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## Employing Polyethnography to Navigate Researcher Positionality on Weight Bias

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### Abstract

Researchers often focus on the content of their research interests but, depending on the research approach, may pay less attention to the process of locating themselves in relation to the research topic. This paper outlines the dialogue between an interdisciplinary team of researchers who were at the initial stages of forming a research agenda related to weight bias and social justice. Using a polyethnographic approach to guide our discussion, we sought to explore the diverse and common life experiences that influenced our professional interests for pursuing research on weight bias. As a dialogic method, polyethnography is ideally suited for the reflexive work required of researchers seeking to address issues of equity and social justice. Beyond more traditional approaches such as journaling, personal interviews, or researcher notes, the intersubjectivity highlighted by this method affords a richer space for exploration, challenging ideas, taking risks, and collectively interrogating both self and society. Following a discussion of positionality, the dialogue between researchers is presented, followed by their critique of the discussion, informed by professional literature.

### Keywords

Polyethnography, Ethnography, Weight Bias, Positionality

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Messages that stigmatize people according to their body weight are rampant in the media and society as a whole, often propagated in the messages given by family and friends (Jun & Lee, 2014; Oliver, 2006). Individuals are exposed to messages that potentially stigmatize people, based on their body weight, through public and professional sources. For example, women are targeted by social messages to feel dissatisfied with their bodies, at any weight, and to internalize a message that they should feel dissatisfied (Britton, Martz, Bazzini, Cutrin, & Lea Shomb, 2006; Ferguson, 2013; Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011). Increasingly, male bodies are also being objectified such that the lean muscular physique is associated with desirability, masculinity, and good physical health (Dakanalis & Riva, 2013). In health care, the weight-focused approach to defining health has contributed to the increasing frequency and intensity of weight bias (Latner & Stunkard, 2003), defined as negative weight-related attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and judgments toward individuals who are overweight and obese (Washington, 2011). The culminating impact of weight bias and stigmatization from multiple levels of society has been implicated for people experiencing increased anxiety, depression, disordered eating, avoidance of healthcare, decreased quality of life, and even suicide (Diaz-Meleán & Somers, 2013; Puhl & Heuer, 2009). Despite the attention paid to weight bias in the professional literature for several decades, there continue to be pervasive negative effects for individuals who are bombarded with messages about weight.

Weight bias is, in part, a study of what might be considered deviance from social norms in the context of a Western culture that promotes the idea that bodies need to be controlled (Bordo, 2004). Research on weight bias has traditionally positioned weight diversity as an examination of the “other,” focusing on the experiences of participants in research studies as totally separated from the experience of the researchers. However, given

the social pervasiveness of weight bias, it is important for researchers to locate their personal experience with weight bias, including values and assumptions that may consciously or unconsciously influence their views of the topic and of the participants and their lived experience (Ponterotto, 2005). In our review of the literature, we have noticed the absence of content that addresses researchers' positionality, tending to position weight bias as a concept that is relevant for other people and not connected to personal or professional locations.

We formed an interdisciplinary research team to study the topic of weight bias from diverse locations and backgrounds. Specifically, our team came together to study the idea of weight bias as a social justice issue. After spending some time examining discourses, forms, and language on how weight is being talked in different professional fields, we became aware that what is often missing from the literature is that researchers do not explicitly discuss what is the relationship with their own body, or their own weight preferences or inclinations. As a result, we became interested in exploring our own ideas, prejudices, and views on weight and body appearance. The goal of this article is to share an example of our generative dialogues on weight bias using our own voices and experiences, in order to make transparent the typically hidden subjective positions and personal biographies that come together to guide and inform our research. In doing so, we intended to contribute to the literature on weight bias research, the literature on positionality and reflexivity in qualitative research, and extend the literature on duoethnography through offering an example of reflexivity, using polyethnography for team-based interdisciplinary research.

Our team consists of four professors, one international postdoctoral scholar, and two graduate students from education (one master's and one doctoral) and represents subfields including counselling psychology, education, sociology, and health sciences. We discovered that much of what we debated and discussed in our team conversations was how to navigate the personal and professional spheres of our lives. As we began to discuss our common and unique interests in the topic of weight bias, we intentionally decided that it was important for us to initially move back from the design of research content to reflection about our experiences with the research topic. Ultimately, we hoped that such an exploratory process would serve us well to examine understandings, assumptions, and challenges that we faced as researchers whose personal lives were intimately connected to the topic of weight bias, albeit from diverse perspectives. Through sharing our process for exploring personal locations, we hoped to sensitize researchers to the importance of this process, as a way to increase personal reflexivity and a way to explore the strengths and biases that team members inevitably carry to the research process. Our stance is that researchers are inevitably influenced by social discourse. Attitudes towards weight bias are not neutral and it is important for researchers to consider the potential biases and assumptions that they carry into their professional roles as researchers.

In this paper, we use a *polyethnographic* approach, an extension of *duoethnography* (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012; Sawyer & Norris, 2013) to exemplify the dialogics of ethnographic practices on how a research team approached the difficult task of claiming our personal and professional locations in how we came to the topic of weight bias. As the founders of the method have expressed, researchers employing duoethnography – and by extension and association, polyethnography – must use ethics and dialogic collaboration to determine

how to make their studies trustworthy, how to use themselves as sites of study and interrogation, how to construct dialogic transactions that illuminate and problematize their topics and their thinking, how to generate deep and meaningful critiques of self and society, and how to present these in ways that invite the reader into the conversation. (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 29)

We used a polyethnographic approach to explore a range of topics associated with the notion of weight bias in a manner that saw generating our own narratives and counter-narratives around these issues, while attending specifically and critically to issues of power, privilege, race, gender, and other aspects of our lived experiences.

We begin the paper with an examination of positionality and its importance when studying weight bias. Polyethnography is described as an approach to understanding the research team's dialogue, presented below. An example of our conversation is presented to illustrate the dialogue that surfaced between research team members through reflexivity. Finally, we offer a layer of analysis through which we reflected and observed our conversation as a way to deepen our understanding of how we bring our person, profession, and positionality to this research.

### **Positionality**

Stating one's positionality at the onset of research has long been the standard when using qualitative traditions of inquiry. Those who advocate exploring researchers' positionalities argue for the importance of introspective and self-critical reflection on behalf of researchers to induce self-discovery and explore cultural influences such as gender, age, ethnicity, and social class and their intersections (Bourke, 2014; England, 1994; Glesne, 2011; Peshkin, 1993; Plowman, 1995). The degree to which this position should be explored and described in depth differs depending on the epistemological stance being adopted (Ponterrotto, 2005). Team members were invited to share their epistemological stances and that prompted us to discuss what we meant by feminism, social justice, social constructionist, and multicultural perspectives. With our diverse research team, we agreed with Glesne (2011) that, "being attuned to positionality is being attuned to intersubjectivity, how the subjectivities of all involved guide the research process, content, and, ideally, the interpretations" (p. 158). In formulating a research team, we sought to honor the importance of reflections about how our personal experience with a research topic influences our professional views of the topics we research. In particular, our research topic exploring weight bias as a social justice issue has opened up personal stories, lived experiences and understandings, and a more self-reflective stance from each research team member.

A key point of agreement was influenced by the feminist perspective; professionals, including researchers, are not value-free as they have been exposed to social and political influences, as expressed in the adage, "the personal is political" (Worell & Remer, 2003). The counterpart adage, the "professional is political," invites professionals to reflect on how their beliefs and actions are influenced by both their personal and professional socialization experiences and how those experiences influence their actions in professional roles (Arthur & Collins, 2014). In essence, professionals are also influenced by social discourse and the policies that surround the contexts in which they work. As a result, professional actions are not neutral or value-free, either, and there is a risk of perpetuating the status quo through the ways that social issues, such as weight bias, are viewed and acted upon (Speight & Vera, 2008). Reflexivity in professional roles, such as research, is essential. As researchers, concepts such as subjectivity, personal experience, values, emotions, and beliefs that form our worldview are thought to be critical influences on the research process.

We also adopted the stance, as a general principle, that researchers need to start with and frequently engage in ongoing reflexivity, inviting critical examination and questioning of one's beliefs and assumptions about the topic of study. According to Gorelick (1991), being reflexive means continuously being aware of the interpersonal dynamics and knowledge sources present in qualitative research. This would include power differences that exist

between the researcher and research participants, including attention to gender roles, the degree of vulnerability and risk to participants, and how the results might inform or unintentionally harm people. The use of reflexivity can be uncomfortable, complex, and multidimensional, and hence, requires continuous vigilance about the epistemology of the research being undertaken (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2002). Our ongoing research project around weight bias as a social justice issue has entailed a complex series of conversations and discussions around each of our own biographies and identities.

The literature on reflexivity focuses mainly on the importance of the process and much less on the procedures involved in engaging in such an exercise. Suggestions for strategies for engaging in reflection are offered in general texts on qualitative research (Gergen & Gergen, 1991; Lichtmann, 2010; Punch, 2009) and include common approaches such as journaling, personal interviews, researcher memos, and debriefing with other researchers or academic supervisors. Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2007) argued that navigating the realities of reflexivity can sometimes lead to more questions than answers – for example, how much reflection is possible, what kind of reflection is attainable, and what are the processes by which to realize such reflection. To complicate matters further, little is written about managing the subjective stance of an entire research team and how to build reflexivity in research collaboration.

### **Polyethnography**

Given the diverse disciplines represented in the research team, we opted for a polyethnographic approach, emerging from the innovative duoethnography work of Sawyer et al. (2013), to begin the discussion among ourselves. Stanley and Wise (1993) suggest that scholars provide an “intellectual autobiography” about the research being conducted in order to establish the interest behind and the relationship to the phenomenon being investigated. Likewise, Norris and Sawyer (2012) argue that a key tenet of duoethnography is that it is both polyvocal and dialogic (p. 13) and entails autobiographical storytelling that offers a rich opportunity for conversation; they explain that

unlike open-ended and/or focused questions in traditional interviews, the use of natural, informal, everyday conversational structures serve as thresholds to past experiences by providing rich details to which the Other can connect. The stories themselves evoke other stories, cascading and building on one another.  
(p. 28)

Indeed, we found our polyvocal conversation to open a number of topics and perspectives about weight bias for our collective reflection. Essentially, the stories of other team members helped initiate our thinking of our own experiences of weight bias and how that was influential for our current research interests. Our intention at this stage of the process was not to categorize themes, but to better understand what we had in common and where points of divergence and convergence pushed our thinking about our individual and collective stances on weight bias and body image. Polyethnography opens the possibility of informing a topic through multiple perspectives about a research topic. In turn, the learning that can potentially occur between participants, including their points of departure and commonalities, can strengthen the understanding of researchers about their positions to the research topic.

Given the topic of study, it is inevitable that every member of the research team holds insider status about and is implicated in the problem being addressed (Pelias, 2011). That is, given that all team members are living in their own body and have received messages about what that body should look like, feel like, and the like, they are thought to be part of a society

that socializes individuals around their weight. Moreover, consider that individuals on the research team have a vested interest in weight bias as a social justice issue, but also maintain the status quo in a variety of ways; they are personally connected to and professionally interested in the topic of study.

Following this description by the method's creators, Sawyer and Norris (2013), we found that "creativity and playfulness can help researchers both develop and sustain multiple dialogues, including those between the researcher and researcher, researcher(s) and artifacts, past and present, text and text, and other unfolding conversations" (p. 18). Our method entailed the asking of one simple but evocative question: "How did I come to be interested in weight as a social justice issue?" We were also invited to bring and use an artifact from our life that evoked the idea of our own experiences with weight, body, and weight bias.

The following is an edited transcript of the initial conversation, held in the living room of one of the authors. Edits were made only to address grammar and sentence structure, interruptions, reducing some content to make it more concise and relevant, eliminating what was deemed as "side-trail conversations." Speakers reviewed their own contributions and edited them for clarity, comfort, and limits of confidentiality. Additional thoughts and responses were added and modified by the original speakers, with one speaker, Anusha, joining the conversation afterwards.

Unlike in more traditional methods, with polyethnography the researchers were not seeking a prescriptive or comprehensive list of themes or outcomes but, rather, allowed the conversation to unfold in a process that was both emergent and flexible. We found that, as Sawyer and Norris (2013) observed, and Norris and Sawyer (2012) found that, rather than presenting the themes of the conversation, we followed a tradition established in other publications on duoethnography (Norris et al., 2012), where actual conversations are shown followed by the analysis. In other words, we wanted to feature our conversation as the site of research and as an interactive dialogic process (Russell & Kelly, 2002). Showing the conversation also illustrates the participation and sharing of power conversation as the site, including faculty members and students. We wanted to offer the conversation as a living example of what we did, and not just write about the importance of reflection on interdisciplinary research teams. At the end of this dialogical process, we decided to share final thoughts and reflections after we had read and re-read our conversation, bringing in a level of analysis from our respective understandings from the professional literature. We wanted to demonstrate how polyethnography could be used to explore our positionality by examining our personal and professional understandings through a team process that may not have occurred without intentional action.

## **The Conversation**

Nancy: I went through family photos of my sibs and I at different ages today, just to get my head into the topic and that was really interesting to do. It helped.

Darren: It does, doesn't it? When there's something tangible, and you're looking at this picture and you remember something about it or the circumstances surrounding it.

Shelly: You know what's interesting, when you sent the email about artifacts and I hadn't thought about it at all until your email came. So I'd given some thought to these questions before and I thought, what would I take with me? The first few things that came to mind were Charlene Prickett, the aerobics instructor on TV. Does anyone remember that?

Darren: I do! In the early 1980s.

Shelly: And Jane Fonda's famous aerobics videos. It turns out some of these instructors had body issues of their own. So for whatever reason, when you said artifact [to Darren]

the things that I could bring were around the craze of tall, thin women doing exercise in those fancy outfits.

Darren: High-cut!

Shelly: With the headbands!

Nancy & Darren: Onesies. (laughing)

Shelly: For me the topic is really personal because I went on my first diet when I was 8 years old. And I think part of the reason I went on a diet was because my parents, my aunts, my parent's friends were always dieting. It's just sort of what you did. Particularly if you were a woman, that's what you did. Well, "I'm a girl so I guess I should diet."

Darren: When you say parents, your Dad would go on the diet as well?

Shelly: My Mom was always "watching her weight." My Dad was more focused on exercise; he was on some exercise program or not at all. Both parents were invested. Part of that I think was the time – it just seemed like everyone was "watching their weight" or everyone that I can remember.

Darren: There were so many diet books out. My Mom always struggled with weight. So my focus for this project, and when I thought about this topic, I grew up in a home where my Mom was always obese, she was always really big. Even her pictures as a child, as a 5-year-old she was this really large little blonde girl. And by "large" I mean only 5' 2" but really she was quite large. So she always struggled with her weight and always talked about it. Every Monday morning was going to be a whole new world. This one is the Atkins. This one is the grapefruit diet. This one is the TOPS [Taking Off Pounds Sensibly]. She joined Weight Watchers maybe 100 times. Every fad diet, every lifestyle change diet. So our whole lives as a little family of four – father, mother, daughter, son – was always involved with Mom's struggle with weight. But in a way I escaped it because my Dad didn't worry about his weight, didn't care if Mom was heavy or not, so he had no investment. But for my Mom, and then she projected onto my sister, it was important. So my sister's life was quite different than my life, in that every Monday my sister would also be on the diet with Mom. And we would promise, and cry, and sit together and swear that "we would not cheat" this week. So it was almost about a moral investment, that if we cannot be cheaters, then we will lose weight and be these perfect people. It was very much an ongoing topic of interest in my home.

Anusha: This is very touching.

Shelly: Yeah, so it's connected to virtue somehow.

Nancy: I received really mixed messages about appearance as a child, that it was okay to be larger than average, but only on the height dimension; I learned by the time I was 10 years old that it was the weight dimension that really mattered in being accepted by other people.

Shelly: I think that how thin females are... it is really strongly connected to success.

Darren: To their value?

Shelly: Yeah ... I've kind of been an over-achiever all my life – and I remember someone asking me: "What would need to happen for you to pump gas or something?"

Nancy: This triggered something in me, successful but... I have so often been evaluated on the basis of my size that it seems to be the priority signature of success.

Shelly: And I wasn't aware of this. But the first thought that came to mind in answer to that question was, "Well I could pump gas if I was thin. It would be okay to be less successful if I was thin."

Darren: Really?

Shelly: Yeah, which is a twisted way of understanding, or thinking or being immersed in the world.



Sarah: Like you have to work harder or prove yourself more because you're not thin?

Shelly: Yes, like you have to compensate somehow.

Anusha: I can certainly relate to the pressure family members have felt around weight... and there's a big dichotomy, because on one side of my family, the pressure was to lose weight to survive and avoid death, and on the other side, the pressure was to remain thin to be beautiful and well perceived.

Sarah: When I think about myself, I compensated by being really funny and being the girl everyone wanted to be around. With regard to artifacts, I don't have the picture but what I perfectly imagined was this framed picture that is hanging on my parents wall as you walk into the kitchen from the foyer. It's this picture of me at Disney World when I was 10 years old, which was the first time I went on a diet.

Anusha: I feel like a late bloomer! Because my first "diet" which lasted a week, was at the age of 12.

Sarah: My first diet came about because, as I went through puberty, I started gaining a lot of weight. What my parents and Mom thought was behind my weight gain was my eating habits, and what I heard from my mother was that I was "getting too big" and "I needed to go on a diet." I was therefore encouraged to diet. I remember not being able to participate in friends' birthdays as fully because they were eating pizza and having pop and I "couldn't eat pizza" and I "couldn't drink pop."

Darren: But you'd be there?

Sarah: I'd be there but I'd have my own food because I couldn't eat the party food. I had to be good, and have food that was better for me, food that was going to help me lose weight.

Monica: My parents never were on diets or worried about their bodies. My brothers and I have never been on diets to lose weight. In my case, the preoccupation for my appearance started when I saw how magazines portray thin and beautiful women. I also remember American TV shows and foreign famous singers. I am curious about how do you perceive the difference between your families' preoccupation versus the media impact.

Sarah: Interesting question, Monica. I think the influence of my mother's preoccupation came first, together with being teased by some of my male peers. However, as I began to enter adolescence and care more about my appearance, I engaged more with magazines such as *Teen Vogue* and *YM* with regard to how the models looked. I think this engagement with magazines and media was concurrent with social comparisons to my peers as well, as I was always very aware of the fact that the female peers I grew up with were much thinner than I was.

Monica: For me, it was different. In my culture (or at least my family) larger bodies are okay and women who take too much care of their body are considered "empty." Perhaps, it is considered that women who are less intelligent or financially successful need to be thin, so someone successful will marry them. In Latin America, standards for thinness were different. In Mexico (there are different "Mexicos" according to socio-economic class), if a woman is intelligent and has financial independency she probably doesn't need to worry in excess about her appearance/weight, but if a woman is not, then she may wish to be thin with lovely hair. I know things are changing for this generation.

Shelly: I'm booking my flight right now.

Darren: Aribbaaaa! [laughs]

Nancy: See that's interesting Monica for me, because I have also been a high achiever all my life. I feel like "self" has been defined by other people all my life, by my body size and many other aspects of who I am as a person are discounted. Notions of body size are really connected to food and love in my family. We would have celebrations,

feasts, and that's how you were together. And every Sunday night was a beautiful dinner and we would always have desserts. There was a mixed message about "don't have too much." These were contradictory messages about enjoyment of food and restraint. How I've taken up space in the world has been noticed and brought to my attention by people in so many ways. When I meet my family members now, or people in my community or people who don't know me very well in the city I'm in now, I will get comments about how I look, but it's a comment about my space in the world. So I was reflecting about one phase in life when I started to think, "I can be thinner and I will take up less space and I don't have to deal with these comments." So, when I was 14, I started to drink Tab pop, which is like 0 calorie stuff. It was one of the first diet pops and then we had this other product, I can't remember the name of it they were like little caramels.

Darren: Oh yea! AYDS. My Mom had them.

Nancy: You could have some of them and they would fill you up a little bit. So I went through that and restricting portions and restricting food. But there's something about this stage in life is different for me. I'm bothered by it, but also motivated by it. This is a big leap for me in wanting to go public in any way. It would be easy to approach this project in a very intellectual way. It's the head/body split. But I think that for me it's important that part of my experience – I don't know whether it's healing or growth or moving through the social stigma, it is to talk about that experience. What was troublesome for me as a younger person was never being able to speak these things. There were other messages about just do it, that dieting as a regular part of life.

Emily: When I received your email this morning Darren I thought, "Shoot all my dance stuff is back in Toronto." I grew up as a competitive dancer and that's really where I got my notions of weight. When we were older we were forced to wear sports bras and little shorts, and the rooms were covered in mirrors, forcing us to look at ourselves. The notion was that if you aren't okay with what you looked like you should change it. And so that's how I really figured out my notion of weight. The world of dance was a mean place, forcing teenage dancers to wear next to nothing, and not even caring if they felt comfortable in what they were wearing. Essentially making young women show their bodies off to other dancers, who were often tiny as well. Dance culture made me think "thin is good" and If I'm bigger then they will put me another costume. At dance competitions, I would see the girls in other studios who were bigger; they didn't have the same costumes as the other girls. So they would put mesh over their stomachs if it were a bra-top type of outfit. It was always that idea of you not only, they don't want them to look the same, but they clearly look so different.

Darren: How long did you end up in that world?

Emily: Until I was 18, so I started when I was 3-18 years old. When I was dancing there were awards for studios with the best bodies. And so my studio would win best body, and once the directors of the studio learned of this they would make us do Pilates weekly. We would be dancing 3 hours each night of the week and also doing Pilates. It made me think, "I don't think we needed Pilates back then."

Darren: So you were 12 or 15?

Emily: Yeah, so the only reason that I think back to it now that he was making us do Pilates was just about looks. I don't think we needed any other activity.

Sarah: I also grew up in the world of dance – but only participated recreationally. I vividly remember my experiences with wearing dance costumes and being measured for my costume each year. I would suck my stomach in to make myself as small as possible,

and I would feel so elated the years I would hear our instructor say something like, “Sarah, that’s smaller than last year!”

Monica: So I also studied dance. That field pressures dancers to be in a specific weight; however, I did not perceive I was on “diets.” We were told we were in a dancer’s regime. What we ate was what a professional dancer must eat. I did not feel I was on a diet to lose weight but because that low-calorie diet was required if you wanted to dance. When I left that field I did not want to continue with those eating habits. If I were not dancing professionally, why should I care? I was just eating like a robot, imitating eating behaviours, what I thought was normal for a ballerina. It is only when you are outside the field that you see that not everybody at 15 is doing that!

Anusha: Oh dear! Now I want to pull Jasmin from dance!

Darren: I think there’s a really strongly gendered aspect to this. And I saw that with my family. I was very external about my engagement to this research topic. But as I was writing my piece about this I also remembered about my own body because I was thinking I was always kind of average size. Nobody ever cared about the boy’s body or whatever, but in terms of being too heavy. When you mentioned taking too much space in the world, Nancy, I felt I was always a bit small, and the men in my family were really big. So my Dad was nicknamed “Moose,” 6’ 2, 240 pounds, and wore it like a badge, and was a cop, and his brother – nicknamed Elk – so Moose and Elk were both cops, Calgary city. 240 pounds, 6’ 2” as well, maybe he was 260 pounds. They were big boys, and all the men and women in the family were really large people. I would go around with my Dad, and I was a late bloomer, didn’t hit puberty into I was in high school. So it was interesting when my older sister hit it in grade 4, so we had about a 10-year lag. But I remember going with my Dad places and his big buddies all the cops on the police force were huge, and he’d take me down there. “What the hell happened to him?” was the typical comment, and my Dad would respond, “Yeah, I don’t know, I barely got my seed back on this one!”

Nancy: Darren, when you were talking about this, I was thinking about my son, who is considered skinny for his age at the beginning of puberty. Other parents have offered comments about his weight to me and it feels like some kind of evaluation of both of us.

Darren: Yes, I remember always thinking I was so little. And I still do, when I’m around big guys, even though I’m really not a very big man, whereas in those days I don’t know, in my family it was kind of valued to be more masculine.

Shelly: Right. I think females are encouraged to take up less space, and males are encouraged to take up more space. So if you don’t fit into that, it’s this unspoken thing. In the dance world you’re acculturated into something that’s not really talked about it. Same as in families, you’re acculturated into something that is not really discussed. You learn what’s supposed to be just by living it.

Darren: It’s the curriculum of body.

Nancy: I remember my first year in university in residency. Each floor had to decide what colours for rugby shirts we would wear and those would be our floor uniforms. We chose ours according to what the popular girls wanted. And the day came where we had to order the size of those shirts. So I’m not going to fit into an extra small; I don’t think I have since I was 4 [laughs], so I ordered a large size. And this person who was allowed to choose what colour looked at me and said, “Oh we’re always glad to have girls like you around,” because it made them feel better. And I remember feeling very hurt about that. I come from a family of giants; I have the genetics.

Darren: Me, too. [laughs]

Nancy: My parents were tall, my grandparents were tall, my sibs are tall. I came from a lineage of big people, it's a bit predetermined. And Darren, it's interesting for me now, as a parent I have children who are at ages where body size is quite important to them. And it's a challenge right now as I see my son who's younger than most of his friends. He's late developing according to their social clock.

Darren: Painful, the worst!

Nancy: He's right on track for him. And he's quite thin, fine-boned. So he's never going to be a big bulky guy. But you know he can play sports, do all sorts of things. But he's not going to be a big tough guy, that all of his friends are into right now. Having to experience it and support their development brings back so many of the things that happened at this stage for me.

Anusha: I'm really hoping that my children won't have these types of pressures, but I guess that's not really realistic? I just don't think I can bear seeing them put pressure on themselves in that way, because the reward is meaningless to me... whereas if they were putting pressure on themselves to excel academically, then I would see value in it.

Monica: In Mexico there is more pressure to excel academically, and economically, rather than thinness, probably because most people have larger bodies, and poverty is a huge issue in my country; however, there are other negative outcomes for academic and economic success. Thinness is a major concern in upper classes but it's starting to be a problem in all societies.

Shelly: See, I wonder, did anybody do puberty at the right time? [laughs] I feel like there's no right time, it feels like you're too far ahead, you're too far behind. But puberty changes are not something you can control. There's a sense of not ever being able to do it right.

Darren: And honestly, my sister developed breasts in grade 4 and really hit puberty in grade 5 I think. Because it was talked about in my family, like "Oh my God, she's like a woman!" And then she was – you know, probably acculturation toward dating and finding someone – she was always looking for boys, and boys found her. By the time she was 12 years old, she was attracting a lot of male attention, too. And I never hit puberty until a decade after that, even though we were only two years apart! It was funny. Yeah, we were both complete opposite ends of the scale, and it kind of affected us, in a negative way for a girl to be so sexualized so early, and for a male to be so infantilized so late.

Monica: Well, that has been changing. In the past men preferred women with bigger breasts. Now I find the opposite. In my experience as a couple's therapist, wives want to get breast implants but the husbands like their infantilized bodies. The thinner and no breast, the better, like Kate Moss or Keira Knightley. Preferences in women have been changing. In the past, men preferred women with curves. Now, they prefer women without curves.

Nancy: Pre-pubescent bodies.

Anusha: That's gross...

Emily: The fact that on Instagram even a lot of men follow really thin accounts and now men are looking for "thigh gaps" in women and I just wonder when did thigh gaps become sexy and when did thigh gaps trump big boobs or big butt type thing? It's just I find it so fascinating to see all these men liking picture of a really thin woman.

Darren: Emaciated, a 14-year-old model or something?

Emily: And maybe I don't know how long ago that would have been, they would have preferred another picture, just the thigh gap thing really throws me off.

Anusha: Because somebody, or an industry I suppose, is dictating what's considered beautiful. It's kind of scary to think of how people's perceptions of beauty are externally created and influenced. It feels very unoriginal, and very inauthentic.

Shelly: For me, there's something about a lot of what we've been talking about in our own stories. I don't know if I can articulate this well. There's something about females being gazed upon, or that females are seen as ornamental, or that the right way to grow up female is to be sure that you fit into whatever is preferred by a male?

Darren: And you always know where your deficits are. Your thighs are a little too heavy, and I know I have really nice *this*, but really bad *that*. You know exactly what the flavor of the day is for each part.

Nancy: Like the body part store.

Darren: For men, women say, "I've got to work on this." Even women who are beautiful, I have friends who were "predatory-type" males, or who at least were always womanizers, you might call them, whereas I was always "the friend." Maybe because I reached puberty late I had to develop friendship skills! But those men knew exactly that the beautiful, very attractive, very nice body women were as insecure as anyone. And they knew exactly how to exploit that. Even the women that you might think, "If only I looked like that" are just as locked in the grip of the exact same things we are talking about. They know exactly that their *whatever*, this is a little heavier than average, whatever it is, there's always something.

Shelly: See, I think it's true in my experience because when I look at pictures I was never a large child. But I always felt like a large child.

Darren: My sister, too, she was never overweight her whole life, what the hell, but she was dieting every Monday! She was a very normal-bodied kid.

Nancy: There is something about this too for me around appetite, or consumption. Women are supposed to always restrict what they eat and never be too full, and that's very different than to have a hearty appetite. Like guys are sort of allowed to have a hearty appetite.

Darren: And skinny girls can eat like maniacs! [laughs].

Nancy: You're not actually supposed to enjoy food too much. I love food. I like to eat. I have an appetite. But that is something I hear lots of messages about "You're supposed to always have small portions." Eating behaviour is different between genders.

Shelly: Supposed to be careful. This connects back to "watching my weight" and to the "gaze" somehow, that I'm vigilantly self-monitoring as well as being monitored.

Nancy: I think it is about women's worth being monitored through their size.

Darren: It's about the denial of desire too, and controlling women's desires.

Shelly: You know what Jean Kilbourne said. I will never forget. She said something like "It used to be that when a woman said she had been 'bad,' it meant they had some sort of interesting sexual encounter. Now when a woman says, 'I was bad this weekend' it means they've broken their diet. It's like controlling desires of the body."

Nancy: And you're supposed to feel guilty because you enjoyed something.

Darren: It's like cheating. You cheated!!

Anusha: I actually feel very relieved that I'm not constantly thinking about food or restricting food. I never have... as evidenced by my physique. I've had many conversations with women about this internal dialogue, and I've thought to myself, "How can this person function with food or exercise at the forefront all day long?" I just wouldn't be able to stand it! I think some would argue that the "do whatever you want" attitude is problematic, but I don't think so...

Darren: The standards have changed but the messages and the way they are delivered are similarly gendered.

Shelly: Yeah, like if somehow if you can control the female population by having them obsessed with beauty whether it be through corsets or through whatever it might be.

Darren: And makeup.

Sarah: Like if we are focused on ourselves and our bodies and the way we look we can't be focused on other things.

Anusha: And it's a huge part of the economy too. Spending money on hair, make-up, manis and pedis – I know, I'm a huge consumer! I buy into all that girly, superficial stuff. And now the new trend around botox, fillers, etc.... More obsessions. More money that people are spending. And it's not just among women, it's huge in the gay community as well, for example.

Monica: I agree with Anusha. The thin and "healthy" industry is influencing habits. There are economical interests behind these. That is why Clinique several years ago brought its "Men" line and it was a huge success.

Darren: Like taking over our shit; [laughs] it's about disempowerment.

Nancy: As someone else's commodity it is the de-powering of women's bodies.

Darren: Some men, like when I hear men's comments about women's bodies, and I do hear them all the time, and they are harsh, harsh judgements all the time. Maybe it's a media figure, or someone who's spoken out, it seems to be about controlling them. It's about putting them back in their place. Reminding them they're not in power.

Shelly: The female body is still seen in relation to the male body. My daughter is 12 years old, and so a couple years ago I was trying to find a book that would help her understand the changes her body is going to go through. It was very difficult to find a book that was not about her body *in relation to a male body*. I don't want a book about intercourse or about how she needs to appear for boys. I just wanted a book about the female body, so that she could understand *her* body. It was very difficult to find. I just wonder, what it is that makes that acceptable? That's that how we language about it.

Nancy: It is historical that the girl is a chattel to be given away, taking the husband's name or property of another person. The girl is given, taking the husband's name. "Property of..."

Darren: From one of our ribs, really!

Nancy: [laughs] Yeah, if you go back a long way.

Darren: But you made a neat comment in our conversation yesterday or the day before when we did our media piece for this project [to Shelly]. Just around, "What if women took all their time they spent on appearance in a day?" Just an average woman, not the appearance-obsessed, or the don't-care-at-all, but just an average woman, the amount of time they spend on their appearance in a day. Compared to male and put that into something...

Anusha: Within the Indian culture, or at least mine, spending time on your appearance is a positive thing... in the sense that you're "taking care of yourself" and ultimately representing yourself and your family in a positive light out there in the world.

Shelly: Could you imagine how much energy we could harness if women spent less time obsessing about, thinking about, spending money on you how they look?

Anusha: Yes!

Shelly: I don't say that in judgement... I'm guilty of that as well.

Darren: That it shouldn't appear as a failure of women. If you just spent your time in the right places you'd do okay, but nooo you're worried about your appearance [laughs].

Nancy: It's interesting that we're talking about this in terms of gender between men and women. But there's something between about how girls take up in their talk to each other about appearance. That talk is often about comparison and criticism, at very

early ages that is disturbing as well. They take in the social norms, and that becomes a very competitive world.

Darren: That's part of hegemony, that's how hegemony works. It's that sexism becomes so much the air we're breathing that you internalize it, and why not have women be the critics, be their own critics?

Shelly: To be hard on each other.

Darren: Yeah, that's part of how sexism keeps working so well!

Shelly: What's interesting to me is that cognitively I feel like I really understand this stuff. That I could really fight against it in a cognitive kind of way. But in an embodied visceral kind of way I have different feelings. So I sort of think to myself, "I'd like to go to work without makeup on." But I don't. There is a difference between understanding something intellectually, versus being able to live that out in a truthful authentic kind of way and I feel like I'm kind of stuck in between those things right now, I find it really challenging.

Sarah: Absolutely, I've had a similar struggle doing the research that I'm doing. It has been a really great opportunity for me to self-reflect, think about my own life and question what has brought me here to be so passionate about this research? I realized that growing up I was always bullied by boys. I realized that those experiences of being continually victimized by boys made it difficult to be vulnerable in relationships now.

Shelly: There's maybe a whole economy that plays on that right? There's a whole beauty industry and fashion industry and diet industry and the whole system is set up to play on that. Those kinds of insecurities they're not even insecurities they're actually a normative response to the culture. But we define it as insecurities.

Sarah: Well, like you talk about your experience of watching that documentary of the mother in Africa making her daughter fatten up for marriage.

Shelly: The Gavage diet.

Sarah: So the exact same thing in terms of "I need to go on this diet so that I can be desirable for marriage. Because I'm not going to be desirable for any man in society unless I'm thin or look a certain way."

Monica: It is interesting how weight and body are related to having a partner or not. In my case, since I have a stable marriage, I do not feel the pressure to lose weight. I perceived that my divorced friends put great energy in their bodies and weight. It is like "I am now on the market."

Darren: On the market, that's right. That is the message though, right?

Shelly: See that's all about the other, it's not about being embodied or being empowered.

Emily: Personally speaking, I'm most motivated to work out when I have a plan coming up. When I know there will be pictures. It's bad but that's when I'm always at the gym; that's when I'm most motivated.

Darren: Beach holiday.

Emily: Exactly. And as soon as I get back from my trip my workout or exercise decreases significantly and it's sad to think that all of that is for something else.

Darren: An external validation from others.

Emily: Exactly, and then when I compare myself to my Mom, my Mom is that person who's always on the go always exercising. So even when she's on business trips she'll bring her work out stuff with her, just because she's that motivated to keep up that active lifestyle you know? So it's interesting, whenever I compare myself to my Mom and think, "wow, if only I could be that motivated," because the active lifestyle is so important to my family, and has been incorporated into my upbringing.

Sarah: It's funny that you say that because, for me, it comes down to a lot of what I learnt and what was modeled to me by my Mom, too. But I've seen the two of us traveling in the

opposite direction with regard to body image and weight over the last few years. I feel like she's going so much further towards thin ideal and everything that comes with it and I'm going further down the road of rejecting it. And that as we go further and further away from one another I feel like I'm at this place of empowerment and I feel sorry for her that her whole life is so wrapped up in how she looks.

Anusha: That's exactly what I was feeling before!

Sarah: I feel very lucky to have had the experiences that I've had and gone through and be living a different way and I feel that it's liberating in a way because the very first thing she does in morning is weigh herself, and my Dad says he can tell if she's going to have a good or bad day based on the sigh that escapes. And she comes home from work at the end of the day and will say everything she had to eat that day, and it's just like her whole life is so wrapped up in it. I feel so sad and I'm so thankful that isn't my life, but I know that's the life of so many people. So it's funny you say that and think that way about your Mom because when I look at it from the perspective of me and my life, it's the opposite.

Nancy: Where are dads in this picture?

Anusha: I've gotten a lot of messages about appearance, weight included, from my Dad...

Darren: My Dad would be sitting there watching the news and saying, "shut up I'm watching the news" that was it.

Nancy: Lots of things between our moms you know.

Darren: Moms and food though, right? Males barbeque, but don't say much about food.

Shelly: It's connected to motherhood somehow and nurturing right, there's some sort of connection there.

Darren: And the emotional connection with food, I mean my spouse doesn't have eating issues or food or body issues that I know of, but in her Italian family there's very much, her Mom was very much like food is emotion: "We love each other. You love me, you'll eat my food." And it's likely that our kids felt that.

Shelly: In my family, my Dad observed it more – he was more invested in exercise not dieting. But it's interesting that fathers observe this happening? The same way women are observed in other contexts – I don't know how much men participate. I don't know if they are participants? I don't know.

Emily: My Dad definitely wasn't observing he was participating in it. We went to the gym on Christmas day. For my family it's like a family thing. Being active is important to my family and makes up a large part of our lives. It's very important to my parents we were brought up like that. My sister was a competitive skater. I was a competitive dancer. My parents definitely value activity; for example, we take ski holidays and scuba diving vacations instead of going down south to an all-inclusive resort to sit on the beach.

Darren: I had an anti-exercise father. He was anti-athletics! He was a hardworking, blue collar, came from a farm, oil-rigger-turned-cop. According to him, the only effort you should ever put out is in cutting the grass or digging the garden. So we would do that, like a work farm thing. So he would get angry about organized sports, which is a really bizarre thing for a male. When normally dads are usually overly invested in sports, you have to be the football guy and everything like that. Rather, he would say, "If you have enough energy to go for a run, get outside and cut the grass again!" It was weird.

Shelly: That's funny. That's related to productivity or something? So girls are seen as ornamental and males seen as instrumental. What men can achieve, accomplish, or produce? Often times when you go to a social situation female conversation is about appearance and male conversation is about "What do you do?"



Monica: What about your grandparents?

Darren: Mine were pioneers.

Nancy: My grandparents come from a lineage of farmers and strong communities.

Darren: Small town Ontario.

Nancy: Making their way, through hard work. But again you'd sit down and have a meal together. There were lots of messages to the men about "You work hard and you can eat hard too." So there were lots of messages about what was acceptable.

Darren: I think a lot of the body issues in my family too were tied around sexuality as well or sexual orientation and hetero-normativity. You might say, I'm just thinking in terms of my sister's body, the fact that it attracted male attention and it had to be modified and controlled to still be an attractive body, so guys would like this. My Mom had a little thing she would say to my sister, I remember they would have a little code word for sucking in your stomach, and for me, not looking manly enough and my Dad worried I might be gay because I wasn't acting manly enough.

Shelly: Hmm, interesting. I think commenting on others' bodies is just somehow socially acceptable. I remember relatives making up rhymes with my name that would have to do with my body parts, so it was always like "Shelly *belly*." There was a rhyme that my great uncle always used to sing to tease me. I remember a relative also telling me to "move my fat ass" when I was about 11. It being acceptable to comment "tuck your tummy in" or make up songs about the body. It's socially acceptable to objectify the body, particularly the female body.

Darren: And it's out there on society, like on a bus. Men standing watching a TV screen anywhere in the world. You'll just hear it. You'll hear it constantly. I do. I hear sexist comments all the time.

Shelly: I really want my daughter to be in her body in her own right. So that's how I looked for the book about puberty for her. I don't want a book for her in relation to men. I want her to be in her body in her own right. Like not to think about it in relation to others or how others are going to look at her or in comparison to others.

Darren: Good luck! [laughs] I mean... I don't know, I shouldn't say this but it is on the positive side though. My spouse and I wanted our kids in sports just to have them experience being part of a team for example that we never got to. So for us we think it has really helped them develop really healthy body images because they were learning to eat healthy, they were working towards a purpose, they were staying fit, and they were lucky enough to have average-sized body types to begin with. But they are both really comfortable in their own bodies, and they are not insecure in the way I was insecure or maybe still am. They are very comfortable not worrying how their body looks, and part of that might come from when you're on an athletic team. If you've ever watched high school girls or university level girls or whatever, playing volleyball or whatever it is, they just change clothes on the court without any shield whatsoever.

Monica: I think that is also influenced also by class, space and culture. I worked in a clinic for eating disorders in Mexico. Girls in a disadvantaged economical situation, living with other families in the same house, put themselves on diets, not because they wanted to be thin but because they didn't want to be attractive to other men in the house. They did that to prevent sexual harassment. The thinner they were, the less attractive they were to other relatives.

Darren: Or at least that's the hope. I think sexual harassers and abusers don't discriminate like that. I think they are predators.

Nancy: But they turn around and blame the girl.

Darren: Exactly.

Nancy: It's because of her body, or it's because that skirt is too short. Or she has a woman's body now; therefore, it's a rationalization, but I think it's again blaming the girl for that position.

Monica: For example in Mexico, men could give women compliments or comments about their body. There is extreme care where and in what context women show parts of their body.

Shelly: But somehow it's up to the female to control the risk right by manipulating their body or not wearing certain clothes.

Darren: Men are fine the way they are; that's the message.

Nancy: We'll have to have another conversation about that.

### **Discussion and Reflection**

Our team decided not to add a traditional discussion section but rather to enter our reflections and observations to deepen our understanding of our person, our profession, and our positionality. We honor our full experience as a team by reflecting on our own individual experience of this conversation, our observations of the process, and the questions we are left with as a result of this experience. To summarize, we wanted to present a portion of our dialogue so that readers could see the interchange between our team members as a potent source of reflection. Next, we invited each other to make a shift from the personal reflection to the professional level of interpretation. In this manner, we individually brought ideas from our experience, shared and integrated ideas from other team members, and then brought forward ideas from the professional literature that would further inform our team experience.

Nancy: I entered into this discussion as a reluctant participant, as I had some concerns about sharing such personal details with colleagues and with students. The thought of "going public" with personal experiences was connected to a deeper level of wanting to maintain power and control. In contrast, I have been reflecting about the pressures to stay silent about weight stigma as a form of social control that continues to reinforce the status quo, versus making visible and explicit the gender and power differences in my life that impact me as a professional. The process of public discussion was liberating as we developed a deeper meaning of our research topic through the unique and collective experiences of our research team. As individuals we hold unconscious biases and often lack or may avoid opportunities to discuss and reflect about the assumptions and potential biases that we hold as researchers in relation to our disciplinary fields of study. Feminist writers have focused on the notion of empowerment to help individuals gain consciousness about their social identities (Worrell & Remer, 2003). Our experiences are strongly influenced by context, as identity is socially constructed through explicit and implicit messages about what aspects of identity are more or less acceptable. As academics and researchers, we need to deeply reflect about how our life experiences are more or less privileged by our personal life contexts (Arthur & Collins, 2014). This conversation has sparked curiosity about the multiplicity of experiences and the intersections of cultural identities for understanding weight bias (Kashubeck-West & Tagger, 2013), and specifically, that we may have overlooked had we not engaged in reflexivity through polyethnography.

Darren: As the conversation was going on, I remember noticing how we were developing a sense of trust in telling our stories candidly, even with some really painful memories being shared. I felt a wide range of emotions being expressed, and reflected on how rare it is to honor those emotions through emotionally charged autobiographical memories, as part of our academic study, yet there are new understandings possible by embracing what Boler (1999) termed a "pedagogy of discomfort." Indeed, any moments of awkwardness and even disagreeing or challenging one another only add to the richness of the

dialogue. In this family of approaches, we are not seeking universals; instead, polyethnography “examines how different individuals give both similar and different meanings to a shared phenomenon” (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 21). Knight-Diop and Oesterreich (2009) characterize educational encounters with discomfort as a “unique third space in which emotions serve as sites of struggle and contestation, and possibilities for changing the status quo of inequities” (p. 2679). Further, my own memories of body policing within our family are imbued with notions of hegemonic masculinities expressed through inadequacies around size (Lee, 2010). A gruff father figure rigidly enforced rules around how I was allowed to use my body through a lens of heteronormativity and working class expectations toward the pragmatic service of the family rather than through athletics. For my sister, the body policing centred around diet control, body size monitoring, along with notions of patriarchal control of her sexuality. It felt like a luxury having a chance to share these personal memories and reflections within a trusted group of colleagues toward a common research goal.

Shelly: When I review this conversation I am struck by my deep desire for, and commitment to, my daughter having a different experience in relation to her body (Richardson & Rehr, 2001). I am also equally parts empowered, enraged, and saddened by the embodied oppression that I see in our exchange: too large, too tall, too short, too big, too small, too much, too little (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005). Too late? I point to this conversation as an exemplar of making transparent the ways in which researchers can embody the personal, professional, and political (Young, 2011). It gives me hope that it is not too late. By exploring the complexities of interdisciplinary perspectives about weight and how as researchers we come to understand our own embodiment (Russell-Mayhew, Stewart, & MacKenzie, 2008), we create greater capacity for impactful and equitable societal change that can make a difference. Through surfacing and claiming our positions that are inevitably influenced by social discourse, we are in a position to reflect and act in more conscious ways to counteract harmful social practices.

Sarah: In reviewing this conversation, what stands out for me is how “normal” struggles with body weight appear to have been in the experience of almost all group members. The term normative discontent (Rodin, Silberstein, & Streigel-Moore, 1984; Tantleff-Dunn, Barnes, & Larose, 2011) kept coming to mind. Weight-related struggles and dieting strike me as having been a natural part of growing up, and that we gradually and implicitly learned our own “rules” around weight and eating (Evans, Tovee, Boothroyd, & Drewett, 2013). I feel as though these rules have an overwhelming presence in the culture of both our families and our society (e.g., Bergstrom & Neighbors, 2006; Lombardo, Battaliese, Lucidi, & Frost, 2012). However, when I think about all the research that has been, and is being, conducted as well as the positive body image movement, I feel hopeful for the future.

Emily: Many salient themes emerged from the conversation, although the one that stood out for me was weight as related to upbringing and family expectations. My notion of weight developed and was maintained largely because of how my family considered physical activity (Kichler & Crowther, 2009) and a lean appearance to be of highest priority (Kluck, 2010). In terms of process, as the most junior member of the research team I felt privileged hearing the personal experiences of esteemed faculty (Lee & Bozeman, 2005); however, throughout the conversation I wondered how the group would perceive my contributions. As this process comes to an end, the only question I am left with is: How will consumers of this knowledge respond to our honesty?

Monica: After reading our conversation several times, I raised more awareness about how my country (as potentially many others) is being colonized by the North American preoccupation for the “healthy” and “thin” body (Jutel & Buetow, 2007; Morgan, 1991). I reflected on how the standards and dominant discourses on what and how to eat and relate

with our bodies are homogenizing society's habits and physical expectations (Katrak, 2006). In the past, we had so much diversity and wealth in arts, culinary traditions, music, fabrics, literature, languages... and body appearances. Currently, the body's surveillance tendency and thinness oppressive practices force us to wear a uniform: the "standardized" body, everybody wearing the same "suit."

Anusha: In reviewing our conversation, I feel a sense of connectedness to my fellow researchers, as we have all had our own unique, but sometimes similar, experiences of weight bias (Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1984). At the same time, I am saddened that we have had to endure such struggles. It should not be this way! My hope is that we can develop a society that is accepting and non-judging of all forms of diversity, including people's bodies and appearance (Kashubeck-West & Tagger, 2012). Another piece that sticks me when I re-read our conversation is that we are all discussing our experiences from our own cultural identities and social locations (understandably). However, I feel that this creates a conversation that can be perceived as sexist, heterosexist, and ethnocentric, to name but a few examples (Fischer & DeBord, 2013). I am very cognizant that there are many voices and experiences missing from this conversation. My hope is that our research efforts in the area of "weight bias as a social justice issue" can work toward highlighting the many different layers and complexities involved in this topic, and ultimately move the dominant discourse in a direction that embraces humanity above superficiality (Kashubeck-West & Tagger, 2012).

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In many ways, this conversation brings forward that which is often hidden in research; researchers are people in a context and bring the personal, professional, and political to the questions being asked in research. The process of reflection about positionality can be helpful to uncover assumptions and address potential biases. We acknowledge that our conversation is limited by our collective locations and experiences in the world and that there are many voices not present that need to be heard. Despite these limitations, we share this deeply personal conversation as an example of a process that might be useful for interdisciplinary research teams embarking on a research journey. It was not an easy process and several of us were hesitant about engaging in the group process and in going public with conversation that required revealing personal experience. Yet, we firmly believe that this is the type of reflection that is essential for a research team, prior to examining their topic from the perspectives of other people cast in the role of research participants. We argue that the point of departure for research has to be grounded in a process to gain perspective about one's personal relationship to the research topic.

Reflective practice in research and positionality are a priority for collaborative research in order for team members to be able to gain personal insights about their experience with the research topic and to share such insights with other team members, prior to engaging with research participants. However, there are few resources to guide collaborators about how to engage in reflective practice and the process of exploring positionality on collaborative research teams. Based on a common research interest in the topic of weight bias, we embarked on a process of polyethnography to encourage reflection, appreciate our own local views and knowledge, understandings what influence our research agendas, friendship and hospitality for the otherness, entrusted responsibility and care for the team, input from other members of the research team, and to foster a deeper collective understanding of the research topic.

Through this process, we have learned a great deal about ourselves, and the multiple perspectives of our team for proceeding with research on weight bias. This was one step in our process in an attempt to make ongoing reflection a priority as we moved forward in our

research on weight bias. Our initial goal may have been to state our positionalities, but the outcome became broader. Our team-based reflection process using polyethnography brought the team together and helped to reduce power disparities between team members, across time and space, cultural perspectives and generational similarities and differences. This was a different process than individual reflection as we learned from and engaged with each other in a group reflection. The experience has reminded us of the importance of taking time to engage with the process of group reflection as we move forward to attend to power differences and to try to step outside of experience and gaze upon ourselves, as a team, with new understandings. This process has helped us to better identify what we stand for as a team, what we are prepared to do in research and what we are not prepared to continue perpetuating in advancing our research actions related to weight bias.

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