

# Your Body, Your Story Part I: Results

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Do you feel you have a positive relationship with your body?

Yes	40 %	12
No	60 %	18

1. Have always felt overweight, even when I wasn't. Mother was (is) overweight, too. No one in my childhood family was athletic; I really wish I had been encouraged in that direction so that it felt more "normal" now. Additionally, childhood was a place to stay still and quiet so as not to attract negative attention. I catch myself doing the same thing now, realizing I have done it all my life. I have "learned" that the body, especially in motion, can be a very dangerous thing.
2. I think the questions below will cover this...
3. more yes than no, not quite yes yet
4. Have had body issues since I was young. Have always fluctuated with weight and other characteristics that make me feel not as attractive. Now that I am aging, I also have medical issues popping up which sometimes make me feel at odds with my body.
5. I am 60 now. I am trying to lose weight because it will be easier on me to move around and exercise.
6. When I turned 40 I felt great about my body and about myself. A variety of personal issues arose in the past five years, some with dating relationships, work, and myself, and some with my teenage children. Those issues took me down a path of intellectual and emotional struggles, and I periodically reverted to some unhealthy eating habits and avoiding exercise. I feel like during those times of stress I abuse my body with those choices, and sabotage whatever health achievements made up to that point. At 45 years old I am flabby and tired.
7. I just turned 50, and menopause is changing my body in ways I am not ready for.
8. hate to admit, but i still hear my parents voices, which define my view of my body
9. For years I was at odds with my body but I have learned to appreciate myself as I am in the moment.
10. i love being in a body!
11. It is good, but it can always get better. Im 27 years old and starting to realize I can no longer eat whatever sounds good at the time. Other than having unwanted body hair due to my puerto rican heritage I would say I like my body.
12. I feel like I want another option... Most of the time it is positive, it has been a journey to get to this point. My body image and working out/being healthy has been a huge part of my life since I was young. I don't think my relationship with my body is actually ever negative, but perhaps that I am not completely satisfied. Still working with my body -positively- to reach a place that is healthy and I am happy with.
13. I am currently 46 years old and though I am more relaxed about my body, I am not completely satisfied with my rubenesque form.

14. It all depends on the day, my mood, and how much pressure I feel under (and if I have been exercising regularly)
15. I know I'm not all that hideous. I just wish I was more desirable.
16. I feel fatter and hairier than women are supposed to be. I'm also 5 ft tall which I like, I just get annoyed because most things are designed for taller people.
17. yes and no
18. As I have gotten older, I am more comfortable in my body.
19. I am somewhat comfortable with my body. The only problem is the weight as I would like to slim down to my ideal weight which I feel healthy. Many people especially females are obsessed with their weight that is way out of proportion. Otherwise I am comfortable with my body. The one major topic I can not change is societal negativity about people with birth anomalies in being accepted.
20. My body is curvy, and plushy and I love it that way. I also like it strong & graceful, so I am looking for a happy medium.
21. I'm more fuzzy on this one- appreciate the machine it is, its fragility, its strength. Cover up parts that are too much or not enough. When we are in synch, we can fly. Getting there is an ongoing up and down and up and down, related to control. This I know. True,
22. I love being me, and part of being me is how my body is, I love being big and I love everything my body can do!
23. It irritates and disappoints me frequently, because it is less than perfect, which means it isn't good.
24. It's improving, but I can tell you I have given the thought about my body being imperfect more energy than I have given anything else.
25. I am grateful every day that I can eat whatever I want and not gain weight. I appreciate that, but I try not to take advantage of it by eating lots of really unhealthy food. I feel pretty good about my body and have reached a point where most of the things I don't like I could change by working out, but I hate exercise for the sake of exercise so I don't make myself do it.
26. I don't hate my body but I do think it is not ideal by any standard.
27. No, I don't. I am learning to love her and cherish her, however. I often feel that my body is my enemy—that I am trapped in a vessel which does not allow me to be who I feel like inside.

We live in a world where the body is often heavily scrutinized. Do you have a story about your relationship to your body in this context?

1. Absolutely. A previous boyfriend made comments about my needing to lose weight. Made them in a very matter-of-fact way, in a "for your own good" way.
2. I was overweight from age four until 14, teased relentlessly, and extremely ashamed and embarrassed about it. At age 12, as I was at the refrigerator getting something that I cannot remember now, my father said, "[name removed], your ass is as wide as that fridge." This left an indelible scar on me. My father's and my relationship would never be the same. In addition to weight issues, I have had acne since puberty. I've been embarrassed about my skin ever since. I have had an extremely difficult time being comfortable in my own skin literally.
3. Yes. I lost 45 pounds and 6 sizes in a year. Both of my children had been delivered by csection. After the weight loss, my skin hung off of me. I hid it. I pulled my shirt to make sure it would not come up when my kids hugged me. I couldn't find pants. I was so small but it was like having a deformity to deal with. I had plastic surgery to cut off the excess skin. I had my breasts lifted too. I do look better even great in clothes. However, the scars sometimes concern me as they are not expected by a lover. The tummy tuck scar is manageable but the t on the undersides of my breasts did not fade as much as I hoped. So, now I do become concerned with a new lover that I don't look ...flawless so to speak. I wasn't going for perfection. Just getting rid of loose skin. I know it looks better than the loose skin.
4. As a gay man, scrutiny is an understatement in our world. The gay male community is relentless and unforgiving. Once you are 30, you become invisible. There is an incredible amount of pressure to be thin, work out regularly to have a good figure and be willing to do whatever is necessary to appear attractive, including surgery, all manner of products and even hair transplants.
5. It bothers me when I feel people are trying to be too personal. My body is my space. I am comfortable in my space.
6. Body scrutiny for females starts at a very early age. My brothers were merciless in their taunting, although they were always loving and playful about it which confused me. Boys in 7th and 8th grade would swat my butt, grab at me, and tease me on the playground and as I walked home from school. They were showing me attention that was meant to be positive, but it was hurtful. My body image issues have stuck with me all my life. I wore I size 4 and 6, but still thought my thighs were too big. I am a size 8 and 10 now, and feel bad about how 'big' I have become. There are parts of my body that I have never embraced; freckles all over, very fair skin, round thighs and butt, small chested . . . it goes on and on. Overall, people say I am attractive and I feel attractive for someone of my vintage, but I still pick myself apart. I'd love to stop doing that and hoped with age it would be easier to give up all those superficial notions of beauty. Hmmm.
7. I do my own scrutinizing. I don't think about others opinions of my body much.
8. I grew up in an area that was mostly western european. I look like eastern european decent. It wasn't until I went to college at 19 that I realized eastern european men find me attractive, and those who don't are usually western european.

9. I was anorexic as a teen and young adult. I had a multitude of insecurities about my physical presence in the world growing up. I made negative assumptions and absorbed other people's criticisms and judgments in the worst possible way. Anorexia was my way of getting back at the world that hurt me and beat me down. I was trying to show that I was strong enough, to prove myself, to make myself as perfect and inscrutable as possible that no one could have any reason to pick me apart again. Unfortunately, I just made myself weaker, but it made me start to take back my own image and body, to make decisions for myself instead of relying on others to tell me what's right. That is a lesson that has stayed with me, and I have no regrets.
10. For a long time, well it seemed like a long time when I was 12 or 13 I kept waiting for breasts to arrive! They finally did but at the time did not match my expectation! I thought I was going to get BREASTS, not little bumps. But alas, with the French saying: more than a handful is wasted or more than could fill a champagne glass, well, I concluded what I had was plenty!
11. Other than having to go through elementary school with bushy eyebrows and a mustache (which I now wax) I'm not aware of anything above and beyond what as a woman we deal with daily.
12. I think because I am generally happy with my body and comfortable in it, that reflects on how people perceive me. There has definitely been points in my life where I felt very insecure in my body and not until I lived on my own was I able to develop a balance and real relationship between my mind and body and feel okay. Of course I still see the magazines and movies of women with amazing bodies and think to myself, wouldn't it be nice? But I can separate that and recognize them as a type of beauty that exists not in everyday life, and more importantly, not for me.
13. This body of mine has been beaten, scrutinized, raped, abused, prodded and poked. It has been slapped, pulled, whipped and cut. We have a long history, my body and me. I am surprised that after all it has been through, it is soft to the touch, warm to hold and smells sweet. I have a deep level of compassion towards my body and I do my best to lather her in love!
14. I don't usually think I'm all that bad, but any time my partner is less enthused to have sex with me, I assume it's because they find me less desirable than the jeans ad they saw earlier.
15. I am incredibly hairy (it is a result of polycystic ovarian syndrome, something 1 in 10 women have, but not everyone experiences the hairiness, and mine is fairly severe). I feel that shaving is a creepy thing, it relates women to prepubescent girls in order to make them sexually appealing. So I don't shave, but I am so aware of other's looks and telling me to my face that I should shave that I just never wear anything that reveals my legs or underarms. While I think shaving is a method of controlling women, my breaking that 'social rule' is nullified by letting other people value of that rule control my actions. In addition to being creepy, I think it's a big hassle. Shaving your legs and underarms and more takes a lot more time and flexibility than shaving your face does. Not to mention men with facial hair don't experience the stigma (though style and sometimes dress code do affect them) that women with leg/underarm/ even 'natural' pubic hair do. They may be seen as sloppy by some, but not disgusting, like women can be seen as.
16. I think for many women (in particular) this heavy scrutiny is constant, coming from every direction i.e. family, media, peers, self... This has been my experience.
17. From early adulthood on, I felt disconnected from my body. That has changed in recent years as I have consciously made an effort to integrate mind and body.

- 18.** I have struggled with anorexia and bulimia for the past 6 years of my life. At one point I was so underweight that I was beginning to have heart problems and my doctors were afraid I was going to have a stroke or a heart attack. Getting help for my eating disorder and returning to a "healthy" weight was one of the hardest things I've ever done and is still a daily struggle. The messages women receive about their bodies in this culture are destructive and horrible. I was initially praised for all of the weight I lost- "you look so fabulous", "omg, I wish I was as skinny as you!". Even when I was sickly underweight I still had women asking me how I stayed so skinny and what my workout plan was. It is sad and scary that we go can go to such extreme lengths and put our health and lives at risk to attempt emulate an unattainable level of "perfection".
- 19.** I was born with a birth anomaly that today is hardly noticed. I had a plastic surgeon ask me if I wanted some cosmetic correction to my face since she was going to repair a short soft palate. My response was no that I was comfortable with what I have and that procedure was not in my thoughts. I had live 40 years with it and had I been obsessed like a lot of people having implants etc. I would have had it done a long time ago. I find many young people who want changes before they are fully developed need counseling or some intervention to accept who they are as we all endure ridicule, teasing and taunting from our peers. It may make us think we need to change the wrong but the consequences later may causes further problems with their self-esteem if society still does not accept them. So I say, Be yourself, accept the genetic makeup you are born with and leave the changes for actual medical intervention. Don't be obsessed with whatever one else is doing (trend following) be the genuine individual you are and enjoy life to its fullest.
- 20.** Yes, My first husband was very critical about my weight. Yet when I look back to those days, i looked Great! He often said "You even have Big Giant Feet"! I took back my power & replied.. "Yes, ..they hold up this BIG, BEAUTIFUL BODY"!!
- 21.** Funny- I am always most healthy when I am around mirrors. Around other women, when I'm swimming a lot or can afford the gym, and I see myself and other real live women. Sadly I scrutinize myself, and create my own spinning when I feel out of control - out of my body. I do believe I have been passed over by males in my life in the context of looking for relationships because I'm overweight. I've had beautiful, close, intimate connections with boys in my life, and I know they have been attracted to me. However, there is an ideal body type that, I think particularly some men, find very important. Even though I've had great connections with them, they would feel ashamed to be attracted to "the fat girl". Too bad for them!!
- 22.** I doubt anyone scrutinizes my body more intensely and with more dislike than I do. Society doesn't give a shit about me in specific and in general, so I hold it to my own standards. The problem is that those standards are designed to give a feeling of failure and increase self-loathing, which probably speaks more to the spirit than the body.
- 23.** First memory of self-consciousness: walking to the corner store with my mom, her saying, well, you can eat that now, but when you are 15, you are going to have to start worrying about what you eat. At 15: I stopped eating because even though I was only 110 pounds, I thought it might be good to lose weight to the prom I was invited to. I went to the prom weighing 87 pounds. I overate that night and didn't stop eating for six years straight. I had dance teachers oink when I walked by (at somewhere around 120 pounds) when I was a teenager. Once, I said to a guy I was dating: "I haven't had anything to eat today." His response: "Good." One boyfriend gave me a book to read. It was a

24. I don't wear shorts. I haven't worn shorts for years. Well, I should say I haven't worn shorts or skirts that go above the knee for years. That is because I am self conscious about my thighs and I don't want people to see them. I don't even want to see them. I know it is silly because I am pretty thin, but everybody has to have something that they don't like about themselves.
25. As a male I don't feel the pressure as much and for the most part can avoid the main scrutiny that is aimed at males by remaining clothed.
26. Of course! My mother was bulimic as a young person and, being a product of her generation (she's 62), still obsesses about her weight. She used to sneak food and wake up and eat in the middle of the night. Her constant vigilance of herself got thrust on me as a girl and she monitored everything I put in my mouth. Even though I was actually just a little bit chubby as a child, she made so many constant comments about my weight, I always felt like there was something wrong with me. I developed at an early age and was the first girl to wear a bra and start my period in my class. I ended up gaining a lot of weight in high school and my body and face got hairier. I spent my twenties obsessing about my appearance, scrutinizing my every "flaw". I hated everything about myself except my face and went out of my way to hide whatever was wrong and accentuating what was "good". When I became a mother at age 30, a lot of this fell away and I began to appreciate my body much more. I am still working on loving myself but I have learned to let the scrutiny of others be \*their\* issue (except when I don't).

As you reflect on your life, can you tell a story of a time you felt really good and alive in your body?

1. Yes, in my 20's when I was working with a sports team (completely fell into it, to my own surprise) and thus felt okay being athletically active.
2. I can't say that I've ever felt that way if nude. With clothes on I've had glimpses of feeling this way. What's interesting is that I feel more like my "self" when my weight is down (which I suppose would be feeling more "alive.") I've always noticed this and have been curious. I will think as if I have a power over men, yet in reality I'm merely feeling their predation, which I am mistaking for desire. I never seem to recognize until it's too late and I've let myself be used -- and left angry and ashamed for being a fool once again...
3. I do now and have before. I felt great as a child and dancer, felt empowered by various sports I've done, and presently yoga and the wisdom of age, I am embracing what I have now and moving on.
4. Ten years ago, I decided that I could not stand the pressure to be what others wanted of me any longer. I decided that I wanted to inhabit my body in my own way. I got a few tattoos which meant something important to me and I pierced my navel (unheard of for guys to do) and for the first time in my life took my shirt off poolside in the summer. It was an incredible feeling of freedom and pride.
5. Before my first surgery when I danced for hours. I loved to dance. It is improving doing Oom Yng Doe.
6. I know that when I eat healthfully, exercise regularly, and am in a loving relationship with a mutually beneficial sex life, I feel at my best. If I'm eating well and exercising, I don't even need the sex to feel good because I can give myself orgasms. When I am living healthfully and taking time for ME, my brain is clear and everything feels strong and alive. When I turned 40 I was doing all the right things to feel good.
7. A couple of years ago, I was working out regularly and eating really well (I don't diet). I went on a hike, and realized how much energy I had.
8. I was pregnant at 24. While making art makes me feel alive intellectually & spiritually, this was the first time I felt alive and creative in a physical way.
9. Right now. Years of work on myself worth and image and paid off tremendously. Each year I grow stronger, healthier, happier, more accepting and grateful of all that I am and all that I have. The things that have gotten me here are dancing, running, singing, meditation, performing, surrounding myself with supportive friends, educating myself and practicing kindness to myself and all other living beings.
10. As a perfectly joyful little tomboy!
11. I would say the age of 22 and 23. I enjoyed and embraced filling out and having outrageous curves. I felt good in my clothes and was active.
12. I have always felt alive in my body when I am active: running, kayaking, hiking, skiing. I love using my muscles, being outside, and having fun.

13. A few years ago, I was away from home for a month on a retreat. The food was good but simple, and I did yoga at sunrise everyday. I was also meditating several times a day. After the month, I felt alive, strong, healthy and totally connected in my body.
14. sadly, the only time I felt good was when I lost a lot of weight because of depression and other mental illness. I loved the way my body looked skinny. I have worked out and lived a pretty healthy lifestyle my whole life, but I never loved my body like I did during that period.
15. At school dances at my first college. It was a very small, residential, liberal arts college that was a mecca for the leftist radicals. The campus was probably at least 65% women, of which about half were non-straight, and of the men about the same. There whether you were fat or hairy or thin and shaved, there were always people of your body type(s) and other than yours that would admire you.
16. I don't remember a time when I felt good about my body or was fully present in my body. I probably did the first few years of my life before my step father started molesting me.
17. I felt very good and alive while pregnant and right after giving birth.
18. The last time I remember feeling good and alive in my body was when I rowed crew in highschool. There was nothing like the strength and harmony I felt out there on the water when we were all rowing in synch.
19. When I was gaining excess weight I decided start working out with a friend, I wanted to lose 10 pounds. I will never again do that as it made me gain 40 pounds in one month's time. I still have not been able to take it off. My body was affected in some way that doctors are bewildered and that has been close to 25 years ago. So I had a desire to lose the 10 pounds which was good but the bad is gaining 40 more pounds instead which is bad for me healthwise.
20. I remember pregnancy as a time when I felt fabulous and full of life. It truly was a delicious time. But, I know when I turned 40, something "came alive within me"..I had been "someone's mother" for a very long time..and did not have much "body awareness". Slowly I began journaling about these feelings, reading wonderful poetry and books, I invited myself to take a woman's class about Tantra. Wow, My body began to sing in ways I did not know it could! I began Yoga which changed my life completely, I released 75 pounds~ and discovered myself again. I had muscles, I had a joyous, juicy mango-like sexuality~ I was alive!!!! My body sang its most beautiful song.
21. When I am living intentionally - when my goals are clear and I am clear enough to be thoughtful about what is good for me, exercise balances me, and I feel taller, strong, and it's not my body that limits me.
22. Ah! I have many! As a youngster I played soccer, and lots of other sports. I can remember the delicious feeling of using my muscles and clever mind to play a really delightful game! I was the goal keeper and my favorite part was diving across the goal to block a shot and hit the ground with strength and confidence! Also, I have had some gorgeous experiences with sex that have made me feel very alive and potent and connected to my body, which I cherish!
23. A story? No. A series of feelings, yes. I remember summers spent at the pool swimming and playing pool games back and forth, then lying in the sunshine and staring across the river at the fields on the other side and just letting my mind slip into an awakening dream state, while the sounds of life around me faded into background clutter.

- 24.** Well, when I worked out three to four hours a day, there were times. That's part of the myth, right? To look back and say, that time I was really fit and only ate when I got dizzy, then I was really happy. I felt really good and alive, but really??? There were only moments, like, trying on a size 10 pair of pants and realized I had abstained from food enough to fit a size four. And what is that? Like getting an A+++ on a test. Very brief moments. I guess now is as good a time as any. I feel like, I am just turning the corner on some acceptance.
- 25.** When I go out dancing I feel pretty good. I love to dance and I enjoy looking and feeling sexy when I dance. I have had people ask me if I am a professional dancer and that is flattering. It feels really good to do something that comes very naturally and to feel a strong connection to my body. I also love music and love to feel connected to a piece of music or a beat through movement. I think it is one of the only creative things I do these days.
- 26.** When I am with someone I love and can share the joy of the moment I do not think of anything except that moment and how it feels to be alive in that moment.
- 27.** I have lots of these. Honestly, one thing that all of this obsessing has done is really help me appreciate myself. I am strong, muscular, flexible and much more physically capable than I ever realized. My fondest memories of being alive in my body are riding a horse bareback and bridle-less as a girl (oh! The freedom!), having sex with a lover who made me realize what a Goddess I am (the union!), nursing my babies (the sensuality and all-encompassing love!), and giving birth (the power of creation!). I always feel better when I'm taking good care of my body, and connecting with the Earth and other beings in loving ways.

Does anything interfere with your enjoyment of or acceptance of your body? If so, what?

1. Internalized constant criticism. The reaction is to shut it down, deny it, rather than work through it and prove it wrong.
2. For a couple years now my weight has been down and I've enjoyed that aspect of my body, yet this "slenderness" is coinciding with aging. I'll be 47 in four weeks, and instead of being happy with being slender, I'm now lamenting about aged skin, sagging, etc. I'm realizing that if it's not something it's another with regard to my body image. In addition, I have been single for the last three years and fear and dread the next time that a sexual encounter happens because I'm so embarrassed about my "older" body. This aspect seems even worse than being overweight.
3. just a new lover. I think I'm over that now due to an amazing lover/friend.
4. Judgement by others (which I am always working on) My aging issues.
5. There is nerve damage in my spine which affects my legs. I need to be slimmer. It is too much work to be this weight.
6. When I don't exercise for months or even years, my muscles lose their strength and I notice it doing regular things in life. This is when I mentally abuse myself for not making better choices for my health. That perpetuates the negative cycles of eating and not exercising. People still tell me I'm beautiful -- coworkers, friends, family -- so it's not about external validation. It's internal lack of validation because I know what I could look and feel like if I did the things that make me feel healthy and alive.
7. When I am sedentary, I feel uncomfortable, sluggish.
8. my parents who raised me fundamentalist catholic who look at sex as a submissive experience for women, and my brothers & sisters who looked more western european and considered me ugly.
9. Fear that I will lose control over my body and myself, fear that I am not enough in comparison to others. But I also know this is just a manifestation of the fear of the unknown, and that through practice I learn not to let it take me over.
10. a recent injury that has been slow to heal
11. Nothing that is not within my control. I have begun being active again to get back to that spot of enjoyment. I have a job where the majority of my day is spent sitting down, and my clothes are beginning to no longer fit!
12. My extra layer of tummy fat....
13. Actually clothes are the biggest reminder that I am not "perfect." It is when shopping for clothes that I am reminded I cannot wear what I would truly love to wear because it is not made in 1x. OR the styles are not who I am. It is this that then makes me take an overly critical eye on my weight/shape/body. I then start feeling down, BUT I do try to catch it before this point.
14. "norms" It seems that the people that I am physically attracted to, are leaner than I am, so I assume they want the same from me. Deep down I believe that people all desire different things and that many people are interested in my particular body type, but it's hard for me to accept because I have such particular desires. Although- They aren't to the standards of "the norm" per se, it's still difficult

for me to believe that anyone out there finds my body irresistible, and that is important to me, because I consider myself very sexual and I absolutely require physicality in my partners.

15. My ideas of what others think of me. Also seeing how fat I am. I would prefer to not know what my stomach area looked like. I wish I didn't know the negative names for specific body shapes like mine (I have a foopa or front butt, ie a stomach that pooches out bellow the belly button and kind of sags). I wish my body type weren't the but of jokes and jabs in insults.
16. Being sexually abused and societal expectations are the two things that most interfere with my enjoyment of my body. How my body looks is never good enough and because of the sexual abuse there is always something between me and my body. I don't think I will ever fully enjoy or appreciate my body again.
17. Uh... everything. It's hard to accept and enjoy one's body in a culture that barrages us one minute with images of fattening foods in enormous portions and then the tiniest little models you've ever seen, and then an ad about diet pills.
18. Due to physical limitations yes I have been denied employment. I came to Seattle 18 years ago, got my AAS degree in the medical profession. during my education I was injured in an auto accident. Because I use a cane I was denied employment by all the hospitals in Seattle and a research lab. I was forced into early retirement as I have not worked since coming here. I can not do a lot of the things I used to so I have had to change my activities.
19. Living in the Midwest it gets cold, and I do not like having to pile on layers of clothing. I get disconnected with my body. When I live in a warmer climate, I wear less clothes and become more in-tune with my body. Being naked is a very nice place to be. I love to go to free-beaches and naked resorts. It is not so sexual as it is, feeling free and in touch with your body.
20. Loneliness and sadness - feelings of inadequacy and coming to the realization that the dreams I've had since childhood won't come true tend to send me spiraling. Not lifetime material for a partner - never to be the mom I'd always pictured I'd be. When I accept that I will be alone, it's a power that can put me back in the independent place that gives me strength as a single woman with a powerful body. When I allow myself to think about the dream lost, the child I will never have, I feel lack, and I have a hunger and a thirst that I can't satisfy. And my clothes don't fit and I don't recognize my body- can't find a way to work it the way I am used to.
21. I do feel hindered by the fact that there are not many places where I can get awesome clothing in my size. I have worked at a clothing store off and on for 8 years, and that store even has a plus size store attached to it! But I still have a hard time expressing how I feel inside through my choice of clothing, because it just doesn't exist in a size 16!
22. Yes, a mental state geared to always find the slightest reason for self-doubt and unhappiness, and then to dwell on that reason, no matter how small, and forget everything else that is a reason for hope and happiness. The stupidest thing for me is that though I am always finding light in the darkness for others to grasp onto and to give them hope, for me I am always finding the darkness on the brightest day and allowing myself to fall into it.
23. Social pressure. Perceived scrutiny. This is all in my head, but for years, I really believed that when I walked into a party, people would actually look at me and think about how much I weighed. I still catch myself strategizing to avoid this. Like, ooh, there's that oscar party coming up, time to lose some weight. Only recently have I begun to think, hey, I'm a sexy bitch, no matter what I weigh.

- 24.** I have certain standards that I have chosen out of all the standards that are out there for bodies, especially women's bodies. I can't help but notice the areas of my body where I feel like I don't meet those standards. Also, I am very busy with school and I can't be as active as I would like to be or eat as well as I would like which makes me feel bad sometimes because I am not nourishing and treating my body well.
- 25.** My seeming lack of control or lack of wanting to truly take control of my weight.
- 26.** The only thing that interferes with my appreciation or enjoyment of my body are the demons in my own mind. I have, at times, harmed myself by punching my stomach and bruising it or scratching myself until I bleed due to feelings of anger and self-loathing. I have fantasized about taking a knife and slicing off my stomach. That is the degree to which I have loathed by body. I could say it is the media and their messed up projections, I could say it was the “haters” or my mother, father or my cruel big brother. The truth is that all of those factors have contributed to the demons but I choose whether or not to listen. I learn more and more every day that I am in charge of my own destiny. I can choose to take excellent care of my body and enjoy all the sensual pleasures life in a body brings and do the best with what I've got or I can let guilt and fear paralyze me. Every day, I choose the former and I celebrate that.

What would an ideal relationship with your body look like? How would you feel?  
What would you do? How would your life change?

1. I would nurture it, exercise it, relate to it \*outside\* of the pre-established family view. The whole feeling would be lighter--physically, yes, but even more important to me would be the psychological and emotional lightness that would result from dropping the guilt and shame. As for change, I would free up so much energy! Good grief, think of all I could do if I weren't constantly obsessing over this. (Even when it looks like I'm not, I am.)
2. I would not be afraid to undress in front of a mirror, in front of a friend, in the gym. I literally fear anyone seeing nude. With that in mind, ideally, I would feel comfortable being nude in front of another person and feel able to wear a swimsuit in the summer. I would feel beautiful in stark daylight -- not afraid of my acne scars.
3. Free in any situation to be the sensual passionate creature I am...with or without clothes. I would just be fully me all the time.
4. I think ideally I would like to feel attractive to myself. I would be further along in the process of letting go of others judgements and feel happier about myself rather than the societal comparisons that we always do. (\*I\* always do.)
5. I would be a more normal weight. I would not hurt. I would have my balance and agility back. I would dance and ride horses. I would have more energy to do what I want to do.
6. My body would be viewed as the vessel of my soul and I would treasure it as a gift from God. An ideal relationship with my body would include accepting it as it is; flaws and all. Or perhaps not seeing those areas as "flaws" at all, but rather seeing them without judgement so they are just freckles, just round thighs, or a round butt, just frizzy hair. Nothing more. Wow -- now THAT would be ideal! Maybe I'm on to something here . . .
7. I would go back to regular exercise, and be toned and healthy feeling. My life would be the same, I would just feel better.
8. I would erase all negative memories mentioned above.
9. To feel no shame of what and who I am, no jealousy of others. Our bodies are always changing and it is our job to accept them exactly where we are in the moment. We can change the bodies we are born with and the way we age, but we can change the way we see ourselves in this context as a society as well as individuals.
10. hmmm. to more deeply heal from this injury would help me feel less vulnerable.
11. It is a matter of respect for me. As I get older I have come to realize I don't put good things into my body. So, an ideal relationship would be one where I respect it and take care of what I choose to eat and how active I am. I have started this already, and it's amazing what it does for your mind, body and soul.
12. I would like to reach a balance with my mind and body. This would require a balance between a healthy, consistent diet and a regular exercise schedule. It would require awareness and patience. It would make me feel in control and proud that I have reached this point that has been a struggle all my life.

13. The ideal relationship would be one where I had energy, less pain and felt stronger! I would feel stronger physically, and mentally. Strength is key for me to not worrying about size.
14. I would love my body. I would recognize that some people might find my body positively appalling, but that wouldn't matter because I would love the way it looked any way. I would know that other people in the world saw my body and wanted to use it or love it. I would love it and feel it sensually. My life would change most dynamically in the sense that I would spend less time caring about how I looked. As it stands, apparently, I turn myself on enough. However- I have no faith in my ability to be effective on other creatures and, shallow as it may be, I do have a innate desire to appeal physically to others. It would be most sensational if somehow, I could manage to be both undeniable to others and humble to myself. I guess the question lies in the ponderous nature of the happy medium.
15. I would be thinner. I don't think, as I've been fat my whole life, I would look good at the 'recommended' weight for my height. My bones didn't develop that way. But I am 60 pounds heavier than I 'should' be. I'd like to only be 30 or 20 pounds over. That I feel would be normal. I would think I look better and would be more confident. Hopefully because I wouldn't feel so judged, but definitely because I had accomplished something. I would exercise (mainly through activity, not the going to a gym) and eat better, because neither of those are things I grew up knowing how to do. I'm learning them now.
16. The ideal relationship with my body would look like - being at home in my body, being able to feel pleasure without the baggage of my childhood. I would feel fully alive. I would celebrate my body as a way of life. I would love my body. My life would be drastically different. If I really pay attention (which usually I don't/I try not to) the truth is my life revolves around various aspects of hating my body.
17. Ideal.... I guess it's pretty ideal the way it is. It might be nice to be super athletic, but I've made peace with my nature!
18. look forward to the day when I can trust my body. When I don't have to feel afraid of food and fat. When I can exercise bc I enjoy it and not for how many calories I'm burning. When I can eat bc I'm hungry and stop when I'm full. Those are the things I am currently striving for in my recovery. I want to appreciate my body instead of feeling like I'm fighting it all the time. I know this would make me so much happier and free up so much space and energy in my mind and my life that could be put toward things that truly are so much more important than calorie counting and waist-scrutinizing.
19. The only thing I would like to change in regards to my body is the weight. For my healthy life I once had is to lose about 60 pounds to my ideal weight. If I lost the weight I would be more active and healthier. So far what my doctors and I have been doing has not changed anything so I may be resigned to what and who I am. It may be the genetic patterns that run in both sides of my family history that has kicked in and likes to tease me by allowing to let me lose a few pounds then mysteriously slips it back on.
20. My ideal relationship with my body would be one of respect, reverence and loving gratitude. I would feed it only the best healthy foods, keep it hydrated, give it warm healing sleep whenever my body requested rest, keep it soft & sensually satisfied, stretch it and keep all of my muscles & joints juicy, I would do lots of yoga, dance, sing & play every single day, bathe it in delicious warm waters in Bora Bora, and cool waterfalls in Hawaii, I would swing on the swings in the moonlight under the

stars, take it on luscious walks & hikes in the Redwoods, get a deep decadent delicious massage every single day in different outdoor locations. I love being in my own skin, my own naked perfectly imperfect body.

- 21.** Goal driven. Independent. Dreaming new dreams that are not connected to another person. Empty, perhaps. But new. Strong. I fear I would have to have a different personality. Always been a dreamer. I'm working on that. Not accepting it. Changing it.
- 22.** My ideal relationship with my body would be one of grace and ease. My body doesn't have to look like the airbrushed girls in Maxim, all I want my body to be is the very best ME possible. I would be happiest if I could have a body without too much pain, and I'm working on that!
- 23.** -laugh- I would be more active, slimmer, and more joyful. I would spend more time looking for my own light and shaking free of the darkness. I would not necessarily do more, but I would absolutely get more enjoyment out of what I do. Life would become more light and colorful instead of shades of grey tending towards black.
- 24.** I just wish I could cross this hurdle about self care. I wish I was as invested in my health as I was in other things. Like, simple things: drinking water, eating beautiful food and serving my temple instead of fast food and all the pain it causes. It's a mystery. Why am I not elevating to this level? Anyway, ideal looks like this, healthy beautiful home cooked food, moderate exercise and lots of water. I don't know if my life would change. But I love the way I feel after a salad.
- 25.** I would have activities that I did on a daily or almost daily basis to keep my body active. I would do a little yoga everyday and go dancing often. I would accept and enjoy the parts of my body that I am currently not satisfied with.
- 26.** I would not feel subconscious about being in a public area in the nude. Not that I want to spend time in such a place but I'd like to feel I could do so without concerning myself with what others might think.
- 27.** I would allow myself the love I know deeply that I deserve. I would make sure I got all that I needed. I would allow space for play, exercise, dancing and self-care. I would cherish myself as much as I cherish my own children and, as I do with them, tell myself I'm beautiful. I would stop feeling guilty and just BE. How would I feel? ALIVE! How would my life change? I've been slowly learning that by caring for myself, good things happen to me. I think my life would only be enhanced by allowing more self-care.

If you wish to enjoy and appreciate your body more, what needs to change in order for that to happen? What support do you need?

1. I need immense amounts of positive reinforcement so that I can forge new neural pathways in my brain, change the automatic thought processes. It feels like the need for a constant, sincere cheerleader to drown out/overcome the negative internalized voice. Emphasis on activity as a form of self-love, rather than "getting fit" and god please no "dieting". It's much more of an internal game than an external one.
2. This is an amazing question...it is somewhat shocking to me, in fact, because I'm feeling that there is nothing that could make me enjoy or appreciate my body except for outright trauma and/or tragedy, such as a burn victim or amputation, or losing some function of my body. As I am writing this now, it feels like the only thing that would and does make me appreciate my body. In those times, I wholly appreciate what it does for me. As I ponder this question more, I can think of another thing that would help -- that would be more awareness/mindfulness that my body is a temple and housing for my spirit and soul and I would be humbled and grateful to realize this in its totality...to feel it on a cellular level.
3. love myself fully, not accept someone who does not accept me as I am.
4. I think it's two fold. Some of the appearance issues I have would be taken care of by more close attention to how I treat my body. I also feel that creating change in society and how we see each other and ourselves needs to happen.
5. I need to sit less and exercise more. Between job and classes/homework, little time is left. Right now I have to do what I have to do and keep up the best I can until I graduate. For support, someone to clean my house so I can go exercise.
6. I need to make better choices for myself and stop judging myself, and appreciate the gifts of health and wellness and beauty. My friends and kids are all very supportive so I have the support needed -- I just need to use that support as a springboard for internalizing all of the positive things they say.
7. I need more time (full time school and work don't leave alot left over), and a new gym!
8. i need to change. and i am. the more positive experiences i have, the more i can ignore or eventually forget the negative memories.
9. I will always encourage, for everyone's benefit, not just my own, to promote a wider variety of body types, races, and physical attributes in the media, to realize that everyone has different tastes and views and they are all valid. Education is also key-if you practice self examination then you are more likely to realize the impact you make on the world, and therefore be more aware of the pros and cons of your actions on yourself and others. Start to question the things you believe about yourself, go and and look at some other perspectives, and find out for yourself what is true. If we all did this, we'd have a culture more open minded and accepting of the variety that actually happens in life, and people in all their variety would be more accepted.
10. it's fine the way it is!
11. See above. I would need the support mainly of my husband who is going to the gym with me and also going for walks with me weekly!

- 12.** It's hard to say what needs to change. Habit I guess. When you've been dealing with something for so long it feels like it's not a choice, it's just life. So I guess for change to occur there would have to be a breaking of the habit. Creating a new, consistent way things happen. I would need for someone to hold me accountable, but mostly someone to remind me that only I am accountable.
- 13.** I need to get my body exercising, the support i could use would be a training buddy- she left for guatamala three weeks ago and I am struggling ha!
- 14.** I need to either be less fleshy. . . i.e drop a few pounds, or believe, somehow that I look incredible as i am. What needs to change: Either, I lose flab, or my partner starts acting more uncontrollable with desire. I need to either become more beautiful or hear that i already am. . .
- 15.** More positive images of fat people, SPECIFICALLY fat women. Fat men are ridiculed, but more accepted than women. It takes guts (haha) for a fat woman to have enough self confidence in the country to be somebody. i would also appreciate people lifting the standards on hairiness. Fat is one thing, because not everyone is at a weight they want to change. But EVERYONE has hair. So why make everyone shave it? If it were a choice, like wearing the hair on your head short or long, I think women would have more freedom of choice and theirfor confidence.
- 16.** I do wish to enjoy and appreciate my body fully but I don't know what it would take to shift my current body paradigm.
- 17.** I have been lucky to have found an amazing support group in my journey to mental and physical health. If you suffer from an eating disorder there are some really fabulous resources out there! Don't hesitate to ask for help! I go to a support group once a month and went to counseling for about 2 years. It is also really helpful to talk to your friends. Everyone, especially women, struggle with food and body issues to some extent. I am at the extreme end of that, of course, but I see bits and pieces of eating disorder behavior in all my friends. The more open and honest we are about these issues with each other, the more we can break through the negative programming that our culture has pushed on us and support each other in finding a more positive way to see and treat ourselves.
- 18.** Get the weight off. As for support I don't know as I have tried many things but will not go for things such as the weght-lose surgeries etc or takiing pills that do more harm than good. I am a all natural kid.
- 19.** I shall move to a warmer place. Where I can wear less clothing. I am currently healing from an autoimmune thing, I have less energy to run & play. I would love to have my "juice" back. I have not lost it, only misplaced it. It is hiding, waiting to be found.
- 20.** I need to support myself. I need to experience a little success - success breeds success - I know that. Need to take chances, and figure out how to pay for them later. Need to finish things. Need to get the creativity in me out into the light again. Need to run.
- 21.** I want support from the people who put out magazines and movies! It would be wonderful to be able to see images of bodies like mine in powerful and beautiful roles! I also think that for me personally, the change that could really help me to appreciate my body to the very fullest would be to get out and use it more! Dance, bike riding, digging in the dirt and playing all help my body to feel better, and in turn help me to love being ME! So I need to include those things in my life, make time for them, because that helps me overall.

- 22.** -grin- Me. I need to change. I have to quit feeding myself into the downward spiral; I have to shake loose, break free, and fly. And I feel that I can't do that on my own, and I can't ask others to help, because I don't know what to ask for or how to ask. My needs would probably change constantly, and I would be very needy and fairly demanding, and I just won't do that to myself or others. In the end, I am secretly afraid that I only have friends because I give all and ask nothing, and that if I asked for the mountain of help and support that I want, I would suddenly find myself alone. I am terrified of being friendless. Just as terrified as I am of ever being found out for being less than I am. It's funny. And yet I'm not laughing. Oh well.
- 23.** I guess I would have to crack this mystery of the self-care vacuum. I don't know how to ask for support about that.
- 24.** I want the culture to change or I want to live in a different culture. I am really tired of seeing these airbrushed people covered in makeup on all the magazine covers at the checkout stand. I think I would also have to just stop caring about what my nose or my boobs or my butt looks like, cuz in the long run who really cares. Do you think anyone cares what Rosa Parks' butt looked like? No.
- 25.** I need to treat my body better. If I treated it with the care I think I should I'd have less of a concern about at least half of my problems with my body.
- 26.** The only person who can change this is me. I can only take full responsibility of myself and my choices. I have learned not to compare myself to others but to fully appreciate myself as I am. I personally try to just break through all the stereotypes. I can be older or fleshier and still be sexy-as-hell (and I am!). I can be fit at any size and age, I can be carefree if I choose. The support I need, I have found. I have found people who love and support me and celebrate me and my beauty and strength.