damhorst 2003). Through this, women have often engaged in concerning diet practices and the development of eating disorders in young girls has been an area of societal concern (Bordo 2013; Faw et al. 2021; Runfola et al. 2013). In the past two decades, Intuitive Eating has been a practice that seeks to change the way people see and feed themselves, in which dieting is rejected and practitioners are encouraged to eat what they want and accept their body as it is (Tribole and Resch 1996).

There are three important research questions that this study examines and answers. In the first, I seek to understand the ways in which early experiences of socialization build women's

awareness of their bodies and beliefs about how others perceive them. Secondly, I examine how mother/daughter relationships impact daughters body image and how observations of mothers influence daughters' dieting and how they talk about their bodies. Thirdly, and equally important, how early socialization around the body affects how adult women practice and share about Intuitive Eating, and choices they make when it comes to raising their own children. These research questions shed light on important social issues such as the impact of early socialization on women's body image, and the influence of the mother/daughter relationship on how daughters' think and talk about their bodies. It adds to sociological research regarding these topics by exploring them through the practice of Intuitive Eating.

Methods

Participants

This study uses in-depth interviews to better understand different aspects of the relationship between mothers and daughters in which the daughter now identifies as an Intuitive Eater. From January to March 2023, I interviewed fifteen (N= 15) female participants whose ages ranged from 26 to 52 years old (Mean= 36.6). As seen in Table 1., twelve of the participants were married, and seven had children of their own. All participants in this study identified as white. Only two participants lived outside of the U.S., living in Canada during the time of our interview. Education levels ranged from bachelor's to graduate degrees. Most participants said they had been practicing Intuitive Eating for 1-2 years at the time of our interview (N= 7), three said they had been an Intuitive Eater since childhood (N= 3), one participant said they had been practicing for six months (N= 1), and another for more than five years (N= 1). Participants self-identified as Intuitive Eaters to qualify for this study and all participants, as well as the names of any people mentioned in our interviews, were assigned pseudonyms for confidentiality. No other demographic data were collected.

Table 1. Respondents Demographics

Name	Age	Relationship Status	Children	Education Level	Years Practicing IE
Claire	30	Married	Yes	Masters	4
Giana	56	Single	No	Bachelors	<1
Caroline	40	Common Law	Yes	Bachelors	6
Zoey	50	Married	Yes	Masters	1
Hannah	36	Married	Yes	Masters	3

Hailey	27	Single	No	Masters	2
Evelyn	26	Single	No	Bachelors	1
Ruby	37	Married	Yes	Masters	1.5
Leah	30	Single	No	Bachelors	1
Penelope	52	Married	Yes	Masters	2
Autumn	45	Married	Yes	Bachelors	2
Kennedy	28	Single	No	Masters	4
Piper	31	Married	No	Bachelors	Since childhood
Sarah	34	Married	No	Masters	Since childhood
Alice	27	Married	No	Bachelors	Since childhood

Procedure

Upon receiving IRB approval, I recruited participants from Intuitive Eating groups on the social media platform Facebook. Recruitment materials were posted with the permission of administrators for each group. Recruitment materials were also circulated on Twitter, with inclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria for participation in this study included being 18 years of age or older, identifying as female, identifying as an Intuitive Eater, and being an English speaker. Race and sexuality were not a part of the inclusion criteria of this study, however all participants in this study identified as white and those who were married, were in heterosexual relationships.

I guided participants through a semi-structured interview in which they answered questions about what led them to Intuitive Eating, their experiences around food as a child as it pertained to their family, school, and particularly their mother, their current relationships with their mother, and any changes that may have occurred in the relationship since becoming an

Intuitive Eater. All interviews were conducted through recorded video calls. Interviews lasted 60-90 minutes. All participants were given pseudonyms randomly assigned to them for confidentiality.

Coding

After audio recordings of interviews were transcribed, I engaged in preliminary open-coding to identify themes in the data (Corbin and Strauss 1990). Coding was expanded by doing a comparison between the transcripts of respondents and recognizing patterns between respondents' experiences. The goal of this analysis was to understand themes within participants' early childhood regarding socialization and views about one's body, particularly around one's eating practices. Through this coding process it became apparent that the women in this study received messages about the need to monitor their bodies and meet social standards of weight throughout early childhood and into high school. These messages ranged from social rules on food, comparisons to friends, and an awareness and anxiety about the size of their bodies that typically began as they reached puberty. Coding also showed that mothers played a big part in the formation of these ideas about the body compared to fathers, and that their role in preparing food for the family is an impactful relationship where participants learned about dieting. Though respondents all remembered their mothers dieting, there was a common theme of their own bodies not being talked about with their mothers. Finally, respondents' answers about their experience as Intuitive Eaters often showed similar trends of being nervous to impose their new beliefs on others while also navigating how to raise their own children without the pressure of diet culture. The themes of this study's findings are comprised of these main codes from this analytic process.

Findings

My findings focus on respondents' early experiences building an awareness about their bodies and of dieting behavior, particularly from conversations about their own body with their mothers. In addition to this, they focus on how other areas of socialization around body image such as with peers and social institutions reinforce ideas about diet culture and the desire to lose weight. I explore the influence of this early socialization on respondents within this new practice of Intuitive Eating in their adult years. Finally, I show how the social impacts of this new approach to health and weight shape respondents' relationships and how mothers who are Intuitive Eaters are attempting to raise their own children differently.

Gender Roles and Diet Culture

Mothers can take a distinctive role in their daughters' lives when it comes to food and the body. Traditional gender roles often create the sense that women are performing good mothering by the food they give their daughters, and mothers are responsible for modeling and upholding body expectations for the family (Harman and Cappellini 2018; Jones and Young 2021; Smolak et al. 1999). My discussions with the women in this study about their mothers' actions around food support this idea that mothers often follow these gender roles and are the main source of diet information for their daughters. Thirteen of the 15 respondents in this study experienced their mother dieting previously or currently, many experiencing both. These diets included Atkins, Weight Watchers, Keto, a particularly rare Lemonade Diet, and at times extreme calorie restricting. Many women describe their mother as a "dieter," noting it as something that seemed almost as if to be a part of her personality. At times, dieting would be something that both of a

respondent's parents did but usually because their mother was guiding their father on a diet after a health concern. Almost none of the women experienced their father being a source of information about dieting, except for one woman who described her father as a serial "crash dieter," though she did not see his actions as particularly impactful to her own eating habits.

When it came to ideas about the body and their relationship with food, the women in this study often expressed that before finding Intuitive Eating, they identified with what their mothers modeled for them, echoing previous theories about the unique relationship between mothers and daughters (Boyd 1989; Chodorow 1978a; Rollins and White 1982). Every single woman in this study remembered their mother cooking or being the sole cook for their household. While some of them mentioned that at times their father did cook, they usually cooked what are socially considered male gendered foods such as grilled meats. However, there was not one instance in which their mothers did none of the cooking. This is consistent with Marjorie DeVault's (1994) finding that mothers are more often the ones who do the cooking in families and therefore are "producing the family" by preparing a meal and giving them an event to gather for at the end of the day. DeVault describes how mothers use this meal to bring together the typically disorderly schedules of the family and are, "cajoling them into some version of the activity that constitutes family" (1994:91). This theme of producing the family by mothers was common for nearly all respondents, as they described dinner time as something they all came together for in the evenings. Even when they lived in a household where both parents worked, still mothers did more of the cooking. Much like Hertz (2006) and Sarkisian's (2006) findings about mothers "doing family" by maintaining traditional family roles, the daughters in this study often experienced their mothers striving to continue similar positions in their family by taking on the cooking (Hertz 2006; Sarkisian 2006).

Most of the women experienced their earliest rules around food when it came to nights sitting around the dinner table with their family, in which they were instructed to finish all the food on their plate. This is an interesting place for their experience of rules around food to begin, with directions to eat more, considering that all of them ended up restricting food through dieting at some point in their life. All the women in this study said they had tried dieting, ranging from traditional diets like Atkins, Weight Watchers, calorie counting with apps like MyFitnessPal or Noom, to newer wellness trends like Whole 30 and Keto. Some women had attempted to use diet pills or lap band surgeries to lose weight, and two women received eating disorder diagnoses from mental health professionals.

Awareness of Body

Hannah is 36 years old and had previously worked as a health coach alongside a physician who constructed health/weight loss plans and hosted weekly weigh ins for communities around the area where she lived. She left the job a couple years ago to become an Intuitive Eating coach after finding the practice through a client. Though she was homeschooled when she a child, she remembers a very formative moment regarding her body when she was about 10 years old in dance class. Hannah told me about how she would sit on the floor with the other girls in her class and compare her legs to all of them, becoming aware of the fact that their bodies did not all look the same.

So, times when my thinner friends would – I can see them noticing my body, and I would notice theirs. Just that comparison of ‘How do I measure up? What do people think when they see me?’

Every woman interviewed in this study talked about developing an awareness of issues with their body through puberty, social situations, and events in their upbringing. Symbolic Interaction theory suggests that social institutions and the peers within them can shape how someone comes to perceive themselves and how they interact with those around them (Cooley 1922; Mead et al. 2015). This theoretical framework was continually reflected in the findings of this study as the women described their early childhood experiences. There was a strong theme in which respondents discussed moments in their childhood of becoming aware their body was different from others, and often in need of “improvement” as they saw it. These situations often centered around puberty in which respondents’ bodies changed before other female friends and they felt their body was larger than it should be. Clothes were one area that this awareness developed from, in which a few women remembered moments when they were taken to the mall to shop for new school clothes and realized they did not fit in the “teen” section any longer or could only fit into clothes for grown women. Friends were another area that this awareness showed up for some women, through mentally comparing their bodies to other girls their age. Sometimes their eating habits were remarked about at a party and made them afraid they were not allowed to eat as much others because of their body size. These interactions created an awareness in the women of this study that led to them make conscious and subconscious choices in their life in regard to how they came to feel about their own and others’ bodies.

With this awareness, respondents highlighted these moments as the beginning of their desire to change their body through dieting, excessive restricting, and exercising. This could mean they built their understandings of their body within this negative context, meaning these women shaped their relationship with their body around being at war with it to change and fit a standard they deemed “correct” from an early age. Clothing advertisements, magazines, and

smaller body friends seemed to set this standard for many of them. Piper is 31-year-old woman who lives in a large city with her husband while she works from home, and she spent our video interview shifting around her standing desk. She remarked in our interview that she felt her body must be wrong because she had to shop for clothes at the store Old Navy rather than Abercrombie like her friends.

So, I remember like a little bit of that. But like it was mostly the like, ‘Why can’t I wear the clothes I’m supposed to wear?’ Not even that I had a strong desire to, I just wanted to fit in a little bit.

This pattern shows that from a young age, women not only become aware of their body and the issues they believe it has compared to traditional body standards, but that they also begin an acute monitoring of their size and make the goal to change it.

Another noteworthy aspect of this awareness of body that the women talked about were the social rules around food and eating that they began to learn, which dictated what was and was not okay. Throughout childhood and high school, many of these women had memories in which they came to realize there was a certain amount of food that was okay for them to be eating when around other people. These rules were typically unspoken, with the women being aware they existed without any social sanctioning, but expressed they learned these rules around food from feeling that people would be watching how much they ate. Respondents seemed to be performing what Cooley (1922:208) described as “living in the mind of others” in which they had not received feedback about their eating habits from others but still assumed they were being judged regardless of evidence.

Some women, however, did experience direct comments due their actions around this subject that they said hurt them deeply. Ruby is 37 years old mom to a little boy and now works in software after having been an English teacher years prior. She told me about an experience she had at a party in high school where she heard a friend respond to a question from someone else about where Ruby was by joking and saying that she was probably eating. Ruby felt embarrassed because to her, this showed that friends were watching her eating habits and confirmed fears that she was inadequate because of them. These rules around food were sometimes dictated by weight, such as if someone was in a larger body in high school then these rules would mean they could not eat as much at a party or could not go for seconds.

These rules could also extend to those in smaller bodies. Claire is a 30-year-old new mom to twins and they made a brief appearance in our video call. She had made time for our interview in between showering and work that morning, so we briefly chatted about her busy routine as she waited for both her nanny to arrive and her hair to dry. She described these social rules around food in both the tough experiences she had in high school and what she would eventually see within teenage girl's experiences at the church she previously worked at. She saw that these rules sometimes shifted and changed without those following them being clear on what they were:

Like if you're skinny, you should eat. And if you're not skinny, then you shouldn't eat. And also, no, you don't get to decide which of those things you are. Other people will decide, but they're not going to tell you.

Navigating these rules was also unclear because the social standards on weight changes throughout time and is further complicated by the age and body development of who it was applied to. As these women's bodies developed, it was apparent that there were certain body

sizes considered not yet appropriate, and therefore rules about what they could eat were extended to them more severely.

Reflecting on the awareness of body these women experienced through puberty, two women talked about developing their curves or breasts “too early”, and that due to this they felt more watched by their peers around food because of how they felt their body grew larger before it should, compared to other bodies. The meaning that these women placed on their own bodies, especially in comparison to other bodies, affected how they operated in situations around food in social settings. This points to the idea that early moments about the body can socialize women to see and respond to others in their lives about the body in particular ways (Goffman 1990; Shilling 2012).

Mothers Building Body Talk

Research has previously explored the connection between mothers and daughters, and how they identify with one another in a unique way that makes the relationship important (Boyd 1989; Fischer 1981; Kagan 1958; O’Connor 1990; Rollins and White 1982). Mothers are early agents of socialization when it comes to ideas about the body. Throughout the interview process, it became clear many women felt there was an issue with their own bodies or eating habits— not by being told there was directly, but by observing the behavior or opinions of their mothers. Nearly all the women interviewed could remember and point to moments in which their mother’s diet actions or comments about her own body shaped how they came to view their body/body standards in general. Memories ranged from comments their mothers made about the desire to lose weight and change their bodies, to even engaging in extreme food restriction to the point of passing out.

Autumn is a 45-year-old mother of two who told me about her life coaching podcast she recently started, while she laughed sitting at her kitchen table that she frequently uses as her workspace. In our interview, she described an unexplained awareness that she had about her mother's opinion on how much food she was allowed to eat. This feeling led her to not grab seconds at dinner in front of her mom, saying that her mom made her feel like "fat people can't have more manicotti." Autumn was monitoring her behaviors around food regarding what she believed her mother felt without being able to remember these standards being told to her. Without communicating, Autumn formed and held on to ideas she had about her mother's beliefs around how much someone should eat, suggesting that daughters are watching their mothers for understanding about these values as previous research has found (Bandura 1986; Kagan 1958).

Even when a respondent mentioned that her mother was never critical of her body and often praised them, she still received dieting messages. Ruby remembers receiving these messages from her mother on things like an extreme 'cabbage soup diet' when she was a child, to lose weight for an upcoming vacation. This further confirms research conducted by Chelsea Jones and Stacy Young (2021) in which they found that mother's communication of "fat-talk" (critique of larger bodies) and dieting behaviors had a strong effect on their daughters dissatisfaction with their own body. In my findings, I continued to see this pattern in daughters of learning dieting messages as they experienced their mothers trying to change her own bodies in extreme ways.

Hailey smiled brightly and laughed despite our conversation's heavy topics, as she sat on the floor in her apartment during our interview one early afternoon. She is 27 years old and pursuing a master's in counseling after receiving a master's in divinity where she focused on

women and sexuality. While reflecting on her experience and relationship with her mother growing up, she said,

I think what's interesting is like the direct comments about like, 'you need to be this way to be this pretty' did not happen. It was her obsession with her weight, her obsession with beauty, and her obsession with my beauty. And it was like a math equation, I just put it together.

For Hailey, it was not that her mother said anything about her needing to diet or gave direct advice on how to lose weight, but it was her mother's view of fatness being wrong and not how someone should look that made her put two and two together. If being in a larger body was not good and she started to notice herself gaining weight, it only made sense that she needed to try to lose it. Hailey went on to reference a lyric of a song that she found impactful in this realization from a singer, Lucy Dacus, that says, "My mother hates her body, we share the same outline. She swears that she loves mine" (Dacus 2019). This echoes earlier research that found mothers' own body dissatisfaction and dieting habits often manifested into alarming dieting attempts by their daughter that mirrored them (Benedikt et al. 1998). Daughters seem to be acutely aware of their mothers' hatred of her body and whether theirs measures up to this standard, once again showing that even in the absence of diet direction, young girls can still be led to dieting.

Furthermore, Intuitive Eating seems to have made these women more sensitive when reflecting on moments in which they formed these mindsets and understanding of their body from their mothers. Due to their anti-diet beliefs, they now view these moments as abnormal. When recalling these moments growing up, two women said they felt even more concerned about them now as an Intuitive Eater because they saw just how early they were receiving dieting

messages. Zoey is a 50-year-old librarian with multi-color hair who talked in our interview about how dieting began for her at a very early age in her childhood. She remembers a class assignment in the fourth grade where she had to create her own sandwich to show her class, in which she named her sandwich the “Weight Watchers Wonder.” Zoey connected this moment with her sandwich to her mother being very obsessed with dieting and having done Weight Watchers when Zoey was growing up. Now, as an Intuitive Eater, Zoey felt sad reflecting about how she was so consumed with the idea of eating “healthy” at a young age that she named her sandwich after a dieting program, due to the way she was being socialized about dieting from her mother. Previous research has shown that the messages of diet culture from mothers can be so impactful to daughters that they learn how to speak the language of diet culture, such as creating a sandwich to present to their class that they view as “healthy” (Faw et al. 2021). The women in this study, who are now Intuitive Eaters, found these experiences and the early age at which they learned diet culture to be extremely problematic.

Regardless of this awareness of how mothers felt about their body, a major theme throughout this study was that most of the daughters did not talk to their mothers about their issues around their bodies or food when they felt them. Many of them had memories of not talking to their mothers about these issues, ranging from when they had conflicting feelings about how much they should be eating, negative views about their own bodies, and even in some cases a diagnosis from a therapist about having an eating disorder. One woman, Kennedy, who is 28 years old and works in the medical field, remarked that in some ways she felt lucky she did not have many experiences talking about these things with her mother. She felt that it saved her from negative experiences where it was possibly not handled well. However, it seems from

responses that without any direction from their mothers, these women felt left to battle issues around these topics by themselves.

When I inquired why the women in this study did not talk to their mothers about their bodies or the issues they were having, their answers fell into three categories. The first was that women felt that they did not know they could communicate about their bodies because it was an issue not talked about in their families or with their mothers. An example of this was Caroline, who is 40 years old and talked about her mom, who she sees once a month for dinner, as she described their relationship as not deep enough to bring issues about her body to her mom.

The second category was that some women also worried they might receive pushback because of how they saw their mothers previously talk about fat people. Evelyn is 26 years old and an only child, and she remembered her mother's comments about other fat people and even about her cousin who had gained weight, when I asked about her guardedness towards her mother.

Finally, some women felt they might not receive the comfort they were looking for because they had experienced previous diet direction from their mothers. Autumn felt throughout most of her life that her body was something to be fixed because of dieting messages from her mother and sister. Due to this, Autumn believed her mom was not someone safe to turn to concerning feelings about her body. These three kinds of responses outline the daughters' fears around having conversations about their body with their mothers and underline a sense that their emotions about this subject were something that needed to be dealt with on their own or protected from outside criticism. From analyzing these responses, I am left to wonder if mothers felt the need to overcorrect due to a concern of talking too much about dieting or body issues around their daughters. It is possible that mothers wanted to be careful to avoid saying something

that could cause their daughters problems, and that this inadvertently made the topic too taboo for even healthy discussions. This would be in line with Ogle and Damhorst's (2004) findings from interviews with mothers and daughters about the different approaches mothers take when it comes to addressing weight with their daughters, showing that some mothers prefer a hands off approach due to a fear of making their daughters fatphobic. "I don't think it even occurred to me that I could talk to her about it" was a response Hannah gave me when I inquired about why she did not feel she could tell her mother about shame she felt around her own body. This further indicates that for some women these channels to their mothers did not even seem to exist regarding their body.

This theme of not talking about these topics with their mothers continued for most of the women into their adult years. Zoey made jokes throughout our conversation covering her childhood about her tense relationship with her mother. She struggled to feel like she could talk to her mother about the issues she faced with her body image, that she described as the "background radiation" of her life growing up. This disconnection in communication between her and her mother has continued into adulthood as she has become an Intuitive Eater, even though she has remained close with her mother. Even though Zoe told her friends about completing her program for disorder eating and learning Intuitive Eating, her mother was still not a safe place for her to share this news. Zoe informed me:

So that's – I never – and like, when I stopped seeing Dr. Jones (her therapist), I told a couple of people, like, 'Hey, you know, I graduated my program. I feel so much better.' And I didn't say anything to her about that. So, I mean we text pretty much every day. And we're going on vacation with them in May.

This points to the protective nature that many women in this study seem to have developed when it comes to talking about their bodies with their mothers. Conversations around the body were not modeled for many of them, and when it did happen it was in negative ways that made them uncomfortable or sad about how their mothers saw their own bodies. Body dissatisfaction, dieting, and eating disorders, were off-limit topics to discuss with their mothers. Even when daughters' issues around these topics reached severe levels, such as developing an eating disorder, they struggled to feel safe enough to open up to their mothers. Intuitive Eating is another lens through which we can understand this safeguard women place around conversations about their body, which is evident by how the women in this study have continued to limit how they talk to their mothers about it.

Five of the women experienced diet direction from their mothers, in which their mothers made comments about what they should or should not be eating, advice to workout, or even invitations to diet alongside them. Mothers who gave diet direction, also gave strong encouragement to their daughters when they saw them dieting and losing weight, framing this as good behavior, or expressing pride when their daughters were able to make their bodies smaller. Diets were even incentivized in some cases.

Autumn recalled finding out in her adult years that her sister had been challenged by her mother to lose weight for an amount of money that would correspond to the number of pounds she lost. Diet direction from mothers came not just when it pertained to the food their daughters were eating, such as remarking that they should be eating "healthier," but also around their bodies. When it came to shopping for new clothes and things not fitting them the way their mothers thought they should, mothers sometimes gave direction about their daughters needing to lose weight. In moments like these, the women in this study came to understand that dieting was

not just about making sure you ate healthier. They also saw dieting as a tool one could use to make their bodies smaller and the size that their mothers would approve of, which is something many of them tried to do at different times in their lives.

However, these conversations mothers were having about diet direction only seemed to go one way. Daughters were almost never allowed to give pushback when they felt upset or disagreed with what they were being told, and when they tried to do so, the conversation was often shut down by their mothers. Alice is 27 years old and learned to Intuitively Eat as she grew up with stomach issues that caused her a lot of pain eating certain foods. Her mother made comments when she was growing up about needing to lose weight and would put Alice and her three sisters on diets alongside her. Alice felt the lines of communication with her mother only went one way, in which her mother could talk about dieting, but that Alice was not allowed to voice how it made her feel, eventually corroding their relationship. She said of the situation, “But it was irritating, and it definitely made our relationship this thing where it’s like, okay, you’re not like a trustworthy person for these things.” Even in situations where bodies are being talked about between mothers and daughters, how conversations about the body are allowed to take place can be controlled by mothers when daughters feel that they are not able to set boundaries or voice concerns about what their mothers are saying.

Making Sense of Mom

The efforts by feminist scholars to raise awareness about the social pressures on women to look a certain way and weigh less has shown how this is a cultural message that can be passed between women (Bordo 2013; Faw et al. 2021; Frost 2001). Though findings from this study and previous research show that mothers can be people whom daughters learn diet culture from, it is

important to understand how mothers themselves are a part of this same social conditioning around the body (Jones and Young 2021; Ogle and Damhorst 2004).

Regarding this cycle of diet culture being passed on within mother/daughter relationships, many of the respondents in this study do not seem to blame their mothers for the issues they came to develop around food or their bodies. Even though these daughters directly described moments in which they felt their mothers' comments about bodies and their relationships with food molded their outlooks, many of them remarked that their mothers were not that bad compared to other women. Three women felt that the absence of their mothers making such direct comments about their own body needing to be smaller or telling them specifically to diet meant that their mothers were not really to blame for what led them to dieting. Some respondents even emailed me prior to the interview to let me know they were worried they would not qualify for this study because they did not have, "a bad relationship with their mother when it came to food and their body."

Piper is 31-year-old woman who lives in a large city with her husband while she works from home. Growing up, she experienced negative feelings about her body and knew that her mother had a similar view of her own. However, she made a point to tell me that her mother was not bad, and in fact rejected many traditional beauty standards, believing that she got lucky compared to other women. She said in our interview, "So I'm like – she wasn't like evil. You know? Like she's a feminist. But she was like, 'Hey, you don't need to eat all that.' And I was like, 'What do you mean?'" She stressed that her mother was different than what she perceived most moms were like and yet, she still felt the need to diet due to a dislike of her body that seemed to mirror how Piper's mother spoke about her own body. Even though most of the women in this study could point to specific moments like this in which their mother made

comments they recognized as problematic, they still did not strongly place the blame on her for how it later affected them.

I believe this lack of blame towards mothers by the daughters in this study comes from a sense of understanding and sometimes compassion for their mothers' own place in the cycle of diet culture. As these women came to understand their experience of diet culture as Intuitive Eaters who now rejected its principles, it became evident to them how their own mothers were victim to this socialization and continued the cycle with them as children. Autumn said in our interview that she could feel not only her mothers' insecurity about how Autumn dressed her body but her mothers' own body as well, and that she now sees the cycle her mother was in with wanting to lose weight. Zoey talked about how this socialization towards dieting and weighing less that she experienced did not just start within her relationship with her mother, but even extended to her grandmother who also constantly worried about her weight. Diet culture was something that could be passed through generations of mothers and daughters and was upholding what feminist scholars have outlined as the social conditioning of diet culture in women (Bordo 2013; Frost 2001). The women in this study often expressed an understanding of these cultural norms pressed on women about the body and how they felt their mothers were trying their best to raise them within this context.

Guarding and Sharing Intuitive Eating

After understanding the foundation women in this study had with their mother and upbringing around food, the interviews turned to how they are currently navigating relationships with this new perspective of Intuitive Eating. When it came to telling other people about Intuitive

Eating, many of the women expressed a desire not to impose on others who are still in diet culture by challenging them with its principles. I found that the desire to not impose Intuitive Eating on others came from many different concerns these women had, both from perceived costs of sharing and previously experienced moments. Three women discussed being worried they lacked enough knowledge to refute pushback they might receive from people still dieting, leading them to not feel ready to make the case for why Intuitive Eating should be accepted. These women also talked about weighing the risk of sharing about Intuitive Eating with people they are close to because it might pressure them, and they feel Intuitive Eating is an individual journey for people to choose on their own. Ruby, who happily found Intuitive Eating two years prior to our interview through a doctor she was seeing, and yet even she touched on this desire to not force this practice on others.

But I don't try to, like, evangelize or anything. So, I'm like, everybody's doing their own thing plus I just don't, whatever, like, necessarily have it in me to try to bring somebody in if they're not necessarily, like, showing interest in it.

Overall, these fears seem to hinder people who practice Intuitive Eating from actually spreading the word about these new principles to approaching food and body acceptance, making them unable to fully get rid of diet culture.

Often there is an individual approach to how to address eating disorders and body dissatisfaction in young women, chronicled by Frost (2001) in her writing about psychological approaches to body hatred. This is interesting considering the non-imposing and individualist approach of these Intuitive Eaters, because respondents describe the practice as akin to personal therapy and not something they feel like they should force on others. However, this seems to be a

contradiction to certain ways they talk about the ideology of Intuitive Eating and the social issues that cause women to hate their bodies and feel the need to diet. Many of them discussed the need to be anti-diet and that diet culture has forced women to think of their bodies in constant need of improvement. They identify this as a societal issue that one would think calls for a more collective action to change the way that women see and relate to their bodies. And yet, from this study it does not seem as if Intuitive Eaters always feel the right to evangelize about their beliefs to push against diet culture. This could be another part of their protective posture towards conversations about how they eat and their body, hoping that by not imposing their ideologies on other's bodies, they can avoid discussions about their own.

Three of the respondents did talk about Intuitive Eating with their mothers or friends, most often suggesting or buying the Intuitive Eating book by Elyse Resch and Evelyn Tribole for their mothers. However, even when sharing this book or other information with others, they still tried to maintain a non-imposing posture. Ruby could remember as a child her mother excitedly dieting before a vacation, and she laughed while telling me about how she took film photos of her mom in bathing suits to use as a comparison as her mother lost weight. She talked about recently sending her mother the Intuitive Eating book but also not trying to pressure her with this gesture.

Yeah, I sent her the book, like, I – I was, like, it's, you know, kind of gave her the 'don't worry if you're not interested in it. It is not a diet book. Do not, you know, it's fine. This is just something that's worked for me. Read it if you want to.'

Sharing about Intuitive Eating is something they do in a very guarded way, especially when it comes to their mothers. Like Ruby, other respondents talked about suggesting the Intuitive Eating book, *Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Program that Works* by Resch and Tribole, to

their mothers or sending her links to read on what the practice is about, and they often had a similar lack of expectations that their mothers would read the book or change her opinions. For them, sharing Intuitive Eating was something they felt like they needed to do because of past experiences with their mothers around dieting. Ruby specifically mentioned that she felt the need to share with her mother about Intuitive Eating because she had watched her mother diet throughout her childhood, and it concerned her. Two other women discussed giving their mothers reading materials on Intuitive Eating because they felt they deserved a break from feeling the need to diet, and they hoped this new information would help their mothers stop dieting. However, daughters often shared about Intuitive Eating in a noncommitted way and they did not try to follow up on what their mothers thought about it, keeping themselves protected from any conflict it might bring up between them. This defensive approach came from both women who said they did and did not receive comments and conversations about their bodies with their mothers. Respondents, who had previously mentioned not bringing up conversations about their body with their mothers because it felt off limits, did not have as much evidence suggesting they would receive pushback for sharing about Intuitive Eating and yet they still felt wary. Regardless of their experience, women seemed to have internalized the message that it was safer to avoid conversations about the body.

In other situations, such as with friends or colleagues, these women felt a need to directly push back on diet culture talk with Intuitive Eating principles and challenge the way people thought rather than directly educate them through the book. Some women took the approach of shifting or reframing body-negative comments or diet fueled talk from friends. Hannah, a 36-year-old Intuitive Eating coach for other women on social media, experienced this when a friend

was talking about using Noom, a diet app that encourages calorie counting, at the start of the new year.

I had a friend come over for New Year, and she mentioned that she's doing Noom. And she looked at me, and she looked at my face when she said that, and she goes, 'You're probably the wrong person to tell that, aren't you?' And I was like, 'Well, Noom isn't my favorite thing. I think they have some – I see the appeal, and I also think they're doing harm.'

After telling this story, Hannah mentioned that she felt like she could have been less negative towards her friend sharing about their diet and instead asked them to tell her about what they wanted to achieve through it. Even in this encounter, the fear of imposing seems to be present for respondents. Though, this reluctance can make sense when it comes to cases when pushing back on diet culture has social costs to those who do it.

For many of the women, interacting with others and sharing about Intuitive Eating showed them that they now spoke a different language than those around them who were still practicing diet culture, and other people sometimes felt angry about the new rhetoric these women were using. Autumn learned from posting about her own Intuitive Eating beliefs on social media, such as a remark about carbs not being something people should be afraid to eat, that she would receive harsh pushback from family members who religiously practiced Keto, a diet previously founded as a tool for patients with epilepsy but now famous as a practice around cutting carbs to induce weight loss. Some women experienced a disconnect in language with friends that further complicated the ways they could interact with them. Claire told me about finding out she was not a part of certain group chats in which her female friends were exchanging diet advice and encouragement for accountability, because her new outlook on food would have the opposite effect.

The theory of discredited stigma is a useful tool in understanding the feelings that the women in this study had as Intuitive Eaters now operating in a world of diet culture (Goffman 1963). As Intuitive Eaters, these women felt like they were approaching most situations in life as an outsider now, as they saw diet culture as a dominate message in society, and they often assumed this would discredit them from the get-go in conversations with other people. Overall, this different language left most of the women feeling frustrated that others could not understand or even felt like the message of Intuitive Eating was so extreme, it was on the same level with conspiracy theories, possibly explaining why many who practice it prefer to keep a non-imposing posture with their Intuitive Eating.

Regardless of these two approaches, avoiding and attempting to talk about Intuitive Eating, nearly all the respondents still saw Intuitive Eating as an individual solution and yet they continued to talk about the need to combat diet culture, a social structure. None of them seemed to talk about the social responsibility or social movement that Intuitive Eating should be to combat this, only about how it had personally changed them.

In interviews, I asked the women if they believed Intuitive Eating had taught them anything regarding relationships, hoping to get a clearer picture of the social effect it may have. Giana, a 56-year-old educator, found Intuitive Eating as a place of relief after experiencing menopause and joined an Intuitive Eating Facebook group specifically created for this cross-section of women. Even though she is practicing Intuitive Eating alongside other women in her Facebook group, she still answered my question about what it has taught her about relationships in a very individual way. Her response to this question was, ‘When I think about intuitive eating, what I have learned is kind of to tune in to your own body.’

Many of the women responded by talking about Intuitive Eating as if it was almost akin to personal therapy, with some describing it as their own journey they had to go on. It was a tool to know how to care for themselves when it comes to food and how they treat their body. Most of this response is understandable given that Intuitive Eating rules promote a return to oneself and listening to your own body rather than following dieting rules and calls for practitioners to do individual work to heal their relationship with food. However, it is still an interesting response given that it is social conditions that respondents describe as the reason for having such a fraught relationship with food and their body, ranging from their mother, friends, school educational curriculum, and media images. Almost none of the women said Intuitive Eating affected their relationships or approach to society as a call to combat diet culture, the transformation they saw was only personal and did not push them to share with those close to them in a way that could change how society views “health” when it comes to food and the body. However, this personal transformation through Intuitive Eating did lead them to make conscious changes in how they approached raising their own children regarding food and the body.

Doing Things Differently

Seven women interviewed in this study had children of their own that they reflected on throughout our interview. They did so in comparison to their own childhood around food and body image and talked about the different course they wanted to take with their child now as an Intuitive Eater. Intuitive Eating made them aware of a new path that they could begin their kids on at a younger age, rather than needing to discover it later in life and heal from experiences with dieting, as they themselves had to do. Claire talked about how much stress there is put on worrying about children eating enough when they are young and celebrating their bodies when

they put on more weight as a baby. She found this funny when it came to her newborn twins considering the shift to dieting society eventually pressures people into.

One different approach many of the women mentioned trying to take with their kids regarding Intuitive Eating is not forcing their children to finish all their food or to eat food that they do not like. Even more than that, many stressed that they want to be aware not just how they teach their children about food, but also how they model their own relationship with their body. Caroline lives in Canada and is an Intuitive Eating counselor and mother of two boys. Though rules around food felt far more relaxed to her in childhood, she still received subtle messages from family members about larger bodies being shameful and was warned by her aunt about her eating too much bread on one occasion. She talked to me about how she plans to teach her kids differently to shield them from diet culture,

How to protect your kids – like, one, don't diet. But then, also, we have to, like, look to the positive. Not just remove the negative, but to be like, 'How can I model not hating my body but also loving my body?' Because he'll only – they'll – he – they – whoever – she – would only really learn to love it if we model that as well.

These mothers now sit in a position where they hold the power to mold how conversations around the body will take place with their own children, and they seem to be cognizant of the need to keep those topics open with their own children. This is in line with previous research about the “double identification process” (Chodorow 1999:204), in which mothers attempt to reconcile issues they experienced with their own mother through how they approach the relationship with their children (Smith, Hill, and Mullis 1998). It is not enough for them to just be careful about handling rules around food for their children, but also important to be more

aware of how they might negatively impact their children's relationship with their body if they dislike their own, as they often saw in their own mothers. Furthermore, they are diverging from how many of their relationships have and still exist with their own mothers, by planning to have a more proactive approach to food and body talk that will hopefully make their children feel safe enough to talk about it.

Conclusion

This study originally sought to examine how Intuitive Eating affects the relationships between mothers and daughters; however through my findings, it became clear that Intuitive Eating is a lens through which early experiences that shape conversations and understandings about the body, particularly within mother/daughter relationships, can be understood. This study answers three specific research questions: In what ways do early experiences of socialization about the body affect women's view of their bodies? How does the important role of mothers on daughters impact their body talk? How do these experiences impact the practice of Intuitive Eating in adult women?

Theories of socialization, Symbolic Interactionism, and the cultural construction of the body are important frameworks to understand how young women build their ideas about their bodies and beliefs about how others might see them (Cooley 1922; Foucault 1990; Mead et al. 2015; Shilling 2012). Due to traditional gender roles that place women in charge of food work in families, mothers play a big part in teaching daughters about which foods are considered “healthy.” Relatedly, mothers' own relationship with food and their bodies— as well as how they do or do not engage with their daughters on such topics—affected their daughters (DeVault 1994; Hertz 2006). As a result of hearing their mothers' negative comments about their bodies, watching them diet throughout their lives, or even receiving direction to diet from them, the women in this study came to place value on how they believed their bodies should look (Benedikt et al. 1998; Jones and Young 2021; Ogle and Damhorst 2003). Most women in this study discussed feeling fear and shame when talking about their bodies, having learned what was acceptable as children from their mothers and others around them.

From a theoretical perspective, the women in this study began a monitoring of themselves and others' views on their body in their adolescence, similar to Cooley's (1922) "Looking Glass Self." As many of the women did not have direct conversations with their mothers about food and their bodies growing up, they filled in the gaps with social cues from friends, especially comparing their bodies to those they saw as "acceptable." Through this, they became particularly alert to how their friends viewed their eating habits and how they measured up to the "cultural construct of femininity" outlined by feminist scholars (Bordo 2013; Faw et al. 2021). Even in the absence of comments about weight from their mothers, these women's awareness of their bodies developed, and for many of them became a "background radiation to life" that led them to dieting and ultimately a difficult relationship with food. In some cases, mothers did provide diet direction and used a similar approach that Ogle and Damhorst (2004) outlined, in which mothers feel responsible for their daughters' weight and try to help change it. However, opening this line of communication did not open all areas of conversation about the body for daughters and often still failed to make them feel comfortable enough to discuss their feelings around this topic with their mothers. All women in this study attempted to diet at some point in their lives, many as a result of these early experiences, and most found Intuitive Eating after a long period of struggle with food and not accepting their bodies.

Intuitive Eating was seen as a personal choice to the women and not something they wanted to impose on others, even though they described the social structure of diet culture as a serious cultural problem. This individual approach by Intuitive Eaters mirrors the way that eating disorders have historically been addressed, in which the social conditioning of young women to hate their bodies is recognized as contributing to the diagnosis, but ultimately not treated (Frost 2001).

Regarding how women make sense of their upbringing around dieting as Intuitive Eaters now, though they repeatedly gave examples of how their mothers contributed to their dieting issues, they seemed overall reluctant to place blame on their mothers. Some felt compassion for the way their mothers and others were caught in diet culture (Benedikt et al. 1998; Bordo 2013). The fact that they were challenging mainstream diet culture and proposing a new way of approaching health and body standards was not lost on the women. Goffman's theory of discredited stigma (1963) echoed the view these women had, in which they assumed their break from norms through Intuitive Eating would set them at odds with others. While some women shared their Intuitive Eating practices with friends and even their mothers, their communication followed similar safeguards about body talk that had been established during childhood. Women were reluctant to expose themselves to criticism or debate about Intuitive Eating ideology and at times experienced direct pushback from those still practicing diet culture whenever they did share.

In reflecting on their childhood and experiences with their own mothers, the women identified these trends of not talking about the body that led them to still fill in its absence with harmful ideas and practices of dieting. This was particularly important for the women in this study who are now mothers. These women plan to change their approach to food with their children based on Intuitive Eating principles and be more aware of how they talked about and treated their own body in front of their children. These findings reinforce previous theories and research about mother/daughter relationships, in which women seek to resolve issues they experienced with their mothers through the relationship they now have with their daughters (Chodorow 1978b; Smith et al. 1998). Whether or not they will be able to enact this change

remains to be seen, especially considering the lack of improvement in conversation with their own mothers.

Further research could explore two important areas that this study highlighted: whether mothers who practice Intuitive Eating are using its principles to change the way they discuss the body with their own children and its effects, and how race might impact the movement of Intuitive Eating. Inclusion criteria for this study did not include race; however, every woman who volunteered and participated identified as white. This reflects what I came to understand about the Intuitive Eating space, that it is comprised mainly of white women which might impact on how the movement progresses. As scholars have addressed, body image and the social pressures placed on whites are different than those placed on racial minorities in Western society, especially black women (Davis 1983; Hill Collins 2009; West 2017). Future studies could examine whether the racial make-up of this movement impacts its goals and what barriers, if any, face entry for minority women.

This study highlights and adds to previous research about socialization, and the impact of the mother/daughter relationship on daughters, particularly how daughters think and talk about their bodies as adults (Benedikt et al. 1998; Boyd 1989; Chodorow 1978a; Goffman 1990; Mead et al. 2015; Ogle and Damhorst 2004). I add to the sociological literature about socialization about the body and mothers' important influence on their daughters' body image and dieting habits by examining how Intuitive Eating is affected. I show that though Intuitive Eating puts women in conflict with people—often their own mothers—practicing diet culture, they continue to employ similar methods that they learned in childhood of avoidance and guardedness when it comes to conversation about the body. By examining these topics, I hope to have given more

context and insight into social issues surrounding women's body image and the important relationships that mothers create with their daughters.

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Appendix

Recruitment Materials: Initial Post

“Hello,

My name is Andrea Jenkins, and I am a graduate student in the Sociology Master’s program at the University of Texas at Arlington. I’m looking to recruit women over the age of 18 who identify as Intuitive Eaters for a research project on Intuitive Eating and are English speakers. The interviews will last about an hour and a half and can be done in-person or virtually, whichever is most comfortable for you. COVID-19 precautions can be taken for any in-person interviews (masking and 8ft apart distance). Through this study I am looking to better understand how intuitive eating affects women’s relationships with their mothers. I hope to add to the sociological understanding of intuitive eating in this way, and I would love to include expertise and experiences directly from Intuitive Eaters like yourselves.

All respondents that participate will remain confidential. This project has been approved by the University of Texas at Arlington Institutional Review Board and all policies and procedures will be followed for safeguarding information and materials.

You can reach me by email included below. I look forward to hearing from you!

Email: Andrea.Jenkins@mavs.uta.edu

Thank you. ”

Recruitment Material: Initial Inquirers Reply Email

“Hello,

Thank you for your interest in this project! This research will consist of one interview in person or online via Teams, for roughly an hour and half. All COVID-19 precautions can be taken for in person meetings, based on your comfort level. We will be discussing your journey to Intuitive Eating and your experiences around food and the ideas of health, especially regarding personal relationships since you’ve become an Intuitive Eater. These interviews will be recorded for accuracy and all identifying information will be kept confidential. If you are still interested in participating, I can arrange send you a consent form either via email before the interview, in which you can give written consent or electronic consent if you are unable to scan and email return a signed copy, whichever you prefer. If you have any other specific questions about the project, process, or anything not mentioned above, please do not hesitate to email me (Andrea.Jenkins@mavs.uta.edu).

Warm regards,

Andrea Jenkins

Interview Guide:

1. Let's start with some easy questions, how old are you?
2. Are you married?
3. Do you have any children?
4. What is your highest level of education?
5. How long have you been a part of (social media group)?

6. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, like where you work or live?

7. Where did you grow up?

8. Can you tell me a little about your family growing up? Who did you live with?

9. And you're a part of the (name of social media platform) group?

10. How did you come to be a part of this group? What made you want to join?

11. Tell me about what led you to intuitive eating?
 - How long have you been or considered yourself an intuitive eater?
 - Does anyone else in your life practice intuitive eating?
 - How does being an intuitive eater shape your eating habits?
 - Have you practiced any other diets throughout your life, if so, can you tell me about them?

12. (If previous question didn't address childhood) Okay, I want to shift gears a little bit and go back in time. Can you tell me about what mealtime looked like for your family growing up?
 - Who typically cooked and prepared the meal?
 - Was there any discussion before about what you'd be eating?
 - If yes, how was the food talked about?
 - Was there any mention of the health of the food?
 - Did everyone eat the same foods?
 - If not, who didn't?
 - Do you know why they didn't?

13. Can you remember if there were any moments that the idea of "health" and "being healthy" took shape in your mind?
 - Did you learn this from your parents?
 - Which parent?
 - When was it most talked about?
 - Was this talked about at school?
 - How did you feel about yourself in respect to this idea of "healthy"?

14. Do you remember when you were growing up how your mother talked about her own body and eating habits?

- What did you feel about what she had to say?
 - Can you remember if this made you feel anything about your own body?
15. Can you think of any times growing up where you may have experienced ideas of “health” or “being healthy”?
- Did you share these experiences with your mother?
 - How so?
 - How did you feel about this subject when talking about it with her?
16. Can you tell me about your current relationship with your mother?
- Have you had discussions about intuitive eating with your mother?
 - Do you know what your mother thinks about the ideas of intuitive eating?
 - Has she shown any interest in it?
17. Is your mother currently practicing any diets or subscribing to any dieting philosophies?
- If so, what are your thoughts about them? How does that make you feel?
 - (If they have a child) How have you approached the subject of food with her in regards to your own child? Do you have any boundaries in place for what is okay to talk about around your child?
 - Do you and your mother have mealtimes together anymore? If so, what has that been like?
 - What about holidays together, in regards to food?
18. Do you think Intuitive Eating has taught you anything about relationships?
- If yes: what has it taught you?
19. How does intuitive eating affect your understanding of your upbringing about what is “healthy”?
20. Was there anything that I didn’t ask about in this interview that you think I should know?

Respondent	Age	Relationship Status	Children	Education Level	Years IE
Claire	30	Married	Yes	Masters	4
Giana	56	Single	No	Bachelors	<1
Caroline	40	Common Law	Yes	Bachelors	6
Zoey	50	Married	Yes	Masters	1
Hannah	36	Married	Yes	Masters	3
Hailey	27	Single	No	Masters	2
Evelyn	26	Single	No	Bachelors	1
Ruby	37	Married	Yes	Masters	1.5
Leah	30	Single	No	Bachelors	1
Penelope	52	Married	Yes	Masters	2
Autumn	45	Married	Yes	Bachelors	2
Kennedy	28	Single	No	Masters	4
Piper	31	Married	No	Bachelors	Since childhood
Sarah	34	Married	No	Masters	Since childhood
Alice	27	Married	No	Bachelors	Since childhood