

Young Danish Women's Experience of Inhabiting their Bodies

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Abstract

The purpose of this master thesis is to investigate and gain a deeper understanding of how young Danish women experience of inhabiting their bodies. The research question is approached through Merleau-Ponty's concept of Body-Subject, where the individual's experience is tied to the body in time and space. Previous research has argued that women's situated bodily experiences affect their bodily movement and orientation in their surroundings, partly because they internalise an objectified perspective of themselves, described as self-objectification. This is argued to be related to body self-esteem, body image and appearance-contingent self-worth. It is argued that in our time, the project of the self is the project of the body, guided by the discourses of healthism and body-ism.

This qualitative study is using individual semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with four Danish women (aged 22-25) recruited through a call on Facebook in March of 2020. Two of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, whereas the last two interviews were conducted as online video conference calls due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The interviews focused on the women's use of their bodies, awareness of their bodies and their experiences regarding their bodily appearance and bodily performance. The material is analysed using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach.

The results point to three major themes of young Danish women's experience of inhabiting their bodies. These are living up to the norms and expectations, sensing the body and temporality. Through the themes, the women's understanding of themselves and their bodies is guided by norms and expectations regarding their appearance, competence and the activities they engage in. They understand their appearance and competence in comparison to others' and they engage in self objectification and appearance-management. They sense their bodies through physical movement, but also through a lack of physical movement and make a distinction between their heads and their bodies. Their experience of their bodies is furthermore understood as being a process, where assessment, judgement of and feelings towards it, change with time through new knowledge and experiences. Their priorities regarding their bodies change through this process and there is a general consensus that the experience of inhabiting their bodies becomes more positive in the beginning of their adult life.

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Young Danish Women's Experience of Inhabiting their Bodies

Within recent years more and more young people in Denmark seem to be particularly concerned with their bodily appearance. A rapport on Danish youth's body perception from 2018 found that 64 percent were dissatisfied with their bodies and that the young women felt less positive about their bodies than the young men. Many of the women wanted to lose weight, even when their weight was within the normal range (Dahl, Henze-Pedersen, Østergaard & Østergaard, 2018).

When studying how women perceive and experience inhabiting their bodies it is interesting to look at embodiment. Embodiment in the phenomenological tradition is the bodily aspects of subjectivity and is a way of thinking and knowing about human beings. It is in contrast to the mind-body dualism, Western dualistic thinking, where mind and body is thought of as separated entities (Qin, 2016). In embodiment, the body is a living entity by and through which human beings actively experience the world. Embodiment can be understood through Merleau-Ponty's concept of the Body-Subject. He understands the body as a subject, a form of consciousness (Romdenh-Romluc, 2010) and states "[t]o see is always to see from somewhere [...]" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 69), grounding experience in the body and the body in time. He eschews the mind-body dualism because even though we are both mental and physical, we would not be able to have a mental state if we were not physical (Priest, 2000). He distinguishes between being a physical object and being a physical subject and finds that one's own body has characteristics incompatible with being solely an object and the body therefore exists in a different way than other objects. The body cannot be wholly detached from the person as it is the person, its presence does not imply the possibility of absence (Priest, 2000). Therefore, we experience our world, perception, emotion, movement and language, through our bodies in time, space and sexuality. Being situated in time and space means that we are being affected by social, political, historical and cultural influences (Qin, 2016). Our experiences are thereby linked to our gender, race, status, etc. Merleau-Ponty further recognises that each body is different, spatially and grounded in personal experience, and therefore each body facilitates a unique perspective and positioning in the world. This uniqueness results in a unique blind-spot for each individual as the individual cannot have complete self-consciousness of the situations of their body at all times (Qin, 2000). We understand our world through shared understandings, bound to the cultural, social and historical meanings and it is through this we construct and transform the world (Qin, 2000).

Approaches associated with embodiment have a longstanding tradition in social psychology, although theories explicitly using an 'embodied' language first increased highly in

number in the 1990's. Traditionally, social psychologists have studied how people feel, act and think in their bodies and what impact the body had on cognition (Meier, Schnall, Schwarz & Bargh, 2012). Feminist scholars have also used the idea of embodiment to study issues such as reproductive rights and technology, sexual violence and sexuality (Fisher & Dolezal, 2018). Fisher and Dolezal (2018) argues that bodies are instrumentalised as sites of biopolitical forces and human capital resulting in a focus on controlling embodied life down to the details.

One feminist scholar who has studied embodiment in relation to female experience is political philosopher Iris M. Young who in a series of essays presents explorations about the social meanings of female embodiment. The series of essays reflect on various aspects of women's everyday lived bodily experience. In the essay "Throwing Like a Girl" she explores the basic modalities of feminine body comportment, moving and space in which she argues, following de Beauvoir, that the female person is defined by her social, historical, cultural and economic situation, and that this situatedness affects her bodily movement and orientation to her surroundings. This means that the way women act in and with their body, to accomplish a purpose or task, is constrained by woman's existence as Other. This is again based on de Beauvoir's account of woman's place in a patriarchal society (Young, 2005). In another essay, "Women Recovering Our Clothes" (2005), she reflects upon women's pleasure in clothes through the frame of representing themselves, objectification and the male gaze. Through these concepts she touches on women's focus on appearance, as well as the condemnation for sentimentality, superficiality or duplicity by society for putting too much stress is put on their looks.

In 1990 the American poststructuralist philosopher Judith Butler wrote the book *Gender Trouble* where she argues for gender as being performative. Here, gender is explained as a social phenomenon, that is upheld through daily practices, founded on learned behaviour based on the cultural norms of masculinity and femininity (Figuera, 2016, p. 1). Butler states "The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body." (Butler, 1999, p. xv). She furthermore describes normative gender roles as "[...] synonymous with "pertaining to the norms that govern gender." (Butler, 1999, p. xx) which means that "[i]t is not possible to oppose the "normative" forms of gender without at the same time subscribing to a certain normative view of how the gendered world ought to be." (Butler, 1999, pp. xxi). Butler writes that "[w]e may be tempted to make the following distinction: a descriptive account of gender includes considerations of what makes gender intelligible, an inquiry into its conditions of possibility, whereas a normative account seeks to

answer the question of which expressions of gender are acceptable, and which are not, supplying persuasive reasons to distinguish between such expressions in this way.” (p.xxi). Butler further argues that gender and sex are not neutral and that both are neutralised through continuously performed regulated activities. This also means that any kind of gender is a form of impersonation, as it is a mode of bodily action and based on social practices (Figuera, 2016, p. 1). But since no imitation is perfect, gender is able to transform through any performance of gender by anyone (Figuera, 2016, p. 2). Gender is thus a social and cultural phenomenon, creating and recreating itself, through active agents subscribing to the norms or not.

In much the same manner West and Zimmerman (1987) argue in their article “Doing Gender”, for an understanding of gender as something done by humans, through socially guided micropolitical interactional and perceptual activities. Doing gender becomes an inherent tool of social control and affords an interactional scaffolding of social structure. This means that humans are constantly acting ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ and thereby actively construct and reconstruct what is considered ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’. The authors argue “[...] that gender is not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings of some sort.” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 129), and thereby illuminates how gender can be understood as a continuous social activity. The social activity which people engage in is different in distinctive contexts and spaces, as Mavin and Grandy (2016) suggested when studying intragender “management” of bodies in elite female leaders. Here certain gendered performances were not allowed and the women who deviated from the accepted norms of masculinity were silenced and Othered. In other words, if they did not live up to the norms of their gender in this context, they experienced social sanctions.

In 1997, Fredrickson and Roberts developed *objectification theory*, the experience of being treated as a body, or even a collection of body parts, mostly valued for its use to or consumption by others. This is often done through the *gaze*, a visual inspection of the body, and evaluation of it (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The body or body parts become separated by the women and then regarded as capable of representing her, leading to the women being treated as bodies specifically as bodies existing for others (Bartky, 1990). The gaze is not only present in social interactions, but also in media (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Bordo, 2003; Faludi, 2006; Moradi & Huang, 2008), where there is a major focus on women’s bodies, what Unger and Crawford (1996) call *body-ism* (in Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The theory is a way to illuminate lived experience as well as mental risks of women who face sexual objectification. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) argue that having a mature female body might create a shared social experience of being sexually objectified, leading to a possible shared set

of psychological experiences as the women internalise the observer's perspective and treat themselves as objects to be gazed upon and evaluated. The subjective experiences proposed to be inflicted include increased shame and anxiety, decreased peak motivational states, also known as flow, and muted awareness of internal bodily states. The internalised observer's perspective is what Moradi and Huang (2008) call *self-objectification* and comprises cognitive components, eg. valuing appearance above competence and behavioural components, eg. engaging in chronic body monitoring (Karsay, Knoll & Matthes, 2018). As women learn to view their bodies as outside observers and internalise the cultural body standards, they judge themselves based on rigid and unrealistic body ideals (McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Fredrickson, Hendler, Nilsen, O'Barr & Roberts, 2011; Del Busso & Reavey, 2013; Piran, 2016b; Mavin & Grandy, 2016; Lunde & Gattario, 2016). In line with Fredrickson and Roberts claim that having a mature female body creates this shared experience of objectification, it has been found that girls are not sexualised as children (Del Busso & Reavey, 2013), but that a change happens in girls' narrative toward self-objectification as they reach adolescence and through others' changing gaze (Piran, 2016a; 2016b). Consistent with this, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) found that women experience different problems in different times of their lives.

McKinley and Hyde (1996) studied *objectified body consciousness* using the scales; *body surveillance*, viewing the body as an outside observer, *body shame*, feeling shame when the body does not conform, and *appearance control beliefs*, that through enough effort appearance can be controlled. They found objectified body consciousness to be related to body self-esteem and eating practices, including disordered or restrained eating. Restricted eating in relation to self-objectification is drawing on the cultural assumptions that weight is controllable and that individuals can decide their weight through controlling their food intake (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn & Twenge, 1998). Multiple other studies (Lunde & Gattario, 2016; Rudd & Lennon, 2000; Franzoi, 1995; Clarke & Griffin, 2007) support the link between focusing on appearance and experiencing body shame. In a study conducted with 123 young Spanish men and 140 young Spanish women, Moya-Garófnano and Moya (2019) found that when asked to focus on appearance, the women engage in body surveillance and the importance of appearance-contingent self-worth is increased. This is problematic as the appearance-contingent self-worth mainly depends on other people which can result in a vulnerable self-esteem and further depressive symptoms, elevated stress levels and appearance anxiety (Moya-Garófnano & Moya, 2019).

Others have also argued that women engage in body surveillance, Bordo (1993) eg. argues that men are traditionally expected to control others, while women are expected to exert control over themselves and their body (in Rudd & Lennon, 2002) and that women constantly engage in self-surveillance and monitor their body to maintain the ideal that the female body is docile (Clarke & Griffin, 2007). This thought is in line with the everyday common understanding that the self is separated from the body and that the self *owns* the body (Sacks, 1984 in MacLachlan, 2004), in contrast to Merleau-Ponty's notion of Body-Subject that the self *is* the body. Osborn (2002) found that body parts that functioned normally, thereby silent, were not given much attention, but dysfunctional or painful body parts were in the forefront of individuals attention and further placed outside the self (in MacLachlan, 2004). These points are seen in embodied talk, for instance in relation to dysfunctionality as with illness "*the tumor in my body*" or that "the psychotropics is helping me fight the depression", or in slogans like "mind over body", where the idea is that if the individual puts their mind to it, they can overcome physical problems through willpower (MacLachlan, 2004).

In line with aforementioned theories on embodiment and objectification, multiple studies support the idea that women's use and thoughts on their body is attained through social learning. Both negative and positive comments by peers (Depper & Howe, 2017; Roessler & Muller, 2018), parents (Roessler & Muller, 2018; Clarke and Griffin, 2007; McDermott, 2001; Pelican, Heede, Holmes, Melcher, Wardlaw, Raidl, Wheeler & Moore, 2005) and others (Clarke and Griffin, 2007) is found to affect the women's understanding of their bodies. Negative comments about their body and even other female family members' bodily dissatisfaction and lack of self-acceptance is seen to be internalised by the women (Clarke and Griffin, 2007; McDermott, 2001; Pelican et al., 2005) just as positive feedback can instil a sense of pride or self-acceptance of their body (Depper & Howe, 2017; Roessler & Muller, 2018) and shield them from feeling wrong (Pelican et al., 2005).

Just like the idea that an individual's body can be wrong or used in a wrong way, there are other ideas about the body present in the multiple discourses of the women's accounts such as *healthism* (Fisher Berbary & Misener, 2018; McDermott, 2000; Gattario & Frisé, 2018; Roessler & Muller, 2018; Riley, Evans & Mackiewicz, 2016). Healthism is based on the understanding that health and bodily appearance is one and the same and that health is achieved through individual effort, discipline and self-control (Fisher et al., 2018). Being healthy has become an ideology, dubbed Healthism by Crawford in 1980, a pathological obsession with being healthy (Chrysanthou, 2002). Following the ideology, a new eating disorder, orthorexia nervosa, was proposed in 1990, and was defined as an obsession with eating healthy food.

(Håman, Barker-Ruchti, Patriksson & Lindgren, 2015). In this ideology the target of the gaze becomes the surface of the body, and the purpose of the maintenance of the inner body is solely to enhance the outer body (Chrysanthou, 2002). This way “healthy” can be judged by others through one’s appearance. Depper and Howe (2017) studied how adolescent girls negotiate the vagueness around neoliberal health discourses in relation to self-monitoring technologies and found that the young girls understand health as a personal responsibility, a common idea in response to the normative social pressures from healthism (Håman, Barker-Ruchti, Patriksson & Lindgren, 2015). Health understandings are even found to impact young girls’ narrative in relation to their imagined future lives and are embodied through surveillance and individualism (Rich & Evans, 2013). Håman et al.’s (2015) findings in their literature review on orthorexia nervosa, also points to an understanding of the individual’s moral obligations to their body, as does Pelters and Wijma’s (2016) theologian reading of the ideology. Another reflection of healthism in our society today is the focus on food choices, approach and regulation of diet and exercise, since healthy eating and exercising are depicted as ways to achieve the “healthiest health” (Chrysanthou, 2002). The project of the self becomes the project of the body, and to achieve the perfect body you must diet, work out and jog (Chrysanthou, 2002). A study on twenty Danish female athletes, found through a phenomenological analysis of interviews, that motives for engaging in exercise was that it was seen as a way they could improve their health, well-being and to be more physically active (Roessler & Muller, 2018).

To attain the ideal body defined by strength and slimness (Dworkin, 2001) one must lead a life with conscious choices about exercising and eating right. A Swedish study found through focus group interviews, that women who engage in sport face complex, restricting and ambiguous norms and notions in relation to their bodies, resulting in a constant “act of balance” (Lunde & Gattario, 2016). The “act of balance” was between the culture within the sport and the culture outside the sport, between understanding the body as performing and the body as an object, between the importance of eating and the shame of eating and finally between an acceptance of diverse bodies and a prejudice against higher weight. The women had to continuously negotiate between and strive for a balance between to contradicting sets of body ideals. Shifting from a sports context to a school context for instance, did create a shift in relation to body image (Lunde & Gattario, 2016).

Obesity is affected by the socially, culturally and economically situation of the individual (MacLachlan, 2004), but what healthism implies is the idea that one can attain the ideal body through willpower meaning that being overweight is a moral weakness (Lunde & Gattario, 2016; McDermott, 2000; Pelican et al., 2005; Rudd & Lennon, 2000; Mavin &

Grandy, 2016; Clarke & Griffin, 2007). While the fit body represents health and a good lifestyle, the obese body is a symbol of laziness (Håman et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2018; McDermott, 2000), unattractiveness (Håman et al., 2015), emotional weakness (Håman et al., 2015), and a lack of self-control (Fisher et al., 2018; McDermott, 2000; Robinovich, Ossa, Baeza, Krumeich & van der Borne, 2018). There is even a widespread bias against heavy and very heavy individuals among physicians and other health care professionals (Schwartz, Chambliss, Brownell, Blair, & Billington, 2003 in Pelican et al., 2005). This idea is not new, as the classification of human body types, somatotypes, developed in 1940 states that being fat, referred to as endomorphy, was associated with certain personality traits (MacLachlan, 2004). By attributing negative traits to the person in question the appearance of the body becomes essential for one's social standing. In mass media we hear slogans like "you are what you eat" and we understand that one's appearance is the result of one's food choices. Fat talk, making disapproving remarks about one's and/or other's appearance, to improve one's own or other's concerns about body image, has been found to correlate with body image disturbance (Mills & Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, 2017). Further, women are balancing between the understanding of food as fuel and food being a source of shame (Lunde & Gattario, 2016).

Another discourse presented in the literature as important when understanding women's experience and thoughts on their bodies is femininity (Piran, 2016a; Rudd & Lennon, 2000; Mavin & Grandy, 2016; Gattario & Frisé, 2018; Clarke & Griffin, 2007). Franzoi (1995) did a study on young adults attitudes towards their body parts (body-as-object) and body functions (body-as-process) and proposed that women seem to have a higher percentage of negative attitudes concerning their body parts than men, and that they are socialized to focus on their bodies as body-as-object. He argues that girls "[...] are taught that their body-as-object is a significant factor in how others will judge their overall value" (Franzoi, 1995, pp. 418-419) while men in sharp contrast, are taught the importance of body-as-process, an argument that supports the aforementioned theories on gender. Some scholars argue that women live in a continuous negotiation between these two modes of being in one's body, living through contradictions (Del Busso & Reavey, 2013; Mavin, & Grandy, 2016; Lunde & Gattario; Roessler & Muller, 2018). The cultural predisposition of defining a woman as her face or body, as seen in body-ism and in objectification theory, might have an impact on why so many women engage in body-related self-improvement such as the pursuit of beauty or fight against aging (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo, 2018). Mavin and Grandy found balance to be important for the women elite leaders they interviewed about their bodies. Here the balance was of being "themselves" or "girly" while still staying professional. For instance, certain clothes were

deemed too feminine, casual and revealing, and therefore unprofessional (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). This understanding of right and wrong clothing, wrong as being too revealing and right as being items that suit one's body, is even seen among young girls (Willett, 2008).

Many studies on women's perception of their bodies support the claim that women understand themselves through, and put immense emphasis on, their appearance (Clarke & Griffin, 2007; McDermott, 2000). The focus on appearance is not only regarding their own body, but also others' bodies (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). Furthermore, one's appearance is a basis of acceptance and recognition from both men and women (Riley et al., 2016) and is used as a source of comparison (Riley et al., 2016; Fisher et al., 2018), embedded in hegemonic femininity (McDermott, 2000). Studies show that women compare themselves to both peers, media images and super models (Rudd & Lennon, 2000; Clarke & Griffin, 2007; Mavin, & Grandy, 2016; Riley et al., 2016) and further judge other women on their way appearance (Mavin & Grandy, 2016; Clarke & Griffin, 2007; Riley et al., 2016). This is argued to be based on the patriarchal structures and heteronormative sensemaking (Riley et al., 2016), where women's worth depends on their appearance (Mavin, & Grandy, 2016). Here appearance become a way of gaining power and agency, even in other domains such as intellect or ambition (Rudd & Lennon, 2000; Riley et al., 2016; Mavin, & Grandy, 2016). Attractive people are judged more positively, thought to have a variety of non-physical positive traits, such as interpersonal, occupational and academic competence and other's behave more positively towards them (Jackson, 2002 in MacLachlan, 2004) and even thinness can turn into an embodied form of capital in society (Robinovich et al., 2018). Some women experience control and agency in their lives through social comparison and ensuing appearance-management, but it is important to notice that this is also true for risky appearance-management behaviours such as restricted eating and substance abuse (Rudd & Lennon, 2000). It is found that for women, comparing one's body to others can lead to body image anxiety, even when one is living up to the norms and are receiving the positive feedback "you are smaller than average" (Heinberg & Thompson, 1992).

The technologies of the time create new contexts for social comparison to happen such as through social media online (Butkowski, Dixon, & Weeks, 2019; Depper & Howe, 2017). A meta-analysis on self-objectification in sexualising media suggests that online media – social networking sites as well as video games' effect self-objectification more than traditional media, as one has to engage in the activity (Karsay et al., 2018). Through social media sites like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, adolescents are exposed to beauty ideals from peers and others and can take part in appearance-related accounts as those focused on

thinspiration and fitspiration (Rodgers & Melioli, 2016). Thinspiration, the contraction of thin inspiration, is described as “[...] extreme thin-ideal content in the form of images of individuals with protruding bones (generally digitally modified), and messages encouraging extreme forms of weight-loss [...]” (Rodgers & Melioli, 2016, p. 107), while fitspiration, fit inspiration, is defined as a lean and toned appearance, attained through nutrition and exercise regimens and “[...] includes objectifying images of individuals, generally portraying muscle definition on abdominals, arms, or legs, and appearance-targeted recommendations for diet and exercise behaviours.” (Rodgers & Melioli, 2016, p. 107). A Swedish study on cyberbullying by Frisén and Berne (2020) found that appearance-related online bullying can impact adolescents body image. They further found that the young boys and girls reported appearance-related pressure from the media, more body shame and internalisation of the thin-ideal. This is in line with other studies that argue “[...] that younger individuals are more susceptible to sexualizing media content” (Fortenberry, 2013 in Karsay et al., 2018, p. 20). On Instagram a new trend has risen called Body positivity, where under-represented body sizes in traditional media are represented, which exemplify the core theoretical components of positive body image (Cohen, Irwin, Newton-John & Slater, 2019). These body positive images have been found to have a positive impact on women’s body satisfaction, mood and body appreciation (Cohen, Fardouly, Newton-John & Slater, 2019). Less including trends on appearance can also spread online as is the case with fitspiration. Through fitspiration, body parts like the thigh gap, a space between the upper thighs when one stands with the feet together, becomes a focus point singled out and something to achieve (Orr, 2013). This is problematic as most women don’t have the body type to even achieve this gap. LaBoeuf (2019) states that:

“The thigh gap arises at the intersection of at least three currents: 1) a certain form of narcissism women are encouraged to cultivate; 2) the current association of feminine beauty and thinness in large segments of contemporary Western culture; 3) an online visual culture that magnifies this association.” (Laboeuf, 2019, p. 4)

Propagated by gendered trends like fitspiration some women find motivation to maintain their participation in intensive physical activity, through evidence of improvement, meaning more muscles and lower fat (Roessler & Muller, 2018). Since “strong is the new skinny”, healthy and capable young women, define themselves as modern, goal-oriented, high-achieving women (Roessler & Muller, 2018). But even in the gym, there has been found an importance of

appearance, such as planning work out outfits, having their hair done and “[...] a full face of makeup.” (p. 483) (Fisher et al., 2018) and this was defined appropriate behaviour in the gym space. This make sense when taken into account that women experience their looks being socially important, sometimes even more so than their performance (Lunde & Gattario, 2016; Piran, 2016a). As appearance needs constant work (Gattario & Frisé, 2018) even isolated body parts, like abs, stomach, arms or thighs can become focus points for women when judging their body (Roessler & Muller, 2018; Franzoi & Herzog, 1987). While competitive athletes have been found to be more focused on the functions of these body parts, recreational athletes were found to focus on the looks of the parts, but one body part which all female athletes seemed to have preference for was a flat stomach (Roessler & Muller, 2018). While there is a lot of evidence for exercising being used as a mean to attain a certain body type, Sacks (1984) found that it is only through use of the body, the individual has a sense of being in it (1984 in MacLachlan, 2004). This makes physical activity an important aspect for individuals but also in research, when studying women’s experiences of their bodies.

Another positive aspect of exercising is the competence gained in one’s body, an aspect that seems to be important when women understand their bodies as body-as-process. Mavin and Grandy (2016) found that some women change their focus from appearance to competence and intelligence. It has been found that when women are feeling competent in their bodies they are more motivated to be active and take care of themselves (Pelican et al., 2005; Del Busso & Reavey, 2013;), they feel personal worth (Pelican et al., 2005, Roessler & Muller, 2018), an increased sense of agency (Piran. 2016a; Piran, 2016b; Del Busso & Reavey, 2013; Lunde & Gattario, 2016) as well as sense of power (Del Busso and Reavey, 2013). Competence brings women to engage with the world and inhabit their bodies differently (McDermott, 2000), making them more comfortable participating in physical activity (Pelican et al., 2005). Feeling “not good enough” (Pelican et al., 2005), fear of ridicule (Fisher et al, 2018), competition or a feeling of being awkward and uncoordinated (McDermott, 2000) on the other hand, can act as restrictions for physical activity. Physical activity is an important aspect for women as it can help them feel connected to their bodies (McDermott, 2000; Piran, 2016b), and thereby get attuned to their bodies and recognise signals of stress, pain and anxiety (Gattario & Frisé, 2018). This is important to note as women in general make less use of their bodily cues than men (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Exercising can also be a way to restore energy or to de-stress (Roessler & Muller, 2018). Bodily competence is important as the positive features such as self-esteem, confidence, functional view of the body, and an openness to diversity in body types can transcend into other contexts (Lunde & Gattario, 2016).

A supportive environment, where one can be physically active, can allow women to gain a certain level of competence and thereby comfortable enough to move on to other environments (Fisher et al., 2018; Piran, 2016a; Pelican et al, 2005). The positive feeling of fitting in, in a sports club and through positive exercise experiences, women can exert and maintain a sense of self to themselves, and through this experience an internal validation of their bodily selves (Roessler & Muller, 2018; Depper & Howe, 2017). Furthermore, different sports offer different physicalities. Some can lead women to feel a joy of moving as well as an experience of being a physical being beyond their appearance, where others support the women's self-objectification (McDermott, 2000). Solo female tourist too, experience objectification as well as power relations when being subject to the local's gaze (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008). In professional contexts where the norms regarding women's bodies or clothing are unclear, some women in the workplace have been found to create embodied norms for themselves and others (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). Furthermore, it has been found that women in the workplace are socially required to engage in body work to meet expectations that their bodies are controlled, meaning fit and not fat (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). As mentioned above, even clothes can impact women's experience of their bodies and understanding of themselves, and certain clothes in relation to the body's position can impact affect and cognitive abilities positively or negatively (Kozak, Roberts & Patterson, 2014). Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, and Twenge (1998) studied the role of self-objectification when wearing different kinds of clothes and found that wearing a swimsuit reduced participants to feel like they were just their bodies. They also felt higher levels of shame and disgust compared to participants wearing a sweater.

People's place in a social hierarchy have a physical imprint on one's health and appearance as well (MacLachlan, 2004). Time, money (Riley et al., 2016) and status can act as a constraint, where both class and ethnicity (Dworking, 2001; Clarke & Griffin, 2007) can limit who are able achieve the ideal body, argued to be grounded in neoliberal constructs, through modes of consumption (Riley et al., 2016). Having time to do appearance work seems to be relevant as female students described using between 20 minutes and up to two hours every day getting ready (Rudd & Lennon, 2000). Women therefore need to have enough time on their hands to live up to the standards of beauty and since doing body work needs continuous upkeep, time to achieve the appearance that leads to female power and agency is a continuous capital (Riley et al., 2016). Clarke and Griffin (2007) found that women with a positive body image often accredited this to the work in achieving and maintaining their looks, which indicate a lifelong process and effect. A study from Sweden found multiple men who

they interviewed, deprioritised having the ideal body as the time and effort it demanded was too much, but none of the women interviewed made the same choice (Gattario & Frisén, 2018). The authors propose that this could be an indication of appearance being the most central criterion to live up to for women, in order to gain social acceptance. When we conform to culturally sanctioned bodily moulds, we gain assurance of our worth (MacLachlan, 2004).

Even though much research on body image has been conducted in relation to attitudes towards, and self-perceptions of, appearance, the construct encompasses the functional aspects of the body as well (Lunde & Gattario, 2016). And although discourses impact how we inhabit our bodies, not a lot of work has been done in order to understand whether and how people are defined by their physical experience of their bodies (McDermott, 2000). So while the international research points to the many ways in which women's thoughts on and experience of their bodies affect their lives, only a few, and none in Scandinavia has looked into the array of contexts and situations affected by this. Furthermore, much of the research has often focused on gender and expectations regarding femininity. Following a systematic literature review, conducted in the fall of 2019 titled, "Women's understanding of themselves through their embodied experiences: A Qualitative Systematic Literature Review" (úr Skúoy, 2019), it is clear that not a lot of studies have been conducted in relation to women's experiences inhabiting their bodies. Furthermore, many of the studies, have focused solely on experiences in a certain context. Only one study, by Roessler and Muller (2018), has been conducted in Denmark and it focused on athletes. It suggests how bodily experiences in the sporting context affect the women's overall understanding of themselves and their bodies. Within Danish society, there is also a strong emphasis on physical fitness, for both men and women throughout their lifespans. A rapport on Danish men, women and children's exercise and sports habits shows that 62 percent of women from age 16 regularly engage in exercise or sports and that 59 percent of them exercise at least three times a week (Pilgaard & Rask, 2016). Additionally, since Denmark is a country with a strong emphasis on gender equality, ranking second in the index of Europe's most gender-equal societies (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020) it is interesting to look at how Danish women experience inhabiting their bodies, since the previous findings could be less prevalent in a Danish gender-equal context. Little is known about whether young women in such societal structures experience being under similar pressure to conform or follow a similar pattern, as is seen in the previous research from eg. Sweden, the UK, Canada and the US. As the findings from previous research regarding women's experience indicates different issues in the different times of their lives (úr Skúoy, 2019), it seems relevant to study how young women understand themselves and their bodies. Young women in this

study is limited to women between the ages 20-25 as it seems like women in this age group in previous studies have become accustomed to their mature bodies (Piran, 2016a; 2016b; Gattario & Frisé, 2018) as well as a typical age where the women are particularly concerned with their bodily appearance (Rudd & Lennon, 2000; Riley et al., 2016;). Furthermore, women in this age group have grown up with the rise of social media, which seems to have an enormous impact on the development and sustainability of body image (Butkowski, Dixon, & Weeks, 2019; Depper & Howe, 2017; Frisé & Berne, 2020; Orr, 2013; Karsay et al., 2018). It is therefore presumed that the women in this age group could find the research question meaningful and be representative for a particular perspective of young Danish women.

In order to explore other important contexts within young Danish women's bodily experiences, thoughts, and feelings, the research question of this study read the following: How do young Danish women experience inhabiting their bodies?

Method

The present study was interested in investigating young Danish women's understanding of their experiences and calls for a detailed examination of their lived experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Due to the nature of the research question, it was most evident to conduct an interpretative phenomenological analysis study. Therefore, the entire procedure, from the sample collection and interview, to the transcription and analysis was guided by this approach.

Sample

In order to find a sample, a call for participants was published on the author's Facebook page in the beginning of March and was shared on 21 different personal Facebook accounts, thereby reaching a great number of possible participants. The call for participants was in Danish with the title "Kvinders oplevelse i deres krop" (English: Women's experiences in their Body) and included a brief description of the topic and a specification, that the interview was to be used for a master thesis. It further narrowed down the aim of the study by describing the interest in everyday bodily experiences and thoughts hereof. It described the overall practical elements of the study, such as time, place and general ethical rights of the participants, hereunder anonymity, confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the project (See Appendix 1). In the following week, 13 women contacted the author either by the e-mail address which was provided in the call for participants or through Facebook Messenger. Six of the 13

women were periphery acquaintances of the author and were therefore politely rejected in order to avoid a biased group of participants. Four participants were chosen based on their location, as a means to make the practical implications of the study as flexible as possible. All names of the participants are pseudonyms, chosen by the participants themselves, to protect their identity. All other identifying information has been altered in order to protect the participants confidentiality. All of the women were of Danish ethnicity and heterosexual.

Johanna is 25 years old and lives in a large Danish city where she is in her second year of studying a bachelor's degree in humanities. She grew up in a smaller Danish town in the upper middle class. She lives alone but is in a relationship. The interview with Johanna was conducted in the beginning of March in the author's home

Lili is 23 years old and lives in a smaller Danish city. She just started her studies in health science at a college in a bigger city, less than an hour away from where she lives. She grew up in the town she lives in, in the middle class. Her parents divorced when she was a child. She is single and lives alone. The interview with Lili took place in the author's home and was conducted in the beginning of March.

Betina is 22 years old and live in a large Danish city, where she is in her second year of studying health science at a Danish university. She is single and lives alone. Betina grew up in a smaller Danish town, in the upper middle class. The interview with Betina was, due to the Covid-19, conducted online from her own home in the end of March.

Astrid is 22 years old and studies a bachelor's degree in natural science in her second year and is a student assistant at a hospital. She lives with her boyfriend in a large Danish city. She grew up in the upper middleclass in a medium-sized city. Due to Covid-19, the interview with Astrid was conducted online from her own home in the end of March.

Procedure

In order to best answer the research question, a semi-structured individual interview was the method chosen for the data collection. The individual interview allows for "rich" data, where the participants have the opportunity to tell their stories freely and reflectively, as there is time for them to think, speak and be heard (Smith et al., 2009). The semi-structured interview allows the conversation to be guided by the stories of the participant, their experiences, thoughts and feelings. It creates an opportunity to follow the unexpected turns and it is therefore a more flexible method to enter the participants lifeworld (Smith et al., 2009) and calls for creativity inside the framework of the interview (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2015). The interview guide was based on what seemed to be important aspects in previous research

and was developed in an iterative process, where ideas were developed, and then changed and new ideas and questions surfaced. In the end the interview schedule consisted of four overall questions as well as prompts and probes for each (See Appendix 2).

The initial question was formulated so that it would be easy for the participants to answer, as it was tied to their everyday life. It was thought of as a way for them to describe their everyday activities and open up for an understanding of what activities they engage in, and what ways of using their bodies they found important, which could illuminate their life world (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2015). As much previous research has found women to negotiate between a focus on the body as either an object, and therefore being aware of their looks, or their bodily competence, therefore having an awareness of the performance of the body the following three questions were thought as a way to explore both of these experiences. The second question was intended as a way for the participants to open up their experience of understanding their bodies, without being led in either the direction of the performance or appearance of the body. The third question regarding appearance was asked as a way to understand their experience and thoughts on their bodily appearance and what implications it had for them as well as the context regarding the awareness or focus on appearance. The final question regarded their physical performance and was included to explore the experience of bodily competence. For each of the questions were a few follow up or elaborative questions, to guide the interview if the answer was brief or did not provide a rich description. Before the actual interviews, a pilot interview was conducted in order to determine whether the interview guide was sufficient, and it was conducted with the help of a friend of the author who fit the requirement of the sample. Only minor changes were conducted, such as a small number of follow up questions. The pilot interview also made it clear that some of the questions might be answered in extension of the initial question, but that it seemed most appropriate to end with the question of physical performance as it seemed to round up the interview on a happier note than when talking about appearance.

Table 1

Interview Guide (translated from Danish, See Appendix 2)

| |
|--|
| <p>Interview Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do you use your body in your everyday?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can you tell me about a normal day for you?• What does that mean for you?2. Can you tell me about an experience where you were aware of your body?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did you feel in your body?• How did you think about your body?• What was is about this situation that made you aware of your body?3. Can you tell me about a time where you were aware of how you and your body looked?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What was is about this situation that made you aware of your appearance?• How did it feel?• What did you do?• Does it happen often?4. Can you tell me about an experience where you were aware of what your body could do physically?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What was it about this situation that made you aware of what your body could do?• How did it feel?• What did you do? <p>That was all of my questions, do you have anything you think we missed talking about?</p> |
|--|

All communication was between the participant and author, and the author conducted all of the interviews. The author reached out to each of the four participants through either Facebook Messenger or by e-mail, whichever they had initially contacted the author through. When they agreed to participate, the exact time, place and other details for each interview was decided in agreement, again through written communication. The three first interviews were decided to take place in the home of the author, while the last interview was decided to take place in the home of the participant, all on different dates in March 2020. The first two interviews took place in the dining room on the corner of a big dining table, so that the participant and interviewer did not sit directly opposite of one another. This way, the participant could easily attain eye contact while being interviewed, but just as easily and naturally look away, in order

to make the interview situation as pleasant as possible. The author provided drinks and snacks for the two initial interviews.

The following two interviews were scheduled for the end of March and were therefore affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequential lock-down. This meant that Aalborg University required all data collection to be conducted virtually and therefore the last two interviews were conducted as online interviews. In order to uphold the participants ethical right for confidentiality and anonymity, the interviews were conducted through Google Hangouts Meet Premium, as this solution was recommended by the university staff. The solution was tested in order to avoid technical issues when conducting the interviews. The online interview was a video conference call, where the interviewer and participant were both using audio and webcam, which allowed for a more natural sort of communication (Salmons, 2011).

Before the interview was started, the participants read and signed a statement of informed consent (See Appendix 3; Appendix 4), which stated that their participation was voluntary and they were free to choose to not answer any or all questions, without consequence. It furthermore stated that they were allowed to end the interview at any time and ask questions regarding the project or methods used. They were informed in text of the data extracted from the interview and observations would only be used in the thesis, and their anonymity would be guarded, so that no names or other identifiable characteristics would be included. The statement further pointed to the fact that the interview would be audio recorded and that said recording would be deleted, once the project was done. After they signed their name, the date and their signature, the participants filled in a form regarding their demographic information (See Appendix 5). This included name, age, gender, sexuality, occupation and mother and fathers highest completed education. For the online interviews, the two documents were sent via e-mail before the interview took place.

Before the interview began, the audio recorder was tested and the participants were briefed on the aim of the project; to research and illuminate young Danish women's experiences, thoughts and feelings about their bodies, and the details regarding the expected time of the interview. They were informed verbally of their ethical rights and were then told that the aim of the interview was to understand their experiences and perspective in depth. Therefore, they were also told that they were the expert and there could be no right or wrong answers. This was done in order to make them more comfortable in stating their thoughts and feelings without worrying about any judgement and could lead to a deeper account of their experiences. Lastly, they were asked if they had any questions before the interview started.

Right after each interview, a postscript was written, where the different practical information and initial thoughts on the interview were described (See Appendix 6).

Each interview was audio recorded using the app Voice Recorder Pro, on a smartphone device for the on-site interviews and on a laptop for the online interviews. This was done in order to get the best sound and to avoid an unnatural setting in both of the contexts. The author attempted to keep an open mind and a “conscious naivety” as described by Brinkmann and Kvale (2009) (in Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2015), which in practice meant letting the participant phrase their own experience in their own words and bracket one’s own ideas, theories and experiences. This also meant that the author made a conscious effort to not take things at face value, such as words, phrases and concepts, but asked for an elaboration or clarification of their understanding. Through this, the author demonstrated commitment and attentiveness during each interview. The interviews were later transcribed verbatim by the author, using a simple standard for the transcription

Table 2

Standard for the Transcription

| |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- (...) shorter break (less than 3 sec.). [3] at longer breaks. Specified in seconds- BIG LETTERS: specify emphatic stress- <i>Cursive</i> indicates less emphatic stress.- Mhh: positive paraverbal acceptance- Mhmh: negative paraverbal acceptance- Ikke: response motion |
|---|

The material was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as described by Smith et al.’s (2009) and can be described as an iterative and inductive cycle. Due to the ideographic understanding, each case was looked at separately and individually analysed in detail, before moving on to the next case. The first step after the transcription, was to read and re-read the interview through while listening to the audio-recording, to assist the analysis by slowing down and bracket off of the initial thoughts of the material. Following this step came the initial noting, which was focused on the individual participant’s description, experience and lived world in order to make sense of the patterns of meaning in their account. This was done through exploratory comments in the transcription. Firstly, the entire transcription was analysed

through descriptive comments, that sought to describe the content of the accounts. Here descriptions, emotional responses, assumptions and key objects and events were taken at face value. Then followed a new read through and analysis focused on the linguistic use. Here the focus was on pauses, laughter, pronoun use, repetition, degree of fluency and the functional aspects of language. The process was done in order to reflect on the ways the content and meaning was presented and supported the next step, which was conceptual commenting. This step was more interpretative and dealt with the material at a conceptual level, which mostly took an interrogative form and shifted the work to the participant's overarching understanding of the different matters, for instance from the particular meaning of their weight towards the overall understanding of how health is seen understood through the appearance of the body.

The last step of each analysis was to develop emergent themes, where an analytic shift happened, from working primarily with the transcript to the initial notes, though still guided by the transcript. Here the analysis was focused on local and discrete chunks of the transcript and breaking up the narrative flow. The focus was on the psychological essence of the part and was both grounded in the transcription and abstracted by the conceptualisation, hereby making them reflect the description and interpretation.

The following is an illustration of the analytic procedure. The excerpt shows the initial analysis and emergent themes, descriptive comments are in normal text, linguistic comments in red and conceptual comments in bold on the left, and the emergent themes are on the right of the transcription.

Table 3

Initial Noting and Emergent Themes

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>151. Altid koblet til udseendet, for hun har ikke fysisk ubehag i sin krop, ondt Jo ikke ondt – fysisk ubehag er smerte 155. Eneste ubehag er når hun synes at den er for stor eller for muskuløs mm. Forkert at være stor. Min – tryk på at det tilhører hende selv Ubehag – følelse af irritation, utilfredshed, modvilje, smerte 160. Grundet ensomhed 162. Nærmere at skælde sig selv ud, når man ikke er sammen med andre.</p> | <p>148 149 150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163</p> | <p>I: Ja. Er det på nogle måde, har det nogle gange <i>ikke</i> noget med hvordan du ser ud at gøre, hvis du ikke føler det nice i kroppen? B: Nej. Det har det faktisk ikke, men det tænker jeg er fordi at hvis man (...) øh altså jeg har jo ikke ondt i noget, altså jeg går jo ikke rundt og har ubehag i min krop så det eneste jeg sådan har ubehag ved, ved <i>min</i> krop det er når der er noget sådan at jeg synes at den er for stor eller for (...) muskuløs eller for et eller andet i den dur eller sådan (...) ja. I: Mmh. Hvornår føler du det? B: Ja (...) nu i de her tider gør jeg fordi jeg synes at jeg går og er ensom og (...) og jeg kan nærmere gå og skælde mig selv ud fordi at, der hvor jeg jo henter energi det er jo når jeg er sammen med</p> | <p>Vurdering af kroppen Smerte Forkert krop Ensomhed Vurdering af selv</p> |
|---|--|--|--|

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| skælde mig selv ud – 164 irettesætte 165 166. Ingen til at røre krop og 166 kramme den og være i kontakt 167 med den. 167 168. Sværere selv at være i 168 den – tanker, følelser, mærke 168 den? 169 Koble op - netværk 170 Kropelig kontakt med andre 171 er vigtig, er det deres accept 172 af hendes krop? 173 175. Følelsen kommer og går 174 177. Minutvis ændring. Fra at 175 synes at hun ser mega nice ud, 176 til næste at synes at hun ikke 176 gør. Det er life, typisk. Del af 177 livet. 177 Har hun accepteret negative 178 kropslige tanker som en del 179 af det menneskelige liv, sit 180 eget eller andre unge 181 kvinders? 182 183. Træning kan ændre 183 følelsen til det bedre. Træning 184 ændrer udseendet. 184 Jo selvfølgelig også- konflikt? 185 Konflikt – træning ændrer 186 udseendet, men det er ikke 187 derfor hun har det bedre. 188 187. Har det bedre med det hele når hun har trænet | 164 165 166 167 168 169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180 181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188 | andre, øh (...) og mine venner og det kan jeg ikke lige nu. Og der er ikke nogen der er der til at røre min krop eller kramme mig eller sådan på den måde være i kontakt med den. Så synes jeg også at det bliver sværere ligesom selv at være i den, når der ikke er nogen tæt på. Men ellers så er det jo ofte sådan (...) meget koblet op på (...) ja, hvad kan det være koblet op på? (...) Det ved jeg ikke, det er nok det bedste eksempel jeg har på det lige nu, for det er sådan jeg går og har det lige nu. Jeg kan ikke lige huske andre situationer, men sådan det kommer og går jo lidt, synes jeg. Jeg synes også at jeg kan stå det minut og synes at jeg ser mega nice ud og så det andet minut så synes at jeg ikke gør. Det er jo bare (...) life, altså det er jo bare typisk. I: Ja. (...) Er der noget, har du, er der noget der sådan (...) kan ændre om du føler at du ser godt ud eller ej? Har du lagt mærke til det? B: Ja altså (...) træning er jo altså, sådan, ikke, ikke fordi at det sådan, det ændrer jo selvfølgelig også hvordan man ser ud fysisk, kan man sige men det er egentligt ikke derfor at (...) altså jeg har det bare bedre med mig selv og (...) det hele når jeg har trænet. | Social kontakt Fysisk berøring Være i kroppen Tidsligt aspekt Vurdering af kroppen Forventninger Trænings positive indvirkning Vurdering af selv |
|--|---|--|---|

This procedure was followed in each of the four material-sets, one at a time. This way each analysis was sensitive to the context of each set material and each participant's experience. After each of the transcripts had been analysed in this manner, the following step was to search for connections across the emergent themes. There was found 128 different themes throughout all four material-sets, which were first regrouped into 34 different themes, which were then lined up and grouped together by parallel or similar understanding and this resulted in the three major themes; Living up to the norms and expectations, Sensing the body and Temporality (see table 4). Four themes were grouped into two different major themes and are in the table written in cursive. These three themes were explored in each of the accounts of the participants and acted as a guideline for the written analysis.

Table 4

List of Themes

| Living up to the norms and expectations | Sensing the body | Temporality |
|--|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Work out | Use of the body | Temporal aspect |
| Body as a tool | Grounded body | Thoughts on the body |
| Conscience | Daily activities | Efficiency |
| Normative use of the body | Sensing the body | Motivation |
| Judgement | Head vs. body | Goal |
| Strength | Desire | <i>Knowledge</i> |
| Social media | Mental aspect | <i>Lifestyle</i> |
| Competence | Body vs. self | <i>Health</i> |
| Illness | <i>Body parts</i> | |
| Balance | | |
| Slim | | |
| Food | | |
| Choice | | |
| Optimising | | |
| Social aspect | | |
| Appearance | | |
| Weight | | |
| <i>Body parts</i> | | |
| <i>Knowledge</i> | | |
| <i>Lifestyle</i> | | |
| <i>Health</i> | | |

In order to make the written analysis as trustworthy and transparent as possible, every translated quote from the material-set included the verbatim Danish quotation, as to make sure that no meaning would be lost or misunderstood through the translation. This further supported the validity of the claims in the analysis. Each quotation was marked with the line numbers where it was found in order to underpin the traceability. This was also done to support the coherence of the finished thesis.

Throughout the process, different ethical considerations were evaluated, many described above. The macro ethical aspect of the research question, whether the question lived up to the aim of psychological research, to add scientific knowledge that could help the human situation and wellbeing of the group in question (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014) was firstly considered. Here it can be argued, that the results of the analysis can be of great use in other research on young Danish women's experiences regarding their bodies.

More specific aspects of the ethical considerations of the research were the participants' rights to withdraw their consent or to not answer any or all questions, and they were presented to them both in writing and orally, to create as equal a relationship as possible. There was further a substantial focus on a thorough, direct and exact rendering of the interview in the transcription, which meant that all breaks and false starts were included, which also added to the validity of the analysis. As mentioned by Del Busso (2007) physical bodies bring particular power dynamics into play which calls for embodied reflexivity as a methodological tool. For this project it meant that the author reflected on her appearance, here especially clothes, hair and makeup as well as posture, in the interview setting. Thereby hoping to create a safer space for the participants to talk about their own bodies.

The changes in the research design due to the Covid-19 pandemic brought certain new ethical considerations forth. As online research involves greater ethical risk regarding personal privacy and confidentiality, and more difficulty in gaining informed consent as well as establishing trustworthiness and data authenticity (James and Busher, 2011) certain measures were made. First of all, the two participants in question were briefed on the changes in their way of participating and it was made sure that they were still interested in being interviewed virtually. Then, as mentioned above, considerations regarding choice of a programme for the online interviews lead to the safest solution in order to protect their personal information and confidentiality. Then followed considerations regarding the interaction and relationship, as online interviewing can affect the trustworthiness of the data.

Results

Through the analysis of the four interviews three major themes appeared in the women's accounts of their experience inhabiting their bodies. The first theme is the most voluminous and concerns the aspect of norms and expectations. Here it is addressed how the women's descriptions of health, appearance, bodily competence, exercise, and lifestyle play a role in their experience and understanding of their body. Social comparisons and social interactions are explored through the theme as well. The second theme deals with sensing the body. This includes the women's experience of bodily sensations and their reactions to and understanding of these, as well as the different situations and activities the women engage in. The third and final theme, Temporality, turns to the temporal aspect of the women's accounts. This deals with their descriptions of time management in relation to their choices in everyday life and further

their experience of the process, in which they understand their bodies and its impact on their choices regarding their bodies.

In the following part (l. XX) indicates the line number in the transcription. The excerpts from the transcription [...] indicates that the sentence from the transcript has been cut, (...) indicates a break less than three seconds and (x) indicates a break of number of seconds.

Living up to the norms and expectations

This theme concerns the social norms and expectations the women experience in relation to the use of their bodies and the appearance of their bodies. It looks into the idea of a healthy body, their appearance, competence in their bodies, and which activities they feel expected to engage in. It also addresses how they experience these norms and expectations in relation to other people and how social media can have an impact on their experiences.

A theme that was present in all of the women's accounts and furthermore brought up by themselves was health. There seemed to be a distinction between mental health and physical health, but both were described as important to the women. Physical health was in all of their accounts connected to exercise. Astrid for instance describes how she "also wants to exercise because she knows it is healthy" (Danish: vil jeg jo også gerne dyrke motion fordi jeg ved at det er sundt) (l. 770-772). She is certain that exercising is healthy and it being healthy is one of the reasons why she wants to do it, though she does not believe that one should only do things because they are healthy (Danish: ikke [...] kun skal gøre ting fordi de er sunde) l. 868-870). Lili describes how she exercises to keep her body healthy (Danish: træningen for mig, mere er noget med at holde min krop sund) and describes a healthy body as "strong" (Danish: stærk) and without pain (Danish: ikke går og har ondt) (l. 446-447). Johanna too, describes the reason for her exercising as "wanting to have a healthy and strong body" (Danish: have en sund og stærk krop) (l. 142) and consciously chooses certain exercise in her everyday because of "the ideal image of a healthy body" (Danish: idealbilledet på en sund krop) (l. 219-220). She refers to "experts" and their "recommendations" (l. 170-173), and then go on to argue that "then it must be healthy when I exercise 30 minutes a day" (Danish: så må det jo være sundt når jeg bevæger mig 30 minutter om dagen) (l. 174-175), when reflecting on what it means for her to have a strong and healthy body. She has some guidelines by authorities (l. 260) to follow, in order to be healthy and one of these is to move her body 30 minutes a day.

The women all talk about how one's weight can say something about one's level of healthiness. Betina describes how she knows that it is "not healthy" to have too low a fat percentage (l. 1044-1045) and Astrid describes how her sisters are "too skinny" (Danish: for tynde) (l. 557-558). Lili described an experience where she realised that:

"[...] ah okay, then my body isn't, it might be, yeah I weight too much (...) but, but my body can actually endure more things than hers can so, so in that way I'm not necessarily more unhealthy [laughs] just because I'm bigger and that was a wake-up call in one way or another[...]" (l. 497-504)

"[...] årh okay, så min krop er jo ikke, det kan godt være, ja jeg vejer for meget men (...) men, men min krop kan faktisk klare flere ting end hendes kan så, så på den måde er jeg ikke nødvendigvis mere usund [griner] bare fordi at jeg er større og det var lige sådan et wake-up call på en eller anden måde [...]" (l. 497-504)

Lili had a grand realisation, that even though she was bigger and heavier than her friend, who was "weighing fucking half" (Danish: vejer fandeme halvdelen) (l. 494-495), she was not necessarily unhealthier. She seems to have the understanding that being heavy is unhealthy, but this idea is challenged and discarded by how much her body can endure. This idea that being slim is synonymous with being healthy is also shared by Johanna, who states that she links "being healthy to be, not skinny, but to be *slim* [...]" (Danish: sundhed at være, ikke tynd men være sådan *slank*) (l. 253-254) and that she wants "to look active" (Danish: se aktiv ud) (l. 308). Both Astrid and Johanna referred to Body Mass Index (BMI), a tool used to find out whether one is normal-, under- or overweight (World Health Organization Europe, 2020), when asked about what weighing too much or being too skinny meant (Appendix 7, l. 837; Appendix 10, l. 580-581). From this perspective, it is possible to be too skinny and weight too much and there is an interval in which one's weight should be - not too skinny and not too heavy, in relation to the norm.

Mental health, interestingly enough, is also touched upon in relation to exercise. Johanna describes mental health as feeling happier and more satisfied with herself after working out, because she feels like she does the right thing (Danish: gladere [...] mere tilfreds med mig selv, [...] fordi jeg føler at jeg gør det rigtige) (l. 208-210). "Doing the right thing" indicates

that working out is a norm she feels a need to live up to, that it is morally sound to engage in exercise, which is explored above. Johanna being satisfied with herself after working out seems to be due to the fact that she has a “guilty conscience“ (Danish: dårlig samvittighed) when she does not make healthy choices, because “what is more important than living healthy and good” (Danish: hvad er mere vigtigt end at leve sundt og godt) (l. 520-521). A healthy life and making healthy choices are presented as being the most important way to live, the most important goal, which can illuminate Johanna’s experience of satisfaction with herself. She has chosen to exercise, which is healthy and that is most important. The satisfaction seems to be the other side of the coin from a guilty conscience, and the positive mental outcomes of exercising could possibly stem from the absence of a bad conscience. Lili describes how she has to “force” (Danish: tvinge) herself to be physically active by “trying to work out those three times a week” (l. 15-18). Exercising for her seems to be a task, something she needs to force herself to do, implying that she does not necessarily have the desire to do it. The phrasing “those three times a week” (Danish: de der tre gange om ugen) infers that there is a general standard of amount of times one should be exercising and her “trying to work out” shows that she is actively making an effort, though not always successfully, to live up to those norms. The three times a week is a consistent number for exercising shared by Lili and Astrid too. The conscious choice of exercising weekly is shared by all four women, indicating that they believe that exercising is a common activity which they are expected to engage in, and they seem to follow this normative expectation of exercising three times a week. From this it becomes clear that health, both mental and physical is important norms to live up to, in order to look good and feel good - to live a good life.

Another norm which some of the women seem to try to live up to is having the right appearance. The way they describe carrying themselves can be described as a way of actively controlling their appearance. This was especially explored and reflected upon by Betina. Betina explains how she uses her body as a way to present herself (Danish: “fremstille mig selv”) (l. 17-27). To present herself she chooses certain kinds of clothing for her body to “look pretty and to make it appear neat and nice” (Danish: ser flot ud og få den til at fremstå pænt og godt) (l. 24-25). By using the word “fremstille” it is clear that she is aware of the way she actively chooses how to appear to others. Betina further reflects on how she presents herself through her posture, something she learned through trying and receiving “positive response” from others, which has now become an unconscious act (l. 64-66). All of the women in the study described how they use their clothes to appear in a way they want, which indicates that they are aware of being seen by others. Not only are they aware of this but they also actively

choose how to appear, aiming to live up to other's expectations. Betina chooses clothes based on what will make her "appear to others like she looks in her head" (Danish: se sådan ud som jeg synes jeg ser ud inde i mit hoved) (l. 685-687) and Johanna uses her clothes to "hide" (Danish: skjule) or "anonymise" (Danish: gøre sådan lidt anonym) her stomach, which she does not like (l. 666-667). Astrid too, describes becoming aware of her body and judging it in a negative way, when she was wearing tight clothes and saw her stomach bulging out a little (Danish: buler lidt ud) (l. 253-256). The women are aware of the visual aspect of the body and use their clothes to appear in an acceptable way to others. Lili talks about how it is "difficult" (Danish: svært) to wear hot pants and crop tops, clothes that show a lot of skin, "if you just do not have the body type" (Danish: bare ikke har den kropstype) (l. 554-556). She describes that:

"I have always wanted to have those thighs that looked good in shorts right? And that there maybe was some thigh gap, which is so popular, right?

I: Mmh

L: But again, with the years I've also become aware that my body is not built in that way and I would have to starve myself a lot [laughs] for there to appear a gap between my thighs, it is really difficult." (l. 781-790)

"Jeg har altid gerne ville have de der lår der så godt ud i shorts, ikke? Og der var måske noget thigh gap som er så populært, ikke?"

I: Mmh

L: Men igen, med årene er jeg også bare blevet bevidst om at det er ikke sådan min krop den er bygget og jeg skal godt nok sulte mig selv meget [griner] for at der kommer hul imellem mine lår, det er virkelig svært." (l. 781-790)

Through this, she expresses a long term wish for a body that looks good in certain types of clothing and defines this body as having a thigh gap. This indicates a norm, that certain body types are needed in order to wear certain pieces of clothing and that your body type determines what clothes you should wear. It even seems to be defined by specific body parts, since the width of one's thighs can determine whether one looks good in shorts. It is also apparent from this quote that Lili understands that she is able to change her looks through her diet, when she

states that she has to starve herself a lot in order to achieve this look, although she has chosen not to do so. Through their clothes they can express themselves, although there seems to be restrictions in what clothes they can wear, based on their body type.

Another way the women use their bodies in controlling their appearance is through unconscious bodily acts. When reflecting upon a time she was aware of how her body looked, Johanna explains how she often uses her body in an “inexpedient way” (Danish: *uhensigtsmæssig måde*) (l. 606) when she unconsciously sucks in her stomach. She becomes aware of this act when she in the afternoon becomes bloated and it hurts, something that often happens when she is wearing tight clothes and tries to avoid to feel the sensation of clothes on her skin (l. 607-614), which she does not like and explain gives her an “ew- feeling” (Danish: *adr-fornemmelse*) (l. 620). She does not like her stomach, describing it as her weak spot (l. 683), as it is not as flat as she would like it to be (l. 709-710). She tries to anonymise it through not only her clothing (l. 695-606) but also through adventitiously (Danish: *komme til at*) sucking in her stomach (l. 612). Here we see how the social expectations of physical attractiveness is defined by having a flat stomach. To achieve this, Johanna exercise control over her body, engages in body surveillance, and performs the normative beauty ideal of having a flat stomach. Even though she often becomes aware that she does it, it is an adventitious action, creating a conflict. She is aware of her own rather frequent unconscious action but is not able to end the behaviour that leads to the uncomfortable sensation and pain. The conflict appears to be grounded in two evils, either she sucks in her stomach and becomes bloated and experiences pain, or she does not and experience the ew-feeling following the sensation of clothes on her stomach. She seems to have chosen the first evil but is still judging herself negatively for it, as it is not how her stomach is “supposed to be” (Danish: *egentligt burde sidde*) (l. 633-634). This normative expectation of how her stomach should be, seems to create a conflict between the social expectations of physical attractiveness, having a flat stomach and the normative expectation that one should not experience pain. It becomes clear as to why she chooses this approach when she describes an experience where she saw her stomach bulging out (Danish: *bule ud*) (l. 731) in a picture from a party where she had not tugged her shirt into her tight skirt properly. She describes how:

“[...] I just like remember that I saw a picture [deep breath] where you just like (...) like you could see my stomach (...) just like (...) that the skirt was not like straight, like it bulged out and that I just

remember that I thought ew [laughs] That it was what I really wanted to avoid” (l. 728-733)

”[...] jeg kan bare sådan huske at jeg så et billede [dyb indånding] hvor man bare sådan (...) altså man kunne se min mave (...) bare sådan (...) at nederdelen var ikke sådan *lige*, altså den bulede ud og det jeg bare huske at jeg tænkte adr [griner] At det var virkelig gerne det jeg ville undgå” (l. 728-733)

Seeing the picture of herself and her bulging stomach after the party invoked a feeling of disgust, as she was thinking “ew” about herself. This feeling was what she actively tried to avoid through her choice of clothing and through sucking in her stomach. When Johanna finds herself in this situation where she does not live up to the norm of having a flat stomach, her self-acceptance and self-esteem is affected, and she judges herself negatively and feels disgusted. Through the picture she could judge her looks from an outside perspective, and as it had already happened, the picture served as evidence that her stomach was bulging and not controlled.

Betina too explains how she consciously tries to control her appearance when taking pictures to avoid “becoming sad *later*” (Danish: blive ked af det *senere*) (l. 666). She does this by trying to smile in a way “so that her cheeks do not look so big” (Danish: så mine kinder ikke ser så store ud) or by keeping her eyes open while she smiles, something that is not possible, at least not for her (l. 718-722). She wants her appearance in the pictures to come out matching her own understanding of her looks. Like Johanna, this supports a way of using the body to control or manipulate the appearance *in situ*, whether or not successfully. What is interesting here is that the women are aware of how impactful the photos are for their own judgement of their appearance. Betina actively and consciously use her body to look the way she wants in order to avoid her own painful judgement. Betina uses the way she carries herself to appear in a way that matches her understanding of herself. She describes being aware of not standing slouched in a corner (Danish: at jeg ligesom er meget opmærksom på at, ikke at stå ovre i et hjørne og være sådan forkrummet eller noget ikke) (l. 72-74). This was first done consciously but after receiving “positive responses” (l. 79), such as “being included easier” (Danish: bliver man nemmere inkluderet) (l. 80), she habitualised the way of carrying herself, and now it has become “what she does” (Danish: det jeg gør) (l. 85). Other people’s reactions and responses to the women’s appearance can therefore be evaluated and habitualised, as a way of

understanding their personal appearance or physical demeanour. This results in certain actions being continued or discontinued, and their self-understanding being affected for years. Betina's and Johanna's accounts both show how they unconsciously make bodily acts to appear in a certain way. This is described as a way to control the appearance, sometimes in order to avoid appearing in a certain way in photographs, which can later be a proof of them not living up to the norms of a controlled female body, and this way of controlling their bodies can in some cases even lead to pain.

It also seemed that the body is understood and evaluated through a comparison with others' bodies in both competence and appearance. A clear example hereof is when Betina talks about when she feels that her body is not "that nice" (Danish: særligt nice) (l. 100-101). She explains that the feeling is either internally or externally sparked:

"That it can both be like an external thing if I walk with someone who I think is (...) is a lot *slimmer* than me or a lot *prettier* than me or has a prettier (...) something like that comparison-thing, which can mean that one don't feel nice. [...] But there is also that completely basic that (...) I can just stand and suddenly not really feel like I look that good and that I am too big and I am too something [...]" (l. 121-127)

"At det kan både være sådan en ekstern ting hvis jeg går med nogen som jeg synes er (...) er meget *slankere* end mig eller meget *flottere* end mig eller har en pænere (...) et eller andet altså sådan den der sammenligningsting, som kan gøre at man ikke har det nice. [...] Men der er også den der helt basic at (...) at jeg bare kan stå og lige pludseligt ikke rigtig synes at jeg ser særligt godt ud og jeg er for stor og jeg er for et eller andet [...]" (l. 121-127)

Betina describes how walking with someone she finds much slimmer or much prettier than her can result in her not liking her own body, a sudden feeling of being too big or not pretty. She understands one feeling as being external, because it is sparked by someone else looking a certain way, and one being internal, as the feeling suddenly appears with no apparent external stimuli. What both of these experiences seem to have in common is that they are both an evaluation of her own body through comparing it to others'. It would be fair to assume that using the adverb "too" (Danish: for) means that she is evaluating herself to be larger than what

is normal or acceptable. It seems as if the feeling of having an inadequate appearance appears out of nowhere and is not tied to a specific experience.

This comparison to imagined others, as also present when Lili talks about what is at stake (Danish: på spil) (l. 725) when being naked around a man. Lili explains how she wonders:

“[...] do *my* breasts look different than, [laughs] that last girl you were with, are they too big or too small, are they too uneven or, all of those things that one might walk around and doubts a bit and sees in the mirror and focus on a lot” (l. 729-733)

“[...] ser *mine* bryster anderledes ud end, [griner] hende du var sammen med sidst, er de for store eller for små, er de for skæve eller, alle de der ting man måske går selv og tvivler lidt på og ser I spejlet og har meget fokus på” (l. 729-733)

The emphasis on “my” (Danish: mine) breasts, indicates that she understands her breasts are *hers*, a part of her physical appearance. This makes the man’s assessment of them important, as it is part of her. She too compares her own appearance to others’, because she is expecting the man to judge them in comparison to other women’s breasts. What is at stake here is his acceptance of the appearance of her breasts, as his judgement is a judgement of her sexual attractiveness. She compares her bodily appearance to others and expects others to do the same. She is not comparing her appearance to the ideal, but to the last girl he was with.

In line with Lili’s comparison to “the other girl”, the women understand their own looks through the notion of normal. What is considered an acceptable body shape is not as much the shape itself, as it is a shape considered to be the norm. An example hereof is when Astrid talks about how her view on her body and weight changed throughout her gymnasium years. She describes the experience of realising that the bump on her stomach was “probably like everyone else” (Danish: sikkert ligesom alle andre) (l. 245-246) and “[...] then of course you realise okay, but that is how everyone else look too.” (Danish: så oplever man jo okay, men sådan ser alle andre jo også ud.) (l. 263-264). For Astrid, realising that everyone else had the same bump on their stomachs, made her become less aware of this body part that she used to feel uncomfortable with. By comparing herself to others, she notices that all of their stomachs look alike, and she does not need to think about it any further, which is “very nice” (Danish: meget dejligt) (l. 268-269). Not living up to the normal, can likewise become a source of

insecurity, showcased by both Astrid and Betina. They both have been in social circles where everyone around them were very skinny (Danish: meget tynde) (Appendix 9, l. 559-560; Appendix 10, l. 557), which made them feel big even though they knew that they generally were not. This was uncomfortable for them, since they used to think they had a normal body type, but since the normal in this social environment was different than the usual, they felt bigger than average. This was conflicting with their understanding of their size, as suddenly Astrid felt “big in relation to them” (Danish: stor i forhold til dem) (l. 558-559). Betina explained:

“[...] so I was just frustrated whether it was because the others were wildly small or because if it was, I was wildly big, I couldn’t really grasp it and it annoyed me like crazy. [laughs]” (l. 563-567)

“ [...] så var jeg bare frustreret over om det var fordi de andre var helt vildt små eller fordi om det var, jeg var helt vildt stor, det kunne jeg ligesom ikke lure og det irriterede mig bare helt vildt. [griner]” (l. 563-567)

When comparing herself to the norm, Betina understands her own body size in one way, but as the norm changes, when all the women around her were smaller than the societal norm, she becomes uncertain about her size. Therefore, Betina’s position in relation to the normal size is changed. Interestingly, the women compare their appearance a lot more to what they understand as the normal than the ideal.

The women also understand their own bodily competence through comparison to others. Again here, the notion of normal defines their own capabilities and the assessment that follows. Johanna defines herself as “very normal” (Danish: meget normal) (l. 962) regarding her strength and points out multiple times in the interview that she is not “the fastest” (l. 982; l. 1025; l. 1068), “strongest” (l. 962; l. 1025; l. 1068) or “most flexible” (l. 1068-1069). It seems to be important for her to let others know that she is aware of her own bodily competence, as she explains “[...] because I don’t want anyone to believe that I believe that I (...) myself think that I am immensely fit because I really am not [...]” (Danish: [...] fordi at jeg vil ikke have at nogen skal tro at jeg tror at jeg (...) selv synes at jeg er enormt trænet fordi det er jeg virkelig ikke [...]) (l. 646-648). Evaluating her own competence and capabilities is a skill that she wants to showcase, and quite possibly a way to avoid making a fool of herself in front of others. The

women's actions and competence in their body is likewise evaluated based on what other people can do and have done. They define and assess an action or achievement accomplished through how attainable it is by others. Lili wants to run, as "walking, that is something everyone can do" (Danish: at gå, det kan alle jo) (l. 178), Astrid is proud of hiking up a big mountain as it is not "something everyone and anyone have done" (Danish: bare noget alle og enhver har gjort.) (l. 203), and Johanna is feeling that her physique was "superior" (l. 1105) because she was skiing faster than her family. Betina found out she was strong because she realised, she could squat more kilos than the benchmark, she had for others to define them as strong "[...] oh but then I am strong, I think I've always thought that people who squat 60 kilo they are strong and now I suddenly stand with 65 kilo [...]" (Danish: [...] nå men så er jeg jo stærk, jeg tror altid at jeg har tænkt at folk der squatter 60 kilo de er stærke og nu står jeg lige pludselig med 65 kilo [...]) (l. 879-882). It seems that competence is tied closely with the actions and competence of others. An action is worthy of supporting a feeling of being competent, if said action is not easily attained by others or if others who do said action, is competent. In Betina's case, her "suddenly" being strong supports the idea that there is a benchmark in strength, because by squatting 60 kilos, one is strong in her opinion. Squatting less makes her "not strong", anything above makes her strong. Reaching such a benchmark becomes a defining moment for her and this experience in particular impacted her self-confidence and self-worth for many weeks. Johanna is still defining her level of competence by her skiing experience three months prior, just as Astrid still feels proud of her achievement years before. Experiencing competence, achieving sports objectives and doing bodily actions they find to be difficult, supports their overall wellbeing and sense of bodily self, in certain cases for weeks, months or years.

Competence is also explained by the four women as being a driving force and motivation for their engagement in physical activities and to boost their bodily competence. Especially strength was a motive for them to exercise regularly. Betina talks about how "super great" (Danish mega fedt) it is to break an old record or when one experiences that one has become stronger or faster and the likes (Danish: hvis man har slået en rekord eller noget i den dur, at man oplever at man er blevet stærkere, løber hurtigere eller sådan noget.) (l. 967-969) and how these are "extremely positive experiences" (l. 887). As Betina uses the pronoun "one" (Danish: man), it is clear that she believes this to be a common feeling and assessment of enhancing bodily competence. Johanna too, describes how a reason for her going to the gym is to become stronger as well as more persistent (l. 349). When talking about an experience where she was aware of what her body could do, Lili remembers the first time she could "do that push up" (Danish: lave den der armbøjning) (l. 863-864), an experience with a great positive mental

outcome. It is described as a process, starting from doing “girl push ups” (Danish: pigearmbøjninger), a term she judges as “super wrong” (l. 870-871). The term “girl push up” is a much-used term to describe a push-up done on the knees instead of on the toes. When keeping in mind that all of the four women are striving towards building competence and strength, a reason for Lili judging the term as wrong could be that by gendering a down scaled version of “proper push ups”, it is indicated that females are not strong enough to do the full exercise. This is not the case, as Lili progressed from having done girl push ups all her life, to managing to do a proper push up through a great deal of practice (l. 860-864). After doing the push up Lili felt strong and invincible and thought of herself as the “worlds (...) coolest” (Danish: verdens (...) sejeste) (l. 864-866). The experience was in sharp contrast to her earlier self-understanding as being “fat and weak” (l. 890) and affected her self-image positively. Feeling invincible by pushing her own body of the ground, indicates that there is more to the bodily competence than just the exercise itself. Betina too, experiences a sense of heightened self-worth (Danish: selvværd) when she breaks a record, finding herself to be “fucking cool” (Danish: fucking sej) (l. 974-976). She reflects upon the impact of competence for her self-image and describes it as:

“It is, you see, also that, it is, extremely what do you say, that the negative uhm (...) from your head can be projected onto one’s body, then I think opposite too that the positive experiences about how strong I am can be projected onto how nice I am or something” (l. 908-914)

“Det er jo også det, det er jo enormt ligesom hvad skal man sige, at det negative øh (...) fra ens hoved kan blive projiceret over på ens krop, så synes jeg også omvendt at de positive oplevelser med hvor stærk jeg er kan blive projiceret over til hvor nice jeg er, eller sådan” (l. 908-914)

Experiencing bodily competence transcends into the women’s overall idea of themselves, their worth and what they are capable of. This way, enhancing competence, becoming faster, stronger or more persistent can affect how they see themselves in other areas than just the gym.

The social comparisons also transcend into the digital world, where social media like Instagram and YouTube, become platforms where some of the women can compare themselves, their appearance and lifestyle to others’ all over the world. Both Johanna and Betina brought up the social media sites themselves, while reflecting on their lifestyle and who they

compare themselves to. For Johanna, social media becomes a source of questioning her own lifestyle, creating a feeling of doubt and guilty conscience about her choices in life. When asked to elaborate she replies:

“Yeah, like I think it is about (...) of course it is about something about how one of course wants one’s body to look like but it probably also triggers some sort of (...) idea I probably have about the healthy, good life, as a simple life, where one don’t (...) eat all sorts of chemicals or don’t use all sorts of resources on like, to buy all sorts of food and all that packaging and fat, and sugar like all of this which has become shamed and of course in a certain way rightly so because it also (...) causes overweight and illness and all of that (...) but I can just feel that it [4] well it makes me think I should live differently” (l. 496-507)

“ Ja, altså jeg tror jo at det handler om at (...) det handler jo noget om hvordan man selvfølgelig gerne vil have sin krop til at se ud men det går jo nok også ind og trigger en eller anden (...) idé jeg nok har om det sunde, gode liv, som et simpelt liv, hvor man ikke (...) spiser alt muligt kemi, eller ikke bruger alle mulige ressourcer på sådan, at købe alt muligt mad og alle de der indpakning og fedt, og sukker altså sådan alt det her, som jo sådan er blevet lidt sådan udskammet og jo på en vis måde med rette for det er jo også (...) forårsager overvægt og sygdom og alt sådan noget (...) men jeg kan bare mærke at det sådan [4] altså det får mig jo til at tænke at jeg burde leve anderledes.” (l. 496-507)

There are several important issues to note within this extract. Firstly, that she believes that her lifestyle has an impact on her appearance, and secondly that chemicals, resources, food, packaging, fat and sugar, as well as other things are shamed. Furthermore, that this shaming is righteous and that it causes overweight and illness. These are presented as facts and are understood as common sensical and reflect the normativity and expectations to strive towards a certain lifestyle. Lastly, it is morally correct to avoid those things, leaving her with a feeling of guilty conscience. She also explains how she feels restrictive diets such as “vegan, raw, something and clean eating and detox” (Danish: vegan, raw, et eller andet, og clean eating og detox) (l. 448-449) “looks pretty” (Danish: ser pænt ud) (l. 463) and therefore appeal to her

even though she knows it is “bullshit that it is also just some diet” (Danish: bullshit at det også er en eller anden diæt) (l. 457-458). This conflict, between the bullshit she knows it is and its appeal to her, triggers a feeling of bad conscience about her lifestyle choices and everyday activities. She becomes hyper-aware of her daily choices and questions her lifestyle, where she “goes to the gym” and “sits in front of a laptop a lot” (l. 548-549). The conflict becomes difficult to handle as her desire to have a pretty, although restricted, lifestyle clashes with her other objectives in life, like her academic education that entails many hours in front of the laptop but also the amount of time she prioritises for sports and the efficiency she believes the gym provides.

Betina experience the pressure from comparing herself to people on social media in a different way, through her appearance. She downloaded Instagram and “fell straight into that trap” (Danish: faldt lige i den der fælde) (l. 1052-1053), “the trap” referring to the “comparison kick” (Danish: sammenlignings- (...) kick) (l. 1059-1060) and feeling of “looking wrong” (Danish: så forkert ud) (1061) when comparing herself to “Instagram fitness girls” (Danish: instagram fitnesspiger) (l. 1051-1052). She was surprised that she was not as well equipped (Danish: bedre rustet) to handle the app where good-looking bodies are “just there” (Danish: så er de der bare) (l. 1217). It seems that seeing ideal bodies and lifestyles of people they do not even know can result in conflict in the women’s image of themselves even through a screen.

Another way the women understood themselves was through how others reacted and responded to them and their bodies. Especially in Lili’s story it becomes clear that other people’s comments and actions can be defining for her self-understanding. She describes that when she was a young teenager, she:

“[...] had a stepmother who (...) who was not the world’s (...) *niciest* human, she was sore at me and she focused *a lot* on that she thought I was too fat uhm (...) and at this time I have been around (...) 12-13, 11-12-13 years old uhm around that, 14, and she was after me all the time and I (...) like she kept her eye on what I ate, how much I ate, uhm (...) was exactly after me about sports [...]” (l. 944-953)

”[...] havde en papmor, som (...) som ikke var verdens (...) *sødeste* menneske, hun havde set sig lidt sur på mig og hun havde *meget* fokus på at hun syntes at jeg var for tyk øh (...) og på det her tidspunkt har

jeg været omkring (...) 12-13, 11-12-13 år øh deromkring, 14, og hun var hele tiden efter mig og jeg (...) altså hun holdt øje med hvad jeg spiste, hvor meget jeg spiste, øhm (...) var netop meget efter mig i forhold til sport [...]” (l. 944-953)

The stepmother’s response to Lili’s weight is very apparent and “influenced” (Danish: smittede så lidt af) (l. 961) her father’s view on his daughter, making him want Lili to engage in certain kinds of physical activity. Lili did so in order to prove to her father that she was strong and “refute” the label of the “*fat horse girl*” (Danish: *tykke hestepige*) (l. 968) she felt like he saw her as. Throughout the interview she describes herself as feeling fat multiple times, a label she seems to have internalized. She understood herself as fat when she was in gymnasium, a label she now understands as misguided for her body then but accepts for herself now. The rejection of the label could be a way to protect herself from the even worse label of “corpulent” (Danish: smælder, smælderfed) (l. 527), which she argues she would be now, if her body back in gymnasium would have been fat. This illuminates how other people’s comments can have an impact on how women understand themselves and their bodies.

Like Lili’s father who wanted her to engage in specific sports, it seems that the women understand certain type of sports as “more right” than others. Both Lili and Betina engaged in horseback riding in their childhood. Betina describes how it is “not that many years since she started using her body” (Danish: det er ikke så mange år siden at jeg begyndte at, sådan at bruge min krop) (l. 930-932), which indicates that engaging in horseback riding is not understood as “using her body”. Lili’s account of her father’s and stepmother’s reaction to her riding, indicates the same, that horseback riding is not a proper sport. Her stepmother wanted her to “find something else to do than that horseback riding” (Danish: skulle finde mig noget andet at gå til end det der ridning) (l. 954-955). Johanna describes “something like Zumba, with all kinds of women and so on” (Danish: sådan noget Zumba, sammen med alle mulige damer og sådan noget) (l. 100-101) makes her feel silly (Danish: fjollet) (l. 99) and she feels like it is a forced way (Danish: forceret måde) (l. 102) to use her body, even though she explains that she would like to take more dance classes (l. 96-97). Lili too, describes feeling “silly” (Danish: fjollet) and “awkward” (Danish: kikset) when trying a trampoline aerobics class (l. 47; l. 214-222) but that she returned because it was fun (Danish: skægt) and she felt like it worked (Danish: det virker) (l. 46-48) (for an elaboration on exercise that “works”, see Temporality). There seems to be a discrepancy between their engagement in sports they enjoy and the normative idea about what kind of exercise they should engage in. One of those sports seems

to be running. All four women brought up running, in a way that made it seem like it was the default exercise. Betina describes how before she attended a folk high school she understood herself as lazy (Danish: doven) (l. 933) and that she believes that she never went for a run before going there (Danish: jeg tror aldrig at jeg har løbet en tur altså inden jeg tog på højskole) (l. 991-992). She furthermore stated that she felt like she at some point tried to fit into that "running-mould" (Danish: løbe-form) (l. 274). Johanna use running as an example of "authentically" (Danish: autentisk) using one's body (l. 129; l. 138). Lili even tried to start running, even though her knees start swelling and hurt when she tries (l. 105-114). Even when a doctor, who Lili describes as "my surgeon" (Danish: min kirurg) (l. 107) tells her that it is a bad idea to run and that her knees cannot keep on (Danish: holde til det) (l. 108-109), she continues to run and doubts the severity of the pain (l. 119-120). Only Astrid likes the process of running, describing "to run" (Danish: løbning) as "fun" (Danish: sjovt) (l. 747-748). This could illustrate how deeply embedded running is in the normative understanding of health and exercise.

In summary this theme has highlighted how the women understand themselves and their bodies through the norms and expectations. Health is understood as a personal responsibility, something they are expected to strive for through exercise, which is understood as healthy and important, though certain activities are judged to be more right than other. They experience positive outcomes in their mental and physical health through exercising and exercising also becomes a way to achieve their ideal appearance. There are certain norms of appearance which the women understand themselves through, such as a normal weight, being slim and looking strong. They further understand being strong as healthy, and bodily competence strengthen their self-worth. They judge their appearance and competence in relation to other people around them, in person or online, more so than the ideal they describe.

Sensing the body

The second major theme addresses the women's' accounts of sensing their bodies. This includes their awareness of their bodies, embodied emotions and acceptance or rejection of sensations. It also turns to their descriptions of what it means to them to engage in physical activities with others and them sensing the natural way of using the body.

All of the women interviewed reflected on their everyday life as students, as a determining reason for using their bodies as they do. When asked about how they use their body in their everyday life they all stated that they were not very active in their use of their body.

They associated “using the body” with doing something active with it. Johanna described her everyday as a sedentary everyday (Danish: stillesiddende hverdag) (l. 4-5) and how the lack of physical activity made her less aware of her body and therefore less grounded in it (l. 4-11). She explains her feeling of being in her body as:

”Like it is, you see, something you don’t think about like that feeling of being in your body and I think that you probably that you might have it more, at least I have experienced having that, I have previously had a job as a waitress where I have like, used my body, like where I have been standing up and I have had to lift things and reach for things.” (l. 30-36)

”Altså, det er jo noget man ikke tænker over altså denne der fornemmelse af at være i sin krop, og det tænker jeg at man måske har mere når man, det har jeg i hvert fald oplevet jeg har haft, jeg har tidligere haft job som tjener, hvor jeg har sådan, brugt min krop, altså hvor jeg har stået op og jeg har skulle løfte ting og skulle nå ting.” (l. 30-36)

An important issue to notice here is that she becomes aware of her body and feels her body when she uses it through physical movement. She reflects upon a time when she actively used her body in her job and proposes a contrast to how she feels in her body now that she does not actively use it in her job and studies. All four women explained that they do not use their body much physically in their everyday activities because of the time spent sitting still when studying. Astrid, like Johanna, describes a lack of bodily awareness when she is sitting still “in school” (l. 39-40), and that physical activity results in bodily awareness, both while the activity is happening as well as afterwards. She says that after physical activity she:

“[...] appreciate (...) that (...) the way the body feels normally, like then one appreciates like the absence of it being hard afterwards. And it might also be very nice that thing to be reminded (...) that one has a body and that it (...) yeah has some needs and like just feel one’s own body and so [...]” (l. 531-537)

“[...] værdsætter (...) det (...) den måde kroppen føles på normalt, altså så man værdsætter ligesom fraværet af at det er hårdt bagefter. Og det er måske også meget rart det der med lige at blive mindet om (...) at man har en krop og at den (...) ja har nogle behov og sådan lige at mærke ens egen krop og sådan [...]” (l. 531-537)

When moving the body, the women become aware of their physicality which they are not when sitting down studying. Astrid describes the awareness as being reminded that one has a body, that this body has needs and describe this is a positive reminder. She describes it as a general human experience by using the pronoun one (Danish: man), constructing it as something that applies to all people in general. That she describes it as being reminded of one's body also implies that it is at times forgotten. The sensations following physical activity puts the body in the forefront of her awareness. Lili too, tells how the few times she has been sitting on a horseback, she could afterwards sense which muscles were used (Danish: SÅ kan man altså godt mærke hvad det er for nogle muskler, der ligesom er blevet brugt, ikke?) (l. 1026-1028) and she explains the feeling as “sore, sore, sore muscles” (Danish: ømme, ømme, ømme muskler) (l. 89-90) as well as a little pain when getting up in the morning (l. 90-91). This indicates that the awareness of the body after engaging in physical activity can even last for many hours, even days. These two accounts both show how pain and rupture as bodily sensations can create an awareness of the body. Not moving can make them less aware of their bodies and being aware of the body is understood as a good thing, even pain in the form of soreness is assessed as positive.

The opposite, a lack of pain while working out, also seems to make the women aware of their bodies. A lack of sore muscles (Danish: havde ikke ømme ben) and not being out of breath (Danish: ikke sådan forpustet) made Johanna aware of her body, when she went skiing (l. 975-977). She used the metaphor about herself that the “animal was on fire” (Danish: knald på dyret) to explain how she could sense the amount of energy in her body to “just want to keep on” (Danish: ville bare blive ved) (l. 995-996). Betina too sensed her body through exercise due to a positive and “addictive endorphin rush” (Danish: endorfinrush som er meget (...) afhængighedsskabende) (l. 943) where she describes how she becomes “flying” (Danish: flyvende) and ecstatic (Danish: ekstatisk) (l. 949-950). Even though they do not describe how this was sensed in terms of bodily sensations, it is clear that they both experienced being in and feeling their body in a different way than generally.

When describing a mental state of happiness and relaxation in relation to mental health, Astrid describes feeling relaxed after exercising outside (l. 815-818), and she believes that it is very healthy for one's psyche to see trees and the sky (l. 794-796) and she thinks that it is something people need (Danish: det tænker jeg bare at man (...) har brug for) (l. 820-821). Lili describes how she could use exercise to help her mental state when "everything hurt inside" (Danish: alting gjorde (...) ondt indeni) (l. 402). It meant that she was able to relax in her body and in her head (l. 411-415) and that she in part exercises "for her head" (Danish: for mit hoveds skyld) (l. 420-421) which is why exercise now is something that needs to add something good (Danish: tilføje noget godt) (l. 436-437) in her life. Betina explains how problems that stress her out become less problematic after she works out, describing it like she is "on a pink cloud" (Danish: på en lyserød sky) (l. 1109). The problem does not disappear, but it becomes bearable and while describing the feeling of wellbeing she states that " [...] I can almost feel it in my fingers when I talk about it, like completely calm-like and serenity" (Danish: jeg kan næsten mærke det i mine fingre når jeg snakker om det, sådan helt ro-agtigt og afklarethed) (l. 1114-1116). Johanna too, describes how she experience happiness (Danish: bliver glad) when she uses her body (l. 950). Not exercising can in line with the above, for Johanna invoke a feeling of sluggishness (Danish: sløv) and staleness inside (Danish: flad indeni) (l. 188-189), which is close to the description of feeling "warm" (Danish: varm) and "stuffy" (Danish: indelukket) which Astrid describes when sitting indoor all day (l. 813-815). The extracts above illustrate the simultaneous positive mental and sensational outcomes of exercising, as well as possible negative outcomes of sitting still.

Also, the clothes can for Johanna, Lili and Astrid result in uncomfortable bodily sensations. Johanna describes how she believes that she sucks in her stomach because she does not like the feeling of her stomach against the clothes (Danish: trækker lidt maven ind, jeg tror at det er sådan noget med at jeg kan ikke rigtigt lide den der fornemmelse, altså sådan min mave mod (...) tøjet.") (l. 616-619). She describes it as a weekly way of becoming aware of her body (Danish: Ugentlig måde jeg lige bliver opmærksom på min krop) (l. 622-623) and the feeling she gets is a ew-feeling (Danish: adr-fornemmelse) (l. 620). Lili too, describes an awareness of her own body in much the same way as Johanna and says:

"My hips, or out here, if one's wearing underwear which tighten the wrong place right, (...) and or get touched around right here, then one becomes aware that there I am a little soft and it, ew (...) so that is also

a little a (...) a thing about myself where I can get a little ew [...]” (l. 791-798)

“Mine hofter, eller herude, hvis man har undertøj der lige får strammet på det forkerte sted ikke, (...) og eller bliver rørt lige heromkring, så bliver man opmærksom på at, der er jeg lige lidt blød og det, adr (...) så det er også lidt en (...) en ting ved mig selv hvor jeg godt kan få det sådan lidt adr [...]” (l. 791-798)

The two descriptions both illuminate how awareness of their body is sparked by a sensation brought forth by either another person or an object, like pieces of clothing, touching areas of their bodies which they are not comfortable with. Johanna calls her stomach her “sore point” (Danish: ømme punkt) (l. 669-670) and Lili describes the area around her hips as “the wrong place”. In the same way, when asked about a time where she was aware of how her body looked Astrid tells how she has been aware of her body when wearing tight clothes and therefore judged it (Danish: hvis jeg sad ned med, i et eller andet stramt tøj og jeg lige kiggede og var sådan, årh jeg synes lige at det buler lidt ud eller sådan) (l. 253-256). This indicates that the bodily sensations they experience results in a negative assessment of the area they sense and therefore become aware of. As explored in the previous theme, this awareness and negative assessment of the body part in question, seems to stem from the norms they feel they have to live up to.

Another interesting aspect of the way in which the body can be sensed is the experience of closeness. Betina describes a physical sensory experience of closeness, where hugs and touch is a source of energy and a way to be in her body. She states that:

“[...] so the only thing I feel unease about, about *my* body is when I think it is too big or too (...) muscular or too one thing or the other or something like that (...) yeah.

I: Mmh. When do you feel that?

B: Well (...) now in these times I do because I think I am lonely and (...) and I can more easily go around and scold myself because that, where I get energy is when I am with others, uhm (...) and my friends and I cannot do that right now. And there are no one there to touch my body or hug me or in that way be in contact with it. Then I also find it

to become more difficult like to be in it myself, when there is not anyone close” (l. 154-169)

” [...] så det eneste jeg sådan har ubehag ved, ved *min* krop det er når der er noget sådan at jeg synes at den er for stor eller for (...) muskuløs eller for et eller andet i den dur eller sådan (...) ja.

I: Mmh. Hvornår føler du det?

B: Ja (...) nu i de her tider gør jeg fordi jeg synes at jeg går og er ensom og (...) og jeg kan nemmere gå og skælde mig selv ud fordi at, der hvor jeg jo henter energi det er jo når jeg er sammen med andre, øh (...) og mine venner og det kan jeg ikke lige nu. Og der er ikke nogen der er der til at røre min krop eller kramme mig eller sådan på den måde være i kontakt med den. Så synes jeg også at det bliver sværere ligesom selv at være i den, når der ikke er nogen tæt på.” (l. 154-169)

What the excerpt illustrates is that she has a harder time being in her own body since there are no one close to her, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. She experiences uneasiness about her body when she is alone and therefore, she can more easily tell herself off and feel wrong. Being in her body is more difficult when there are no friends around it to be in physical contact with it. Here it is explored how closeness can be a physically sensory experience which impacts the experience of being in the body.

Even though only Betina describes the importance of the physical sensory experience of closeness, the social aspects of exercising are explored by all of the women. Until now exercise has only been explored in relation to the norms, but it also serves a second purpose of socialising. All four women emphasises the positive social impact being around others, engaging with others and being part of a community has on them. Johanna talks about the importance of focusing on the social and “community aspect” (Danish: fællesskabsaspektet) of working out, instead of talking into the negative aspects of appearance, such as being “fat or ugly” (l. 950-952). Betina describes how big of a role the community in her CrossFit gym “apparently” (Danish: åbenbart) (l. 473) plays in her life, while Lili points to how nice it is to see and meet people and feel community around an activity (l. 630-634). All of this indicates that sport and physical movement can create certain arenas that can offer a feeling of community with many people at the same time. Using the word community (Danish: fællesskab) means that there is something uniting about physical activity in a group, and that

being together in something makes the group tied together. Johanna's comment on the positive social aspects of exercising in opposition to exercising in order to avoid feeling fat or ugly, shows the different objectives behind doing sports or moving the body. It becomes a choice whether to focus on one or the other, one bringing happiness, community and social experiences, the other bringing negative self-evaluation. As exercising plays such a big role in the women's lives it is quite clear why Johanna is advocating for the first focus, since exercise in this way becomes the arena for positive emotions, thoughts and actions instead of negative. Taking Betina and Lili's comments into consideration it could be argued that having positive social experiences while exercising, the importance of appearance and competence falls in the background. Astrid tells about how many of the activities she engages in are of social character such as winter swimming (l. 594), bouldering (l. 107) or running (l. 839-840). For her it is a way of seeing friends while getting variation in her everyday life, instead of just sitting in front of each other at the dining table (l. 677-682) and she feels that experiences become larger when sharing it with others (l. 690). Here the activity is not necessarily the subject of attention, but it creates a different ground for the interaction and relationship. The context there, in which the body is trained to live up to the normative expectations is given a second purpose besides exercising. Socialising through exercise might this way be experienced, to some extent, to counter the pressure they experience to live up to the normative expectations.

Another positive sensory aspect of exercise is described by all of the women as a way for them to get out of their head and seems to be tightly connected with the positive aspect of mental health explored earlier. Astrid describes how she thinks about many things (Danish: *alt muligt*) (l. 824) while running but that she does not necessarily have a lot of control over it (Danish: *kontrol over*) (l. 849-850). She judges it to be "[...] probably pretty good too, that the brain can (...) do it's own thing and (...) like it (...) when one dream probably" (Danish: *Det er sikkert også meget godt, at hjernen bare kan (...) køre sit eget show og (...) ligesom den (...) når man drømmer sikkert.*) (l. 852-854). This is also explored by Johanna who says that while exercising she can "turn off the brain a bit and so "(Danish: *slå hjernen lidt fra og sådan.*) (l. 387-388). Betina describes how it is a big freedom for her to exercise as it is impossible to think when one's heartrate is above 185 (Danish: *fordi man kan ikke tænke når ens puls er over 185 overhovedet altså sådan. Det, det er helt vildt så stort et frirum [...]*) (l. 1322-1324). Not thinking or being aware of anything thereby seems to be positive outcome of exercising. While these excerpts all describe the experience of not being aware of their thoughts or thinking at all while engaging in exercise, Lili points out "if the body is run completely dead, (...) then it is also easier (...) in some way to relax and (...) and to relax in the head, I think." (Danish: *hvis*

kroppen den bliver kørt helt død, (...) så er det også nemmere (...) på en eller anden måde at slappe lidt af og [...] og slappe af oppe i hovedet, tror jeg) (l. 411-415). The positive mental outcome is by her experienced to exceed the actual activity and she is able relax after the exercise has happened. All of the women connect the feeling of mental calmness to the exercise, and it is safe to assume that it is because they sense a difference from before and after engaging in the physical activity. What these excerpts further show is how the women distinguish between the head or brain and the body, while still pointing out how the body affects the head or brain.

Some of the women further sense their bodies differently depending on what activity they engage in. Johanna describes how her body might be created to ski (Danish: jeg bare sådan tænkte altså enten så er min krop bare *skabt* til ski) (l. 1017-1028) as she experienced being able to continue skiing without becoming exhausted (l. 1003-1004). Betina too, describes how she enjoys doing CrossFit because:

”[...] now it is, like I have just found something I think I’m good at, or can, can become good at and like it is easy for me and it (...) like you know that, like it is those small things like, that I can squat deep and I’m praised for (...) having a good mobility and things like, it is those very small things, but it is just like. It makes me feel like oh well then I’m probably just born to do this instead of born to do something (...) boring run-ish [...]” (l. 281-291)

”[...] nu der handler det, altså jeg har bare fundet noget jeg synes at jeg er god til, eller kan, *kan* blive god til og sådan det det falder mig *nemt* og det (...) altså du ved det der, altså det er jo sådan nogle små ting som at, at jeg kan squatte dybt og at jeg får ros for at (...) man har en god mobilitet og sådan nogle, det er sådan nogle *helt* små ting, men bare er sådan. Det får mig bare til at føle at nå men så er jeg nok bare født til det her i stedet for at være født til sådan noget (...) kedeligt løb-agtigt [...]” (l. 281-291)

They both experience feeling like they are born to use their body in this particular way, Johanna because she does not feel tired like the people around her and Betina because she is praised by her abilities in things she thinks of as small, or less important. The use of the body is

experienced as natural, arguably what they are intended to do. Interestingly, they both only described positive experiences, thoughts and feelings regarding these activities. On a similar note, Lili thinks that she should exercise in the mornings, because she senses that she becomes really energised and that this energy makes it difficult for her to sleep after taking night classes (Danish: jeg tror jeg burde træne om morgenen, fordi jeg bliver enormt frisk og [...] får en helt anden energi, jeg har faktisk svært ved at sove når jeg har taget de der hold om aftenen) (l. 661-664). She too, can sense what feels right in her body in how she uses it. Interestingly, when asked about whether she listens to her body's signals Lili responded "I think I *notice* it, but I do not think that I'm always so good at, like act in response to what my body tries to tell me" (Danish: jeg tror at jeg *bemærker* det, men jeg tror ikke altid at jeg er så god til helt, sådan at agerer efter hvad det er min krop den prøver at fortælle mig.) (l. 673-676). Her description indicates that she understands the bodily clues but sometimes ignores them. Johanna seems to refer to sensing the bodily cues as well when she reflects on trusting changes in her body and lifestyle and says "well that thing about like [laughs] be a little intuitive about it [...]" (Danish: Altså denne der med altså sådan [griner] være lidt intuitiv omkring det) (l. 889-890). By using the word intuitive, this excerpt could indicate that she too can sense how to use her body naturally or right, by sensing something unconsciously. The women can sense how they use their body in a good way, what feels natural and easy, but can also choose to ignore their bodily signals.

There are many ways in which the women describe experiencing sensing their bodies. Mostly, it seems, the bodily sensations are noticed and put to the forefront of their attention and awareness through physical movement. Soreness or pain, a rupture in their everyday sensations is sensed and reflected upon, which especially makes them aware of their bodies but also a lack of movement is sensed in the body. They experience a shift in their mental state through exercising, where they make a distinction between the body and the brain, while still describing a connection between the two. Engaging in social activities are experienced to bring happiness and a feeling of community and they can further sense how to act in ways that are natural for their bodies, though they do not always act on the bodily cues.

Temporality

The last major theme is the temporal aspect of their experience. This theme concerns the temporal aspect of their lifestyle choices and their understanding of themselves and their bodies

as a process. The latter includes how there are different bodily norms for different times and how they retrospectively make sense of their thoughts of themselves in relation to their bodies.

When talking about actively using their bodies, it became apparent that the use of the body was often directed at something, the movement having an objective. This was especially clear when they reflected on exercise and its role in their lives. When reflecting on exercise, three of the four women mentioned efficiency as a reason for engaging in a certain kind of activity. Astrid describes efficiency as having used her body for a good cause and it being tired (l. 787; l. 801-805) and Johanna explains efficiency as “getting something out of it” (Danish: at få noget ud af det) (l. 339). Johanna chooses classes in her gym based on efficiency, as well as avoids classes like yoga or Zumba, because her reason to be there is to “burn calories” (l. 342-347). Even though she thinks that the dance classes in the gym looks more fun than the “efficient” classes (l. 327-328), her objective to go to the gym is to burn the highest number of calories. When she explains her reason and motivation for going to the gym it is a bit hesitantly:

“But in relation to what (...) motivates me and what is sometimes the driving force and maybe also the reason why I choose to go to the gym instead of (...) going to play badminton or something, it is because then I feel like I can like [5] [deep breath] like more determinedly can go after the body type (...) I want to have.” (l. 264-270)

“Men i forhold til hvad der (...) motiverer mig, og hvad der nogle gange er drivkraften og måske også grunden til at jeg vælger at tage i fitnesscenteret fremfor (...) at gå til badminton eller sådan noget, det er fordi at så føler jeg ligesom at jeg kan sådan [5] [dyb vejrtrækning] sådan lidt mere målrettet kan gå efter den kropstype (...) jeg gerne vil have.” (l. 264-270)

It appears to be difficult for her to say her reflections out loud, maybe because it is conflicting with what she thinks is the morally right way to think of the body, in a natural way, as explored above. Lili, in much the same manner, talks about a trampoline class she has taken multiple times, and describes that “it works” (Danish: det virker) (l. 48). She defines “working” as bringing the heart rate up and that she feels the exercise in her thighs and glutes. She then goes on to question whether it is efficient in relation to other kinds of exercise and states that “There I would probably prefer something else, but if it fits with it being Monday, then I do it. Then I

have done something, right?” (Danish: Der ville jeg nok foretrække noget andet, men hvis det så passer med at det lige er mandag, så gør jeg det. Så har jeg da fået gjort noget, ikke?) (l. 64-68). Lili would prefer something that is more efficient than the trampoline class even though she enjoys it very much but choose this class because doing something inefficient is better than doing nothing. Efficiency for Lili is the feeling that she “is used in her body” (Danish: er brugt i min krop) (l. 76) which is consistent with both Astrid’s and Johanna’s understanding. There is an underlying premise in all of their explanations that efficiency is to tire the body the most, in the shortest amount of time. As Astrid says, “it is not because, in essence it can take all day if one had the time for it, but like (...) one might not have that (...) always.” (Danish: Og det er ikke fordi, i princippet må det tage hele dagen hvis man havde tid til det, men altså (...) det har man måske ikke (...) altid.) (l. 806-808). This quote could illuminate one possibility as to why efficiency is valued and prioritised higher than fun or enjoyment while exercising. What is interesting about Lili’s and Johanna’s accounts is that they both talk about getting the exercise “over with” (Danish: overstået) (Appendix 8, l. 144; l.146; Appendix 7, l. 402; l. 1183). It could be argued that prioritising efficiency above the desire or joy of the sport, might affect the overall experience negatively, since they both choose efficiency above enjoyment. For all of the women it became clear that they chose to exercise and engage in certain kinds of exercise with the idea of efficiency in mind. This meant that they felt tired in their bodies and judged this to have made good use of the time they spent exercising.

The second temporal aspect is in relation to times where the women imply the norms are changed. Two different norms came forth here, a normative age for experiencing a negative body image and times when it is acceptable to gain weight. The normative age for experiencing a negative body image was found in all of the four women’s accounts. As mentioned earlier, Betina downloaded the picture sharing app Instagram, fell into “the trap” when she was “pretty *old* actually” (Danish: ret *gammel* faktisk) (l. 1053) at 20 years of age. The trap she refers to is the “comparison kick” (Danish: sammenlignings- (...) kick) (l. 1059-1060) which made her feel like she “appeared wrong” (Danish: så forkert ud) (1061) when she compared her appearance to Instagram fitness girls (Danish: instagram fitnesspiger) (l. 1051-1052). For Betina these thoughts that stems from looking at fit girls is normal for young women, especially in their teenage years. This becomes clear as she describes that she “managed to get through all of the gymnasium without encountering“ (Danish: jeg var kommet igennem hele gymnasiet uden (...) at være ramlet i) (1054-1056) the trap. This is in line with Astrid saying that she was very aware of how her body looked as well as her weight in her teenage years, though “maybe not so much in relation to others” (Danish: måske ikke så meget i forhold til

andre) (l. 244-245). Lili too, states that she thought of herself as "way, way to fat" (Danish: alt, alt for tyk) in the gymnasium years (l. 519-522) and also shares the idea that teenage girls are "a little insecure" (Danish: lidt usikre) (l. 295-298). The same holds true for Johanna who even seems to understand it as a normative experience across generations, as she believed that her teacher would have understood what it was like to be a teenager and not feel super great in one's body (Danish: Men at (...) hun måske også *forstod* os. Det der med at være sådan 15-16 år og ikke have det sådan super fedt i sin krop. Det tror jeg jo, det er jo *fuldstændigt* normalt) (l. 938-940). This all illuminate an understanding that girls in their teenage years feel insecure and uncomfortable in their bodies and have a negative body image.

The second temporal aspect of normativity in relation to the body, regards acceptable times to gain weight. Three of the women, Johanna, Astrid and Betina all describe how they gained weight at a certain point in their lives, but brush it off as normal or natural, partly because others gain weight in the same situation too. Astrid talks about her weight gain as something to expect when saying

"[...] I went on exchange after uhm, 1.g and there I gained quite a lot of weight. And that was actually alright with me because that is what everyone does, it is like (...) yeah, it is kind of expected and then I lost it when I came home, which everyone does too [...]" (l. 269-274)

"[...] jeg var på udveksling efter øh, 1.g og der tog jeg ret meget på. Og det var, det havde jeg det egentligt fint nok med for det gør alle, det er sådan (...) ja det forventer man lidt og så tabte jeg det så da jeg kom hjem, det gør alle også [...]" (l. 269-274)

She describes being alright with the weight gain because others gain weight when they are in the same situation too. It is expected to happen, which might have had an effect on her acceptance of it. She states that everyone loses the gained weight when they return home too, another expectation, which again could have affected her acceptance of the weight gain. In many ways Johanna's experience seems to be rather similar to Astrid's but her reaction was very different to the way Astrid reacted. Johanna states that she gained weight when she went to live at a boarding school where she, like everyone else, gained weight (Danish: på efterskolen, hvor at, sådan jeg ligesom alle andre tog sådan lidt på [griner] eller jeg var ikke på en sportsefterskole så det var sådan ret, naturligt nok at tage sådan lidt på.) (l. 743-745). She

argues that it is natural to gain weight, partly because the kind of boarding school she attended was not focused on sports, and partly by pointing out how she did the same as everyone else. Where the experiences differ is through the reaction to this weight gain. Johanna describes how a teacher at the boarding school suggested weighing the young girls who felt too fat (Danish: Og så foreslog hun også at hun kunne *veje* os.) (l. 757-758) which “kick-started” her understanding of being healthy with weighing something specific (l. 775-776). After this experience she used her boarding school and gymnasium years to chase a certain low weight (Danish: jeg brugte sådan (...) altså efterskole- og gymnasietiden på sådan at forfølge det) (l. 778-779). Betina’s description of a situation where she gained weight is quite similar to Johanna’s. She says:

“[...] like I gained weight you know, at the folk high school, like one does when one goes to a folk high school, or many do at least, when going to a folk high school and it was extremely frustrating, it is also the first time it has happened in many years I think, since something like 9th grade-ish, I had looked that way, uhm, and I took it super personal or like, I took it in like I was a fiasco at least and it had to change [...] (l. 993-1002)

”[...] altså jeg tog jo på, på højskolen, som man jo gør når man tager på højskole, eller mange i hvert fald gør når de tager på højskole og det var enormt frustrerende, det er også første gang det er sket i mange år tror jeg siden, siden sådan noget 9.klasse-agtigt, havde jeg set ud på den måde, øhm, og det tog jeg *mega* personligt eller sådan, det tog jeg meget ind som jeg var en fiasko i hvert fald og det skulle ændre sig [...]” (l. 993-1002)

For Betina, the impact of her weight gain was big, even though she describes it as a normal thing to happen when moving to a folk high school. She felt like a fiasco, that she was wrong by gaining weight, and it does not seem like the normality of the situation made her any less affected by it. Betina and Johanna, opposite Astrid, both experienced how the weight gain affected their understanding of their self-worth and how they took the experience as something they needed to act on. Through these excerpts we see how weight gain in certain situations in time are understood as normal and even expected and how this, for some, can act as a supportive

factor regarding body image and understanding of the self. For others, the fact that many other people gain weight when in the same situation, does not act as a supportive factor, at least not impactful enough to support a more positive sense of self-worth and still the weight gain becomes a problem that needs to be taken care of.

The final temporal aspect is the women's experience and understanding of their bodies as a process, which is found in all the women's accounts. Johanna describes how her coming to terms with her body was a process (l. 885-889) and she describes how her understanding of tools like BMI has changed with time. Now she believes that BMI and weight is used in the wrong way and that her view on it *now* is different from how she thought of it before (Danish: Men (...) at det er jo den forkerte måde at bruge de redskaber som BMI og vægt og sådan kan være, synes jeg i hvert fald *nu*.) (l. 838-840). After trying to lose weight for around four years, she has used her start-twenties to actively try and avoid situations that trigger a feeling of her body being wrong, such as certain YouTube videos or weighing herself (Danish: og som jeg nu sådan har brugt mine start-tyvere på at prøve at, ved for eksempel at, lidt ligesom jeg ikke opsøger sådan nogle YouTube-kanaler, altså jeg kan ikke veje mig.) (l. 779-782). The scale has a huge impact on her sense of self, making her "sad no matter what" (Danish: ked af det uanset hvad) (l. 783). It is a continuous decision and conscious act to not weigh herself, as the feelings regarding the number on the scale affects her mood and body image. Betina too actively tries to avoid certain pictures from people who can make her think "I wish I looked like that" (Danish: gid jeg så sådan ud) (l. 1270) and describes how she the last few years learned to "clean one's feed" (Danish: få ryddet op i sit feed) (l. 1239), a lesson her "friends probably learned through the gymnasium" years (Danish: veninder nok lærte i løbet af gymnasiet) (l. 1237-1238). The idea of conscious avoidance and the thoughts behind it, shows that body image is a process guided by conscious thinking and action. Both Betina and Johanna are consciously fighting their old ways of coping with the wish for an ideal body by judging "the cost" (Danish: prisen) (Appendix 9, l. 1251) or expense (Danish: på bekostning af) (Appendix 7, l. 594-595) of maintaining such a body. For both of them this cost is in particular social, as they would not be able to drink beer or eat cake with their friends if they were still prioritising the ideal appearance (Appendix 9, l. 1253-1254; Appendix 7, l. 589-590). Betina describes how she consciously have to repress the old mindset as the old thoughts "lurk" (Danish: lurker) (l. 1139). When reflecting on her old reactions to exercise and weight gain Betina describes how she, after gaining weight at the folk high school, hired a personal trainer to become "fit for fight" (l. 1004-1005) in order to become "skinny", "pretty" and "fitness model-like" (l. 1020-1021), a reaction she calls "a little bit extreme" (Danish: lille smule

ekstrem) (l. 1006). Describing her own reaction as “a little bit extreme” suggests that she knows that this is not the normal reaction to a weight gain and could indicate a change in her assessment of the situation, as well as a retrospective assessment of her old way of reacting. This is supported by her account of her focus on exercise now where she says:

“[...] the exercise I have done in the last couple of months has been revolving a lot around *that* [positive aspects of exercising] and around feeling *good* and like, *much* more than it has been about changing the way I look or in any way being connected with (...) shame and guilt and all of those things I think that (...) exercise maybe has been *before* [...]” (l. 239-245)

”[...] den træning jeg har lavet de sidste par måneder har handlet meget om *det* [de positive aspekter ved træning] og om at have det *godt* og altså, *meget* mere end det har handlet om at skulle ændre hvordan jeg ser ud eller på nogen måde være forbundet med (...) skam og skyld og alle de der ting som jeg synes at (...) træning måske *førhen* har været [...]” (l. 239-245)

She points to the temporal aspect of her thoughts and priorities of exercising, that there has been a shift through the last few months. She makes a distinction between the feelings of shame and guilt that were a major part of her reason to exercise before and how exercise now revolves around positive feelings instead. She describes this change coming about through learning (l. 1015). Astrid describes the change in her acceptance of her body as gradual (Danish: *gradvist*) (l. 281) and a big change has happened after starting her studies and becoming aware of how amazing her body is, just as everyone else’s (Danish: *At jeg sådan er blevet mere opmærksom på min krop som en (...) altså (...) noget der (...) jo egentligt er ret fantastisk, ligesom alle andre (...)’s kroppe også er.*) (l. 294-297). When explaining how she chose to shower after gym in the gymnasium, as one of three girls in her class, she said that it felt weird, but that one becomes used to it (Danish: *vænner sig til det*) (l. 309-311). The phrase “get used to” is also used when she is talking about accepting her body the way it is and she deems it normal and says that it very nice to feel that way (Danish: *det det har jeg ligesom bare [...] på en eller anden måde vænnet mig til, eller det ved jeg ikke, på en eller anden måde tænkt det er normalt [...] så det det er meget dejligt*) (l. 265-269). Getting used to something demands time and a continuous

experience and here we see the temporal aspect of the bodily acceptance too. Lili describes how she was more aware of how her body looked when she was in the gymnasium and that this awareness and focus on the appearance lessen as one becomes more mature and confident in oneself (Danish: at blive mere moden og hviler lidt mere i sig selv) (l. 276-287). She too, describes how her mindset about her body has changed with time, and said:

“But I also believe that through the years that I like, try to, has gotten a little less focus on that thing about the number, and a little more focus on the thing like how does it actually feel, like (...) in my body and how does my body feel in (...) in the clothes I wear [...]” (l. 544-549)

”Men jeg tror også at med årene at jeg sådan, prøver at, har fået lidt mindre fokus på det der med tallet, og lidt mere fokus på det der med hvordan føles det egentligt, altså (...) i min krop og hvordan føles min krop i (...) i det tøj jeg går i [...]” (l. 544-549)

Lili retrospectively assesses her previous focus on her weight and makes a distinction between that focus and her present focus on how her body feels. These excerpts again underline the understanding that the thoughts regarding the body changes with time and that it is a continuous process, where the focus shifts through the years. But the thoughts about the body can also change from one moment to the next, like when Betina describes suddenly feeling too big or wrong in her body (l. 122-127), or when Lili can feel good about her appearance one day but then flip the next day without a clear reason (Danish: men igen så kan den flippe dagen efter. *Uden rigtig god grund, synes jeg.*) (l. 596-597). The previous descriptions of how seeing pictures can change Betina and Johanna’s moods and thoughts, also shows how quickly thoughts and feelings regarding the body can change. The experience and understanding of as well as relationship with the body is in this way experienced as a process, that changes slowly over years but also fast, from situation to situation.

This final theme, temporality, showed how time plays a role in relation to the women’s choices in their lives and their understanding of themselves and their bodies. There is an understanding that it is normal for girls in their teenage years to feel wrong in their bodies and to use the following years to learn new ways to cope with their negative emotions in relation to their bodies. Furthermore, it seems like there are certain times and situations where it is more normal to gain weight, which for some, might lessen the negative assessments of their weight

gain. Their relationships with their bodies change with time and can be understood as a process. They learn and therefore change their priorities with time, retrospectively judge their previous thoughts on their bodies, but can also experience fast shifts in their body image, as well as thoughts and feelings about their bodies.

Discussion and outlook

The aim of this study was to investigate and gain a deeper understanding of how young Danish women experience inhabiting their bodies. Through the interpretative phenomenological analysis of four semi-structured individual interviews, three themes stood out as important aspects of the women's experience in their bodies. The themes which appeared in each of the women's accounts were living up to the norms and expectations, sensing the body and temporality.

Consistent with findings from previous research (Fisher et al., 2018; McDermott, 2000; Gattario & Frisé, 2018; Roessler & Muller, 2018; Riley et al., 2016), a way in which the women understood their own bodies were through the discourse of health. The women engaged in exercise on a weekly basis, which seemed to be a cultural norm to live up to in order to be healthy and appeared to be an important factor in their choices of daily activities. The discourse healthism is seen in the women's accounts through the major emphasis on a healthy lifestyle as well as the idea that health and bodily appearance is one and the same - that being healthy is seen through one's appearance. This understanding is affecting the women's choice in what exercise to engage in and their bodily goals, and like it was found in the study by Depper and Howe (2017), health is understood as a personal responsibility. This study identified the ideal body to be slim and strong, opposite being overweight or fat which is also consistent with findings from previous research (Dworkin, 2001; Lunde & Gattario, 2016; McDermott, 2000; Pelican et al., 2005; Rudd & Lennon, 2000; Mavin & Grandy, 2016; Clarke & Griffin, 2007), and the results further showed how some of the women engage in certain types exercise as a way to more determinedly go for the ideal body type. This indicates that it is possible to alter one's body type through engaging in certain activities, and the responsibility of the health and appearance of the body lies in the lifestyle and choices of the individual. This supports the suggestion that being overweight is seen as a moral weakness, a symbol of laziness (Håman et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2018; McDermott, 2000) or lack of self-control (Fisher et al., 2018; McDermott, 2000; Robinovich et al., 2018). Its impact on the women's choices of exercise

activities is seen in their focus on efficiency. The results indicate that bodily appearance is of great importance when choosing what activities to engage in for the participants in this study. The time it took to become physically exhausted, was found to be a factor, as they wanted their work outs to be as “efficient” as possible in order to attain a healthy, slim and strong body. Finding the importance of time too, is consistent with findings from other studies, where it is argued that women are limited in their possibilities to achieve the ideal body, by time, status and money (Riley et al., 2016; Dworking, 2001; Clarke & Griffin, 2007).

Other than the temporal and physical aspects of choices regarding what activities to engage in, it was very clear from the results of this study, that certain activities were understood as better to engage in than others. In much the same way as it is argued that exercising and healthy eating is depicted as a way to attain the “healthiest health” (Chrysanthou, 2002), it seems that running is an activity judged to be better than other activities and is presented as common sense. This is seen in all of the four participants accounts, and the understanding of running as the default or normative way of exercising can even overrule the personal experience of the individual. There seems to arise a conflict between the discourse about running as a healthy activity and the experience that running is not an activity they enjoy, or which suits them. One participant holds onto the understanding of running as a healthy activity even when her surgeon told her specifically, that it was unhealthy for her. This indicates how strong the discourses about health can be for the women’s understanding and to what extent it can affect their choices. Eating is another aspect of their experience which can result in conflicting thoughts and feelings, where the women seem to experience a contradicting set of norms and notions. Because of the idea that weight is a personal responsibility and that the body is changeable through diet and exercise, it is seen that there can be a conflict between attaining the ideal body and what is possible in their daily lives. This becomes a conflict between their personal priorities and the norms regarding the importance of a pretty, slim and strong body. Similar to the findings in Lunde and Gattario’s (2016) study, this study suggests that the women experience ambiguous norms regarding their bodies and that they have to continuously negotiate between attaining the ideal body but still make time and space for other objectives in life.

Although the women negotiated between prioritising their social life and attaining the ideal body in the gym, exercise was also found to serve a second purpose of socialising. Through engaging in a common physical activity with others, the women experienced community and unity. This is in agreement with findings from numerous previous studies, where positive social outcomes of exercise have been found (Fisher et al., 2018; Piran, 2016a;

Pelican et al, 2005). These studies found that supportive sports environments can allow women to gain competence in their bodies, which in turn can lead them to maintain a positive sense of bodily self as well as experience being a physical being beyond their appearance. Feeling competent in their bodies was a positive outcome of exercising for all the women interviewed here and the results resonated with the previous findings, that feeling competent created a sense of pride and can transcend into their overall idea of themselves and their worth. Especially when they engaged in activities where they felt a natural ease supported their sense of competence. Competence was also found to affect some of the women's assessment of their looks, as strength was seen to affect their understanding of their body, meaning that instead of just seeing it as big, they saw it as strong. This finding also supports the previous literature on the topic, where various research has argued that women continuously negotiate between understanding their bodies as body-as-object or body-as-process (Franzoi, 1995; Del Busso & Reavey, 2013; Mavin, & Grandy, 2016; Lunde & Gattario; Roessler & Muller, 2018). This study would point to an understanding of body-as-process as more positive for the woman's self-understanding. But like previous research the women seem to understand themselves more through the notion of body-as-object and through self-objectification (McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Fredrickson et al, 2011; Del Busso & Reavey, 2013; Piran, 2016b; Mavin & Grandy, 2016; Lunde & Gattario, 2016), which is also here found to make them engage in body surveillance as seen in the case of Johanna who sucks in her stomach in order to live up to the norms of having a flat stomach or when Betina tries to smile in a way that does not make her cheeks look big. It indicates that the women are having an objectifying gaze upon themselves and this increases their sense of body-shame and guilt and also points to their focus on body parts, which is found to have a negative impact on their self-understanding. Among most prominent body parts in the four women's accounts is especially their stomachs, but also thighs, buttocks, cheeks and in some cases arms, or breasts. These were mostly explored as part of their appearance, where the parts were judged in comparison to others' and the ideal. As Osborn (2002, as cited in MacLachlan, 2004) found, painful or dysfunctional body parts were placed in the forefront of people's awareness and it is interesting to ponder, whether this also includes "dysfunction" regarding looks. As seen in their accounts, pain and soreness from exercising did bring their attention to their bodies and the awareness could last for days. Pain erupted from sucking in her stomach also made one participant aware of her stomach, but so did the feeling of tight clothes for many of the participants. This raises the question whether feeling that the body looks wrong and it not meeting the standards of beauty could bring awareness to the body parts in the same manner as physical dysfunction?

In line with the previous statement it seems that it was through moving the body and engaging in physical activity, the women became aware of their bodies. Due to the phrasing of the first interview question, *how do you use your body in your everyday life?*, all of the participants answered the question from the standpoint of physical activity. This might be due to the fact that they all four did engage in exercise and physical activity multiple times a week. When not using the body, it can be forgotten and being reminded of it and sensing it is experienced as a good feeling. All of the women interviewed, experienced positive mental outcomes of exercise and of using the body for different kinds of physical activities. It was seen as a way to experience freedom and a way to give the head a break and distance themselves from their thoughts. These accounts gain more depth when compared to Roessler & Muller's (2018) findings that exercising can be a way to restore energy and de-stress and other studies that showed how it can help the women feel connected to their bodies (McDermott, 2000; Piran, 2016b) and become more attuned to its signals (Gattario & Frisé, 2018). It could suggest that the constant assessment of their own body is paused while engaging in physical activity, and that the body is sensed instead. This is in line with the argument above, that physical activity and the experience of competence can lead to multiple positive mental outcomes, opposite the objectified gaze on the body, body-as-object.

The results presented here show how the women's understanding and experience of their bodies have changed through time and that their relationship with their bodies is described as a process. Their thoughts on their bodies change through their experiences, by learning from others and gaining new knowledge as well as through retrospectively reassessing their old ways of thinking and judging their bodies. They describe learning how to assess their bodies from others, family and peers as well as media which supports previous findings (Roessler & Muller, 2018; Clarke and Griffin, 2007; McDermott, 2001; Pelican et al., 2005; Depper & Howe, 2017;). They all describe coming to terms with their looks and how they are now engaging less in appearance-management, including risky appearance-management, than before. Three of the participants are studying health science, which might have an impact on their bigger focus on functionality above appearance.

The change in how they understand themselves and their bodies is not a thing that happens automatically for all of the participants, but something which some of them describe as a conscious and continuous decision. The decision is seen in avoiding certain activities or people who trigger a feeling of shame, guilt or being wrong. Interestingly, the two women who describe using this avoidance strategy both put it in opposition to how they previously acted in relation to experiencing these negative emotions. They frame their possibilities as either

conforming to their negative thoughts and thereby prioritise attaining their ideal body or avoiding the thing that induces these feelings altogether. The changes in their thoughts regarding their bodies is seen in contrast to their earlier thoughts and feelings. The previous understanding is helping them define their present understanding of their bodies. Conforming with previous research, the women's accounts point towards changes happening with age (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997), starting in adolescence (Del Busso & Reavey, 2013; Piran, 2016a; Piran, 2016b). The women all describe an experience of looking wrong in their teenage years, which they further describe as a normal reaction for teenage girls. There seems to be an understanding of teenage girls as insecure in their bodies, which is normal and accepted even across generations. But this also means that one can be insecure at a wrong time, since the right time for young women to conform to society's ideals is in their teenage years.

Furthermore, there also seems to be more normal and thereby more acceptable times to gain weight. This has not been illuminated by previous research, but again points to the understanding of one's body through the notion of normal. It could be interesting to look into the differences in women's experience of gaining weight in a normative acceptable time or during other times. All of the investigated women were found to judge themselves in relation to others. What was interesting was that they seemed to compare themselves more to what they understood as normal, than compare themselves to the ideal. This was in relation to both appearance as well as competence. While some of the women also compared themselves to other women on social media, it seemed from the results, that the notion of normal was more important for their self-understanding than what did the appearance of super models or women in media images. This is in contrast to previous literature, that argues that women internalise the cultural body standards and therefore judge themselves based on rigid and unrealistic body ideals (McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Fredrickson et al., 2011; Del Busso & Reavey, 2013; Piran, 2016b; Mavin & Grandy, 2016; Lunde & Gattario, 2016). While this was found to be true to a certain extent, most of their stated comparisons were judged in regards of what they found to be normal. The comparison to what was experienced as normal further seemed to be an important stage in their process towards accepting their bodies, even though it in some cases led to negative judgement of the body or body-anxiety.

Fredrickson and Robert's (1997) found that women generally make less sense of their bodily cues than men do, which the results from this study might be able to illuminate from a different perspective. Here it was found that the women do sense how their bodies feel better when engaging in certain modes of movement, like skiing or lifting heavy weights or even at certain times a day. Another side of the coin is the fact that at least one participant chose

to purposefully ignore the bodily cues. Another participant did also connect sucking in her stomach with the pain she felt in her stomach and did try to relax her abdominal muscles when she became aware of the pain. This could point to an aspect of the women's experiences, where although body surveillance might impact their awareness and sensemaking of their bodily cues, it might not necessarily result in them not understanding the cues, but in them ignoring them. While it is still bad for their health to ignore cues of stress, pain, and anxiety, it can be argued to be better for them, than what previous research has suggested. Ignoring the cues indicates that they can make sense of the cues, so if they deprioritise appearance-management and attaining the ideal body, they do know what their bodily cues mean and do not need to learn how to make sense of their sensations.

Opposite Osborn's (2002) (in MacLachan, 2004) findings that body parts which functioned normally and were thereby silent, were not given much attention, the findings from this study indicates that the lack of pain or discomfort when it was expected, can actually bring attention to the body in a positive sense. This is due to the women's assessment of what the lack of pain or exhaustion tells about their own bodily competence, as seen in some of the women's experiences of feeling strong and capable in their bodies. They describe the positive emotions and feelings that followed, which can indicate that there are other ways in which the body can be sensed than just through disfunction, pain or rupture.

Another interesting new finding was how some of the participants responded to their own negative feelings, like guilt or self-doubt when being on social media sites. While a meta-analysis (Karsay et al., 2018) has shown that the effect on self-objectification is bigger in social networking sites than in more traditional media, what this study shows is that the social networking sites create the possibility to "clean ones feed", and thereby avoid pictures or people who can instil a sense of body-shame in the individual. By choosing to unfollow certain people or avoid videos that can trigger negative thoughts and feelings, the women can achieve a more positive mood, body satisfaction and body appreciation, without having to avoid the digital platform altogether. When taking into account that trends like Body positivity are gaining more momentum (Cohen, Irwin, Newton-John & Slater, 2019; Cohen, Fardouly, Newton-John & Slater, 2019), social media sites might create a space where the normal is defined by the otherwise under-represented body sizes, and not the rigid and unrealistic body ideals in traditional media. But as stated by the participants in this study, it might demand some learning and reflection, to get to the stage where young women can actively take a step away from the cultural norms and expectations regarding their bodies.

The results of this study further indicate that the women are aware of how time can act as a constraint in their pursuit of attaining the ideal body, which is seen in their wish for efficiency. In contrast to Gattario and Frisé's (2018) findings, this study found that the women deprioritise having the ideal body, as some of the women negotiated between their wish for the ideal body and wanting a free social life. With time, the cost of attaining their ideal body was no longer worth it and they therefore deprioritised this goal. This points to an interesting difference between the two Scandinavian countries, and although the reason for this difference is not clear from the results, it could point to appearance not being the most central criterion to live up to, in order to gain social acceptance for Danish women.

Due to the limitations in the amount of time available to conduct this study, the participants were not screened for any underlying mental or somatic conditions, which could have an impact on their experience. Although the sample was not screened for homogeneity it did turn out to be homogeneous sample in regard to sexuality, class, ethnicity and country of residence and birth. As mentioned above, three of the participants were students of health science which could have an effect on the results, especially in regard to how they understand and emphasise different aspects of their bodily experiences. The phrasing of the initial question on the interview guide could also have affected the general focus on physical activity, which was an underlying theme in each of the interviews.

The lock-down due to the Covid-19 pandemic also brought limitations in especially two regards. Firstly, as the libraries shut down, the available literature was limited to texts with online access from the university library. But more importantly, the pandemic affected the data collection as described in the method section. The final two interviews were conducted online, as video conference calls, using both audio and webcam. James and Busher (2011) points to the problem created by the fact that the participant and researcher are hidden from each other online, which can make it easier for the participant to play with their personal perspectives and views. Given that this research is grounded in an embodied understanding of the individual, the displacement of time and space in the online interview was also taken into account when conducting the interview (James & Busher, 2011). The virtual interviews were in synchronous mode, co-present in time but not in space, and created smaller issues regarding conversation overlap and interweave, which is argued to be able to present a chaotic narrative, difficult to interpret. It also meant that it was not possible for the author to see as many bodily cues and facial expressions and thereby read the participants non-verbal signs. The online interview removes the bodily presence which can signify mutuality, trust and commitment through a feeling of shared purpose (Seymour, 2001, as cited in James & Busher, 2011), which

can affect the data collected in the process. In order to make the online interview as similar to the face-to-face research as possible, the interview was conducted with both the interviewer's and participant's webcam on, in addition to the audio. What is also of importance is that the participants who were interviewed online, were visible to themselves in the corner of their screen throughout the entirety of their interview. This is especially interesting, but possibly problematic too, as their reflections on their bodies could be affected by their own appearance while talking about it. In the analysis, all four of the interviews were regarded equally trustworthy and valid, as the possible issues regarding the online interviews were accounted for, as much as possible in the interview situation.

Based on the results and limitations of the present study, future directions within this field of research could engage in studies with different samples. The women interviewed here, all grew up in smaller cities in the higher middle class, were heterosexual and engaged in exercise multiple times a week. It could therefore be interesting to research women who do not exercise regularly to understand how they experience their body and themselves, as the findings here suggest that the body is often in the forefront of their awareness when they are physically engaged. It could also shine light on the role of bodily competence when understanding one's body-as-process. It could furthermore be interesting to look into what sexuality means for one's understanding of appearance, as some of the participants described thoughts and feelings regarding their appearance when being in romantic or sexual relationships with the opposite sex. Even studies on men's bodily experiences could also expand the field and it would be interesting to see if the impact of physical movement is a gendered experience or a human condition. It is also important to note that a rather big difference was found in the way women assess their possibilities to deprioritise their appearance-management from a previous study conducted in Sweden and therefore studies in other countries might show other cultural differences. Due to the results that show how their experience in their body changed with time, different kinds of research could illuminate different aspects of this process. Either through life-history interviews, where the women can reflect more specifically on the gradual change in their understanding of their bodies or through longitudinal research, where their present experiences could shine light upon how this change happens in detail, unspoiled by retrospective reflections. What longitudinal studies could further add to the field, is highlighting the thought process behind the different experiences, choices and priorities at the time the thought processes are happening. Here it could especially be interesting to see what changes happen in experience, meaning making and understanding regarding their body around the time of adolescence.

The aim of the present study was to analyse the relations, processes and conditions of the participants' experiences in their specific contexts, and valid claims can therefore be made to similar contexts. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that fittingness is the degree of congruence between two contexts, and if these contexts are congruent enough, a working hypothesis could be applicable in the second context (in Demuth, 2017). This can lead to generalisations of results to a theoretical understanding in similar phenomena or context, although it is problematic to generalise in social science. This is due to the situatedness of human meaning making and action, and every experience being unique, since it unfolds in a continuous flow of everchanging processes in irreversible time. It is however argued that generalisability is possible in any single case, since humans are intentional beings and their action is guided (Valsiner & Brinkmann, 2016, as cited in Demuth, 2017). Socio-cultural practices guide meaning making and thinking, and generalisation is therefore possible through the principle of transferability to a similar socio-cultural context. Following this thought, the results of this study might support the deeper understanding of other young Danish women's experience in their bodies and therefore add scientific knowledge of the group in question, making the research have an impact and be of importance.

Based on the findings of this study it could be beneficial for interventions for young women to take a more ecological approach, that focuses on different aspects of the women's cultural and social context, to lower the risk and support protective factors to prevent body image problems (Piran & Mafriqi, 2012). Every level of the women's environment can be targeted through an ecological approach. From their microsystem, the immediate interpersonal environment, to the community-based organisations, such as schools, and up to the macro level, formal laws and regulations, as well as social structures and ideologies. This type of intervention could be relevant when looking at how to support a positive body image, bodily well-being or at least prevent eating disorders in young Danish women.

The aim of this study was to explore how young Danish women experience inhabiting their bodies. Previous research show that women experience certain societal norms and values they have to live up to, for both their appearance and actions, as well as living up to ideas about what the female body can and should do. Furthermore, women experience objectification by others and are socialised to engage in self-objectification. To understand this in a Danish context, semi-structured individual interviews with four young Danish women was conducted and analysed through an interpretative phenomenological analysis. The results suggest that the women understand themselves and their bodies through the cultural norms and expectations and their experiences are guided by the hegemonic discourse of healthism, where

health and appearance is understood as one and the same. This is found to lead to a focus on a healthy appearance, defined by a normal weight, being slim and looking strong. In many ways, the women understood their own bodily appearance and competence in relation to the notion of normal, by comparing themselves to the people around them as well as people online. Although certain activities are regarded as “more right” than others, physical movement is found to enhance their self-worth and they experience positive outcomes of exercise. This is seen especially when they hold an understanding of body-as-process and focus on their bodily competence in opposition to understanding their body-as-object. Too big a focus on exercising being the morally right thing to do can on the other hand result in a guilty conscience and have negative mental outcomes. Feeling more confident in their bodies made them experience physical movement and their appearance more positively.

The women furthermore notice their bodily sensations through physical movement. Soreness or pain are sensations that make the women become aware and become attentive of their bodies, but also a lack of soreness when it is expected, puts the body in the forefront of their attention. Interestingly, a lack of movement can also be sensed in the body and is often felt through uncomfortable sensations. They describe a distinction between the body and the brain or mind, while still connecting them, in regard to how physical movement plays a role for their mental states. Furthermore, physical activities with others are experienced to bring happiness and a feeling of community, and they can sense what ways are natural for their bodies to move, though they do not always act on their bodily cues. Lastly the results point to how the temporal aspect of their lives has affected their understanding of themselves. They seem to understand that it is normal to feel insecure in their bodies at certain times in their lives and that it is normal to gain weight at certain times. For some the notion of normal can impact the severity of the feelings regarding their experience, for others not. The teenage years are understood as the expected time where girls feel wrong in their bodies and the following young adulthood is experienced as the time to learn new ways to cope and grow from the insecurities. Their experience of and thoughts about their bodies is understood as a process, where they learn and alter their priorities with time. They retrospectively judge their relationship with, and experience in, their bodies and do not always seem to understand their own thoughts and feelings completely. As the women feel body-shame, engage in self-objectification due to a big focus on their appearance and other negative experiences, it is suggested that initiatives using an ecological approach can support women in getting a positive body image and feel better in their bodies.

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Appendix 1. Call for participants

Jeg skriver speciale om kvinders oplevelser i deres krop og søger kvinder, der kunne tænke sig at deltage i et interview.

Kunne du have lyst til at fortælle mig om dine oplevelser eller kender du en der vil?



Opslaget må gerne deles.

Kvinders oplevelser i deres krop

Jeg skriver speciale i psykologi om unge kvinders oplevelser i deres krop.

Kroppen er med os i alt hvad vi gør og igennem hele livet. Derfor er jeg interesseret i at høre unge kvinder mellem 20-25 år om deres kropslige hverdagsoplevelser og tanker om deres krop.

Er du en kvinde mellem 20-25 år og kunne du tænke dig at fortælle om dine kropslige oplevelser i et interview af ca. 1 times varighed i trygge rammer?

**Så kontakt mig (Pernille) på
parska15@student.aau.dk**

Du er også meget velkommen til at skrive, hvis du har spørgsmål.

Hvor: I Haslev (eller hos dig efter aftale)

Hvornår: Marts 2020

Dine oplysninger og det du fortæller mig bliver anonymiseret og behandles fortroligt. Oplysningerne vil kun blive brugt i forbindelse med specialet og bliver derefter destrueret.

Du har til hver en tid mulighed for at trække dig undervejs, hvis du skifter mening.

Appendix 2.

Interview guide: Unge kvinders oplevelser i deres krop

Test af optager

Specialets mål: Undersøge og belyse unge danske kvinders oplevelser, tanker og følelser om deres krop.

Interviewet her tager ca. én time

Al information bliver anonymiseret, opbevares og håndteres fortroligt.

Du kan til hver en tid stoppe eller tage en pause under interviewet. Det står dig frit for ikke at besvare spørgsmål, uden konsekvenser.

Målet med interviewet er at forstå dine oplevelser og dit perspektiv, i dybden og derfor er du eksperthen.

Der er ingen rigtige eller forkerte svar.

Har du nogle spørgsmål inden vi går i gang?

1. Hvordan bruger du din krop i din hverdag?
 - Kan du fortælle mig om en normal dag for dig?
 - Hvad betyder det for dig?

2. Kan du fortælle mig om en oplevelse hvor du var opmærksom på din krop?
 - Hvordan følte du dig i din krop?
 - Hvordan tænkte du på din krop?
 - Hvad var det ved denne situation der gjorde dig opmærksom på din krop?

3. Kan du fortælle mig om engang hvor du var opmærksom på hvordan du og din krop så ud?
 - Hvad ved denne situation gjorde dig opmærksom på dit udseende?
 - Hvordan føltes det?
 - Hvad gjorde du?
 - Hvor ofte?

4. Kan du fortælle mig om en oplevelse hvor du var opmærksom på hvad din krop kunne præstere fysisk?
 - Hvad ved denne situation gjorde dig opmærksom på hvad din krop kunne?
 - Hvordan føltes det?
 - Hvad gjorde du?

Det var de spørgsmål jeg havde, er der noget du synes vi mangler at komme ind på?

Hvis ikke der er mere så vil jeg gerne sige mange tak for din deltagelse. Hvis du har spørgsmål eller kommentarer eller noget som helst andet, så er du velkommen til at

kontakte mig. Alle mine informationer er på den samtykkeerklæring vi skrev under på i starten.

Appendix 3.

Samtykkeerklæring

Unge kvinders oplevelse af at være i deres krop (Young women's experience of inhabiting their body)

Formålet med dette speciale er at undersøge og belyse unge danske kvinders oplevelser, tanker og følelser om deres krop.

Din deltagelse i dette projekt og interview er frivilligt, og du har ret til frit at vælge ikke at svare på nogle eller alle spørgsmål uden nogen konsekvenser. Du kan ligeledes afslutte interviewet uden yderligere konsekvenser. I forbindelse med projektet kan du frit og på ethvert tidspunkt stille spørgsmål, som måtte falde dig ind vedrørende projektet og de metoder, som anvendes.

Jeg har forstået, at alle data, som Pernille Hammer úr Skúoy uddrager fra interview og observationer til brug i dette projekt, ikke under nogen omstændigheder vil indeholde navne eller andre identificerbare karakteristika. Jeg har forstået, at min anonymitet vil blive beskyttet, og at alle informationer jeg stiller til rådighed vil være fortrolige.

Jeg er indforstået med, at interviewet lydoptages, og at optagelsen slettes, når projektet er færdigt. Jeg har forstået, at optagelser og projekt vil blive opbevaret sikkert og forsvarligt. Interviewet vil ikke blive publiceret og vil udelukkende blive præsenteret for individer med tilknytning til Psykologisk afdeling på Aalborg Universitet.

Jeg giver hermed mit samtykke til, at jeg har læst og er indforstået med ovenstående.

| For- og efternavn | Dato | Underskrift |
|-------------------|------|-------------|
| | | |

Appendix 4.

Samtykkeerklæring

Unge kvinders oplevelse af at være i deres krop (Young women's experience of inhabiting their body)

Formålet med dette speciale er at undersøge og belyse unge danske kvinders oplevelser, tanker og følelser om deres krop.

Din deltagelse i dette projekt og interview er frivilligt, og du har ret til frit at vælge ikke at svare på nogle eller alle spørgsmål uden nogen konsekvenser. Du kan ligeledes afslutte interviewet uden yderligere konsekvenser. I forbindelse med projektet kan du frit og på ethvert tidspunkt stille spørgsmål, som måtte falde dig ind vedrørende projektet og de metoder, som anvendes.

Jeg har forstået, at alle data, som Pernille Hammer úr Skúoy uddrager fra interview og observationer til brug i dette projekt, ikke under nogen omstændigheder vil indeholde navne eller andre identificerbare karakteristika. Jeg har forstået, at min anonymitet vil blive beskyttet, og at alle informationer, jeg stiller til rådighed, vil være fortrolige.

Jeg er indforstået med, at interviewet lydoptages, og at optagelsen slettes, når projektet er færdigt. Jeg har forstået, at optagelser og projekt vil blive opbevaret sikkert og forsvarligt. Interviewet vil ikke blive publiceret og vil udelukkende blive præsenteret for individer med tilknytning til Psykologisk afdeling på Aalborg Universitet.

Grundet COVID-19 kan der være behov for, at interviewet udføres ved hjælp af et online videointerview.

Jeg giver hermed mit samtykke til, at jeg har læst og er indforstået med ovenstående.

| For- og efternavn | Dato | Underskrift |
|-------------------|------|-------------|
| | | |

Appendix 5.

Demografiske informationer

Disse informationer er kun til intern brug og vil ikke blive publiceret i specialet. Din besvarelse vil blive anonymiseret og identificerbare karakteristika bliver modificeret. Du er ikke forpligtet til at besvare alle spørgsmålene og kan lade spørgsmål forblive ubesvaret, uden nogen konsekvenser.

Navn _____

Alder _____

Køn _____

Seksualitet _____

Beskæftigelse _____

Forældres højest fuldførte uddannelse

Mor _____

Far _____

Appendix 6.

Post script

9/3-20

15.00-16.25

Johanna

My apartment

First impressions:

Balance

Training for herself but also to look good

Weight as an assessment point

Takes precautions to avoid caring too much about the body's appearance and weight

Health was a big issue

Experts advice

Seemed mentally impacted by talking about her body; sad, disgusted

Is only in/uses only her body when she is active

Judges health by looks

Expanded a lot on her descriptions and stories

11/9-20

16.15-17.30

Lili

My apartment

First impressions:

Fitness

Social aspect of exercising

Parents ideas

Other's mood and self-confidence affects

Healthy meaning slim and strong

Certain sports are better

Being and looking silly is to be avoided, but probably good for you

Thoughts and feelings about the body changes from day to day

27/3-20

13.10-14.25

Betina

Online Google Hangouts Meet

First impressions:

Had a lot of different reflections on use of the body

Impression

Inside matching the outside

Happiness when exercising

Body-mind as connected

Social interaction was very important

Video interview makes the talk less fluent

I kept the breaks shorter – avoiding lacking etc.

Comfortable in sharing – sitting outside on her balcony

29/3-20

14.30-15.40

Astrid

Online Google Hangouts Meet

First impressions:

Less talkative

Focus on functionality

Not interested in talking about looks

Medical understanding of the body present

Active as a way of interacting with others

Meditative or thought inducing trekking

Health is wellbeing

Very long pauses