

# *No Numbers*

## *Identity Beyond Measure*

### Teacher Resource

*No Numbers: Identity beyond measure* can be viewed as a whole, or in shorter segments. The film is divided into three 30-minute sections as well as shorter 2 to 10 minute chapters.



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## SECTION 1. Eating Disorders: A Response to Post-Capitalism

**26 minutes and 25 seconds**

This section looks at the relationship between media and disordered eating. While eating disorders are not “caused” by the media, particular media messaging about what is considered beautiful can have a detrimental effect on individuals’ sense of self worth. Capitalist narratives and media values strive to make people feel like they don’t quite measure up. In North American society there is the increasing normalcy of hating our bodies and growing support for “fixing” what we perceive to be wrong. We buy new clothes, invest in cosmetics, and sign up for gym memberships, purchasing our way closer to who we want to be and how we hope to feel. However, no matter what we spend and how much we do it never seems to be enough. In some individuals, trying to emulate perfection and attain social ideals of beauty can lead to the development of disordered eating. As narrative therapist, Dr. Stephen Madigan clarifies, “I think what people don’t understand sometimes is that people struggling with anorexia are in a constant dialogue with anorexia, meaning they are in a constant dialogue with the expectations of culture.”

### Chapter 1. You Haven’t Heard My Story: Perspectives on Disordered Eating and Health

**5 minutes 15 seconds**

Media not only creates images of ideal beauty, but they also create certain representations of eating disorders. The media often chooses to focus on the spectacle of illness. Thus when people think of anorexia what comes to mind are the “walking skeletons” of emaciated young women and records of startling low weights. Media also glamorizes disordered eating as this or that Hollywood star is rumored to be anorexic. Media coverage of bulimia often focuses on the enormous amounts of food consumed during binges or the life threatening risks of purging such as heart attack. While such media portrayals definitely draw attention to the subject, they do little to educate people on disordered eating and sadly such spectacle actually works to encourage anorexia and bulimia through “triggering” disordered eating behavior.

In the making of *No Numbers* we avoid spectacle as much as possible. The film steers clear of featuring extremely emaciated people, as well as talk of weight, calories and other numbers that motivate disordered eating. Rather, we feature people you wouldn’t suspect of being eating disordered, people that appear to be “normal.” It soon becomes apparent that disordered eating doesn’t look a certain way and a variety of people are affected, teenagers and adults, as well as both men and women.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

##### **1. What Health Offers**

The film quotes Marya Hornbacher from her book *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia*. She writes as someone who has recovered from anorexia that, “Sickness is

easy, but health is more interesting.” This is not to say that going through an eating disorder is easy by any means. Anyone who has experienced an eating disorder would be the first to say it was a living hell and probably one of the most difficult experiences they ever had. What Hornbacher is speaking to, however, is that when you are in the grips of an eating disorder it is extremely difficult to move toward recovery. What she is saying is that staying trapped within the addiction of eating disordered behavior feels easier and safer than attempting to recover. However, the life you regain through recovery is more interesting. This could be said of any addiction.

Have you experienced this sense of liberation in being able to rediscover aspects of yourself and your life that you may have lost to disordered eating or any other addiction? Addiction not only includes drugs and alcohol but now other activities such as smoking, playing video games, surfing the internet and even shopping.

**Recommended Resource:**

Hornbacher, Marya *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia* (2006) Harpercollins Publications ISBN - 10:0060858796 or ISBN - 13:9780060858797

## 2. Defining Health

Patricia O’Hagen says giving the gift of who you are... in health; that is what health is. While we often focus on health in terms of eating right, exercising regularly and getting enough sleep, there are also other important elements of health. While your doctor may not ask you about these at your regular check- up, taking time to play, laugh, build nourishing relationships, communicate openly and other ways of living fully are factors that help us to feel good in life and healthy?

How do you feel when you are feeling healthy?

What helps you feel healthy?

**Exercise:**

Write about a time that you felt really great about yourself. Examine what you were doing and what it was exactly that made you feel so fantastic. How did you feel in your body in those moments? How did you feel about the world around you?

## 3. Perceptions of Disordered Eating

Before watching this film, who did you think suffered from disordered eating? How did you come to develop that preconception? After watching the film, how has your view of those susceptible to disordered eating changed?

**Exercise:**

Before watching the film, make a list of what you think about eating disorders and then put it away. Watch the film and then make another list of what you think about eating disorders. Compare your notes and discuss how these lists are different and why.

## 4. Gender

Brown University's Health Education Webpage focuses on "Men and Eating Concerns". They list the following statistics.

1% to 5% of all men have seriously unhealthy eating behaviors that would qualify as eating disorders. That's several million in the entire US 10% to 15% of people with eating disorders are male.

Of men with eating disorders:

- 79% to 83% have binge eating disorder, described as impulsive gorging or continuous eating;
- 10% to 13% have bulimia, described as binge eating and then purging by use of self-induced vomiting, laxatives, prolonged fasting and excessive exercise;
- 4% to 6% have anorexia, described as self-starving and, even if extremely underweight, having a distorted image of their bodies as fat.

Link:

[http://www.brown.edu/Student\\_Services/Health\\_Services/Health\\_Education/nutrition/ec\\_men.htm](http://www.brown.edu/Student_Services/Health_Services/Health_Education/nutrition/ec_men.htm)

Is it surprising to you that males suffer from disordered eating?

Why do you think it is commonly believed that anorexia and bulimia only affect women?

If more men were recognized as suffering from disordered eating, do you think more would be done to fund eating disorder research and treatment?

## Chapter 2. The Media: Disordered Eating as a Solution to What?

### 5 minutes 31 seconds

At the beginning of the chapter Dr. Ron Manley suggests that eating disorders are a solution and the question is posed a solution to what. This section looks at how disordered eating can be an answer to what society is asking us to be. As Dr. Stephen Madigan explains, "I think that what we need to look at in terms of anorexia is how is it that this post capitalist society at this particular time is producing women who feel like they don't quite measure up, who are struggling towards impossible ideals of perfection, who are feeling that they are not in, who are feeling that the only way that they can be successful and perhaps have some mode of control over their lives is to become best at what the culture is asking them to become. So in some ways that people struggling with anorexia can be viewed as our perfect citizens. They are just doing everything the culture is asking of them but they are just doing it better."

Neither Dr. Ron Manly nor Dr. Stephen Madigan suggests that eating disorders are an answer. Rather much like Hornbaucher, they are reframing our perceptions. They are asking us to examine what problems people going through disordered eating may be reacting to. Too often when helping people with disordered eating the focus is on them

as the “anorexic” or “bulimic” and the behaviour they are exhibiting that needs to be changed. By reframing eating disorders as a reaction to some greater problem, the focus is shifted off the individual to a larger context. Instead of pathologizing the person struggling, we are asked to question problematic social and cultural pressures that could be causing these unhealthy responses or so called “solutions.” Familial and other social relations also figure prominently as unhealthy influences as we see how infiltrates the minds of friends and families. However, too often these perceive notions of beauty and what we are supposed to be are so closely tied to our culture and our own behaviour that we aren’t given the chance to step back and reevaluate them as problematic. This chapter motivates us to question the workings of cultural hegemony.

### **Discussion Questions:**

#### **1. Reframing Eating Disorders**

What are kind of pressures do you have in your life that come from family, peer and social expectations?

How do you respond to those pressures?

How do you feel when you meet these expectations and how do you cope when you are failing to measure up?

Are some coping mechanisms more positive than others?

### **Exercise:**

Examine different media sources, such as magazine images, billboards, television shows and blockbuster movies. What messages presented do you perceive as problems? How is losing weight, getting toned or even bulking up a “solution”? What other messages, besides those related to body image, are being presented by media? When you understand that a part of disordered eating may be an attempt to resolve problems presented in the media, what are some healthier methods of addressing these issues that don’t require one to change oneself? List more proactive solutions.

## **Chapter 3. Countering Media: Seeing Beyond**

### **2 minutes and 24 seconds**

Power is knowledge. Media loses much of its power when it is critically analyzed and deconstructed. Just because media messaging exists, you don’t have to take these messages to heart. As an educated consumer you start to understanding that the purpose behind such messaging is to make you feel inadequate so you buy more and more products. You also realize that you can voice your concerns about such messaging and demand advertisers to create advertising that is more representative of your values and lived reality. You can also choose to buy and not buy products based what you believe in and what kind of person you want to be.

### **Discussion Questions:**

## 1. Critical Analysis of Media Images

Emergency foster mother and actress, Shimsher Pannun, states, “I wish modeling was based on and acting was based on people in the real world. I wish that they didn’t take out stretch marks or pimples or whatever it is they have, that this is real life. You know because nobody is going to look like that billboard. And I think that for me it’s building that around the kids in my life, just talking to them about body image and not buying into it. And just showing them when they are looking at a magazine and showing them how that could have been photo shopped.”

What is beauty?

Do you feel beautiful? Why or why not?

What do you admire and find beautiful in others?

How does that compare to the images of beauty portrayed in media?

### **Exercise:**

Watch Dove’s short video “Evolution” and see what goes into the making of a billboard poster.

Link:

[http://www.dove.ca/en/#/features/videos/video\\_gallery.aspx\[cp-documentid=9125381\]/](http://www.dove.ca/en/#/features/videos/video_gallery.aspx[cp-documentid=9125381]/)

## 2. Taking Action

Patricia O’Hagen tells the story of a grade 10 class from Washington that wrote to Oprah Winfrey and caused The Gap to change its advertising to include not only multi-ethnic, but multi-sized models. Consumers are becoming more vocal about what they want to see from companies and are joining forces to create change. Do you make choices as a consumer based on your values? Why or why not? What are some simple actions you can take to make more informed purchases?

### **Exercise:**

A) Look through magazines and gather several advertisements. Look at the use of visuals, color, text and other means advertisers use to create certain messages. Make a list of these messages. Do you note a common theme? How do these ads make you feel about yourself? Do you think these advertisements accurately reflect you and your friends and family? Write a letter to a company that you would like to see changes in their advertising practices. Not only outline what you find disappointing about their branding and/or advertising, but explain what you would like to see in its place and why that is important to you.

B) Carrotmob is an organization that organizes consumers so they are able to partner with companies to make positive changes. View the short video “Carrotmob Makes it Rain” at the link: <http://www.vimeo.com/925729>  
Brainstorm how you can help organize an event like this in your own community. How can you involve as many people as possible?

### 3. A Moral Dimension

Patrica O'Hagen raises the issue that deconstructing media is "... not just critical analysis of is that real or not, or is that airbrushed or not? It's also got a moral dimension to it. Is that who you want to be at the end of your life? At the end of your life... think of your grandmother, think of you mother, what is the message you want to leave this world that you were on the planet to do? Wear certain clothes? Look a certain way? ... Or be a person? Be who you are."

Who do you want to be at the end of your life? Who are your role models?

What version of beauty do they promote?

#### **Exercise:**

A) Write a letter to your role model telling them why they inspire you and how you want to follow in their footsteps.

B) Write down a list of all that you hope to have experienced and achieved at the end of your life. Think about the impact you hope to make on the world not only in terms of your career, but your friends and family as well. What actions are you taking now toward creating that reality?

#### **Recommended Resources:**

Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty

Short Proactive Videos "Amy" and "OnSlaught"

Link:

[http://www.dove.ca/en/-/features/videos/video\\_gallery.aspx\[cp-documentid=9125381\]/](http://www.dove.ca/en/-/features/videos/video_gallery.aspx[cp-documentid=9125381]/)

Lenny Flank, *Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony: Marxism, Capitalism, and Their Relation to Sexism, Racism, Nationalism, and Authoritarianism* (2007), St Petersburg, Florida: Red and Black Publishers.  
ISBN 978-1-9791813-7-5.

## Chapter 4. Sonja's Story

### 9 minutes and 28 seconds

Sonja developed disordered eating when she was in her early teens. She was extremely influenced by the media and the images she saw and the messages she heard were significant catalysts in her development of anorexia.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How much of your life is defined by media? Where do you develop your own stories? What else influences how you see yourself? What has the strongest influence on you?

2. What are the part of ourselves that the media tells us aren't good enough? Are these messages true? Why or why not?

3. In this short film, there is a flood of media images and much repetition in terms of sound, word and visuals. What does this reflect and/or symbolize in terms of Sonja's attempt to recover from disordered eating?

**Exercise:**

Write a poem about a personal struggle that you overcame. Collect visual images or create your own to help tell your story. Create a collage to accompany your poem.

## SECTION 2: Rethinking Treatment and Recovery

**34 minutes 22 seconds**

Treatment for and recovery from eating disorders is far from successful. In North America 1 in 6 women suffer from an eating disorder. 50% of them will never recover, even with clinical treatment. Many continue to endure chronic symptoms, while others die from complications. Eating disorders are the cause of more deaths than any other mental illness. Given these low success rates and high recidivism, frustrated health professionals are quick to deem patients with disordered eating as “not treatable”, while treatment strategies and social norms go unquestioned. In this segment the film examines several elements of treatment that limit successful healing. The film attempts to look to alternative methods of approaching recovery or rather “rediscovery”.

### Chapter 5. Identifying Disordered Eating: Boundaries of Health and Illness

**6 minutes 24 seconds**

A large part of creating change is looking at problems from a new perspective. As Albert Einstein said, “You can’t fix a problem with the same mind that created it.” While we usually turn to experts as authorities on disordered eating, we wanted to highlight the expertise and insight of those who survived anorexia and bulimia and have a good understanding what worked and didn’t work for them in treatment. We also wanted to include the voices of professionals that are challenging the status quo and creating new approaches to recovery treatment.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

##### **1. The Anorexic Voice**

The film includes a journal entry that reads, “Who am I? I can’t hear myself anymore. All I hear is her. That entity - she becomes me.” Dr. Ron Manley explains how people come to see themselves as the anorexia and how that is “a measure of just how much the anorexia has really taken over their life and is in charge of their life at that time.” When people develop an eating disorder a very clear voice and way of thinking begins to dominate. Though people develop disordered eating for several reasons and healing is extremely individualistic, the voice of disordered eating is not. Thus, the so-called “Anorexic Voice” is very distinct and uniform, and presents almost as an entity unto itself. In fact, some therapy involves asking people struggling to name the disorder so it is recognized as something separate from themselves and thus it is easier to fight and leave behind.

How familiar are you with this anorexic voice? What do you learn about the voice of eating disorders from the journal entries? What does including journal entries and personal drawings in the film achieve?

## 2. Labels

The use of labels in medicine can be positive in that they help physicians communicate. Labels can also validate a person's experience so that they can move beyond it. However, there are also inherent dangers in labeling. Dr. Rahul Gupta notes labels mark moments in time, but what is being considered is actually process not fixed. The danger then is that people identify with that momentary label they are given, for instance "I am depression" or "I am anorexic". Dr. Rahul Gupta raises the question, "What does that do to one's psyche, and one's actual feeling that they can make change, that they can have another experience?" For example, in interviews not included in the film, Dena distinctly remembers not wanting anyone to see her eat because if they witnessed her eating then she would no longer be anorexic. As she notes in the film, if she let go of being anorexic, then who was she anymore? Patricia O'Hagen emphasizes that in this regard labels run the risk of limiting people to illness.

Discuss the pros and cons of labeling. Extend your discussion beyond the use of labels in medicine. For example discuss how plants and animals are classified or how certain minority groups, such as Canada's First Nations, are now claiming autonomy through renaming themselves.

## 3. Diagnostic Criteria

Patricia O'Hagen also notes how with diagnostic criteria it as if there is some magic line between sickness and health. In this case, not meeting the diagnostic criteria for eating disorders, or rather not being recognized as being ill, proposes other problems. One significant problem with the diagnostic criteria for anorexia and bulimia nervosa is that the symptoms outlined are only evident once the disorder has progressed to an extreme state. For example, someone may go into a doctor's office, be underweight, express concern about restricting their food and are over exercising because of a fear of becoming fat, but they will not be diagnosed with anorexia unless they have stopped menstruating for at least three consecutive months. Likewise, someone else may go see their doctor concerned that they are bingeing uncontrollably, and vomiting to control their weight. However, unless they vomit or purge at least 2 times a week over a period of 3 months they will be diagnosed with bulimia. Sadly, there are countless stories of people who are denied validation of their problem and go on to do deeper into disordered eating until months down the road they qualify for help. In fact for many people struggling with eating disorders, finally meeting the diagnostic criteria can become a motivating goal. For instance, a journal entry in the film states, "I don't look sick. But I'll show them."

The response to the diagnostic criteria's failure to address people different stages in the development of eating disorders was met with the introduction of a new category – Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified.

### DSM-IV CRITERIA

The EDNOS category includes disorders that do not meet the criteria for a specific eating disorder. Some examples are as follows:

1. All of the criteria for Anorexia Nervosa are met except the individual has regular menses.

2. All of the criteria for Anorexia Nervosa are met except that, despite substantial weight loss, the individual's current weight is in the normal range.
3. All of the criteria for Bulimia Nervosa are met except binges occur at a frequency of less than twice a week or for less than 3 months.
4. An individual of normal body weight who regularly engages in inappropriate compensatory behavior after eating small amounts of food (eg. self-induced vomiting after the consumption of two cookies).
5. An individual who repeatedly chews and spits out, but does not swallow, large amounts of food.
6. Binge eating disorder; recurrent episodes of binge eating in the absence of the regular use of inappropriate compensatory behaviors characteristic of bulimia nervosa.

While these definitions help recognized more people as struggling with disordered eating, the danger of these otherwise unspecified definitions is that sufferers may feel that their disorder isn't serious enough to warrant proper recognition and that their struggle isn't worth validating. However, as the popular eating awareness site Something Fishy notes, definitions of EDNOS strictly serve to assist doctors in clinical diagnosis; "it is in no way representative of what a sufferer **feels** or **experiences** in living with an Eating Disorder. It is important to note that this is a **Clinical** definition, and is in no way meant to say that any sufferer does not struggle, and that the condition is not serious. It is not meant to say you do not have Anorexia or Bulimia (or a combination of both sometimes known as Bulimirexia). This is a clinical category of disordered eating meant for those who suffer but do not meet all the diagnostic criteria for another specific disorder."

What is it about the name Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified that has made it necessary for Something Fishy to include this comment on their website.

Discuss the idea that illness restricts, while health expands.

**Exercise:**

Work in partners. Give your partner a label that sums up who they are; simply judge a book by its cover. For example, you could label them as an athlete, an intellect, a leader or any other title that captures what you view as their attributes. Your partner in turn must then respond by saying, "Yes I'm an athlete because I love sports and play on the basket ball team, but I'm also a ... because I ... and I'm also a ... because I ..."

What was it like being labeled? What more did you learn about your partner through this exercise?

**Suggested Resource:**

Something Fishy - <http://www.something-fishy.org>

## Chapter 6. No Numbers It's Not about Food or Body

**4 minutes 51 seconds**

Unfortunately a lot of treatment for disordered eating invests incredible significance into numbering in terms of measures of food and calories consumed, weight gained or lost,

duration of exercise, the time taken to meet numerically determined goals. The film argues that breaking out of this numbers game is essential in order to liberate oneself from anorexia and bulimia where measuring and counting everything to do with food and the body dominates and drives the disorder. As Patrica O'Hagen explains, "We need to have conversations about it [food]. They need to understand that you need to have food to survive, but it really has to come down to what's going on inside and that needs to be a good part of recovery or we're going nowhere. All we'll do is be on the wheel of and going out and getting their weight gained, going out, getting sick again and coming back and it'll just be a never ending revolving door. And we see it. We see kids coming back in the hospital 8, 9 times... because they are not dealing with the issue." This chapter emphasizes the importance of looking at the root issues of disordered eating and not the symptoms.

## Discussion Questions:

### 1. Numbering

Besides numbering around food and body, what other areas of life do we invest incredible great importance into numbers? Why is it rude to ask someone how much money they make or how old they are? What are more valuable measures of worth? Think of someone you love and how you measure their value? Is it based on their weight, age, how much money they make or personal qualities such as kindness, humor, wisdom or other admirable characteristics?

### 2. Addiction

In recent years, eating disorders have come to be viewed by many as a form of addiction. Research also supports a high level of co-morbidity between disordered eating and alcohol and drug addiction. In fact, Clark Whitelaw, the male interviewed, only discovered that he had an eating disorder when he went in for drug and alcohol addiction treatment. Thus, when it is understood that the compulsive need to weigh, measure and count everything from the number of grams in an apple, to the numbers of steps taken a day, to the number of calories of a postage stamp is part of addiction, then it doesn't make sense to keep such an addict focused such measures with the daily weighing, counting of calories, food journaling and other behaviour that only works to entrench that addiction. The film argues that you need to escape the numbers game to truly start to rediscover a life beyond disordered eating.

How can treatment help someone to break free of this numbering game?

#### Exercise:

Read the following link:

<http://www.psychiatrictimes.com/display/article/10168/54311>

How does viewing disordered eating as addiction change your perspective on anorexia and bulimia?

## Chapter 7 “Rediscovery”: What Health Means to Me

### 5 minutes

Besides reframing our perspectives on what defines and constitutes disordered eating and its causes, it is equally essential to imagine what life beyond disordered eating looks like to the person experiencing it. It is important for people to discover individual benchmarks for success outside of medically defined recovery that is all too often determined by reaching a certain weight.

### 1. Rediscovery

Both Dr. Ron Manley and Dr. Stephen Madigan discuss Dr. Robert Palmer’s “re-discovery” as opposed to traditional views on recovery. While recovery suggests getting back to where you were rediscovery suggests moving beyond to some place new.

Play the film’s last chapter “Looking Back: The Strength Gained” and discuss rediscovery in terms of how the stories told about people’s experience with disordered eating.

### 2. Stories of Possibility

Although we feature stories of rediscovery in the film, by no means are we claiming that we no longer struggle with disordered eating. However the extent of that struggle is far less than what it used to be. We wanted to show this progress because this film’s focus is on health, not illness. While it is important to understand the depth of despair endured during disordered eating, it is equally important to know that life beyond Anorexia and Bulimia is possible and worth fighting for.

What is the importance of having hope or faith in something more? Think of significant historical figures that were such visionaries and explain the impact their beliefs had on the world.

### 3. The Process of Rediscovery

Alana Ruben, recovering anorexic and playwright explains how recovery is not one straight journey up, but a series of up and downs that can go on for 10 years or more. She recognizes how it takes a lot of commitment to be in an on-going process for several years and how is it that commitment to the process that is really important, not if you fall down.

Explain what Alana means by this. What kind of qualities does it take to commit to overcoming disordered eating for several years?

## Chapter 8 Joanne's Story

### 10 minutes and 7 minutes

Joanne was born in Beijing and came to North America when she was 20. She started dieting and losing weight while she was in Beijing. However, it was in the States that her conflict with her body and food developed into severe eating disorders. A few key incidences contributed to this development: the breakup of her parents, the loneliness and painful adjustment period when she first arrived in a new country, the diet, weight loss driven culture of America (especially that of South Carolina), and the isolation of people's relations in America. While having these eating disorders greatly damaged her life and body, anorexia and bulimia also gave her a kind of identity, a feeling of belonging to something that she could hold onto. This identity filled her empty soul. Her recovery started from when she finally lived with her sister. After 8 years of struggling on her own, she finally regained the feeling of having a family. Once again a few key events led to Joanne's recovery. First, Joanne and her sister worked together to make a feature based on Joanne's story. Second, she started to learn Buddhist meditation. Making the film and Buddhist ideology helped her to see life and the world from a new perspective. She gradually developed a new sense of belonging, to something better and happier in life than what disordered eating offered.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever questioned what is happening to the women of other cultures and in other countries in the age of globalization?
2. Joanne's story is a typical reflection of a hidden reality of immigration: the development of mental illness caused by dislocation and cultural conflict. Why do you think dislocation would trigger mental illness? What does it mean to "belong"? Why do human beings need to feel a sense of "belonging"?
3. In the film, Joanne notes how that here in the North America, people do not seem to be judgmental of others, but on the other hand, she feels that people also seem no not really care about others; "Everyone should only mind their own business." What does this mean? Have you ever questioned how western "individualism" has contributed to the spread of eating disorders? Is media the root cause or something beyond it, something more fundamental?

## Chapter 9 Healing: The Power of Story

### 2 minutes 28 seconds

Personal stories of rediscovery are central in the film because of the power and importance of giving voice to what has been silenced. It is also important to position ourselves as experts of our own experience, to validate the insight and knowledge we glean from life. It is important that we tell our stories in a way that is meaningful to us and to reclaim our identities from dominant media and medical narratives.

### 1. Breaking the Silence

For years, the expense of technology kept media in the hands of a selected few. Having control of such media gave those few a great deal of power. However, in recent years with technology such as cameras, computers, and the creation of the internet, people from all walks of life are capable of utilizing the power of media. How can media be empowering? What do you make of the implosion of internet forums such as Youtube, My Space, Facebook and more recently Twitter? Given their mass popularity, what social need are these new media spaces fulfilling? How do you make use of these media spaces for self-representation?

**Exercise:**

Jessie's Hope is an eating disorder awareness group located in Vancouver BC. Jessie's Hope holds Youtube Video contests each year encouraging youth to create videos based on different themes. Last year the theme was "What Makes You Strong?" and this year is was "What Makes you Beautiful?"

Check out the winning video "Reflections of Beauty" and other entries at <http://www.jessieshope.org/98.html>

Pick your favourite video and explain why it's a winner in your eyes. Work on an idea of your own to enter into next year's contest.

## 2. Making Ourselves Whole

Susan Wittig Albert writes, "As we become aware of ourselves as storytellers, we realize that what we imagine about ourselves is a story. And when we know all this, we can use our stories to heal and make ourselves whole."

Discuss the significance of this quote in relation to the film. Write a story, compose a song, paint a painting, create a video or even put together a mixed media project to help tell a story you need to tell in your words and told in a manner that holds meaning for you.

## 3. Narrative Therapy

After conceptualizing this documentary as a film focusing on the power of reclaiming narratives from media and medical institutions through personal storytelling, we learned that there is an entire approach to therapy based on this philosophy called narrative therapy. It was then that we discovered and interviewed Dr. Stephen Madigan who is included in much of the film. How does narrative therapy work? As authors Jill Freedman and Gene Combs describe:

"Narrative therapists are interested in working with people to bring forth and thicken stories that do not support or sustain problems. As people begin to inhabit and live out the alternative stories, the results are beyond solving problems. Within the new stories, people live out new self images, new possibilities for relationships and new future" (1996, p.16).

How is this exemplified in the film?

**Suggested Resources:**

Dr. Stephen Madigan's webpage:

[http://www.planet-therapy.com/pub/ed\\_bios/madigan.html](http://www.planet-therapy.com/pub/ed_bios/madigan.html)

Madigan, S. & Law, I. *Praxis: Situating Discourse, Feminism & Politics in Narrative Therapies* (1998)

Freedman, J. & Combs, G. 'Shifting paradigms: From systems to stories.' In Freedman, J. & Combs, G., *Narrative Therapy: The social construction of preferred realities*, chapter 1. (1996) New York: Norton.

Epston, D. & White, M. 'Story, knowledge, power.' In Epston, D. & White, M., *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*, chapter 1. (1990) New York: Norton.

## Chapter 10

### Creative Resolutions: From Self-destruction to Self-creation

#### 5 minutes 33 seconds

While you cannot always control the world around you, you have complete power over how you react to it. In life there are always positive and negative ways of coping. It is important to remember that we always can have a choice in how we react and this is where we can always exercise human agency.

#### 1. Gaining Perspective

In the film, I talk about how being creative allows the space to step back and look at your experience in a new way that's not so internalized anymore. You can get your emotions outside of yourself, and stop trying to use your body as a canvas to express all the pain and other turmoil you feel. For with an eating disorder you tend to self-destruct and you self-destruct on your body. But when you are working with creativity you can get some of that out and away from you and it's really self-creating in that way. And I also think it offers the chance to see other possibilities because you finally have space. Discuss this philosophy.

What is the relationship between creativity and transformation?

#### 2. Being Creative

When we interviewed various people in the film about creativity it soon became apparent that creativity didn't always mean creating art. Katherine Fuller talks about how raising children was incredibly creative, and her daughter Janya state how she sees her life itself as a form of creation. In other interviews, one woman described how she felt creative when solving a complex problem and another found creativity in gardening. If we open our eyes, creativity is surrounds us.

What can you think of in your own life that you see as creative, but an artist might not? What does being creative add to your life? What would it be like to live a life void of creativity?

### **3. Expressing Oneself**

Dr. Rahul Gupta states, “There is something about expressing ourselves that in a sense is a form of declaration, and we are announcing in a sense what direction we want to go.”

Discuss this quote. Can you think of examples that illustrate how self-expression is a form of declaring the direction we want to take in life?

## SECTION 3: Making Connections

### Chapter 11 Dena's Story

#### 5 minutes and 53 seconds

My struggle with anorexia began when I was 12 years old. I became critically ill and finally gained the courage to work towards recovery when a girl on the eating disorder ward died. It was at that point that my fear of dying became stronger than my fear of food. However, even though I had gained the necessary weight and was declared recovered by my doctors, I never fully got over a deep-seated desire to lose more weight.

I believe it was no accident that I started modeling at 16 and worked in the Asian market until my early twenties. Once again I was in the depths of anorexia but unable to recognize my behavior as problematic as my actions were justified by the modeling industry. However, when I developed bulimia I was forced to look at my health and quit modeling.

In and out of treatment for several years my struggle with bulimia subsided but I continued to struggle with anorexia. It wasn't until 4 years ago when I began practicing yoga and meditation regularly that I experienced a significant shift in health and increased sense of well being. It is these last few years of rediscovery that inspired my short film.

#### Discussion Questions:

##### 1. Beyond Words

Having gone through years of therapy and discussing the same issues over and over until I was blue in the face, I eventually came to understand that while talking has its place, and an important one at that, there are some things that escape logic and cannot be expressed in words alone.

I first discovered this in art therapy where through painting I gained more insight than 15 years of talking. This journey continued as I discovered yoga and then meditation. Quite simply when I practiced yoga and mediated, I felt good. The more I did, the better I felt. Then to my surprise the anorexic thinking started to slowly fall away. As it was in the silence that lay beyond words that this healing occurred, so that is why my story of recovery I chose not to speak using words.

Though there are no words, the film is far from silent. Listen carefully to the use of sound. Why do you think the sound of breath is so central in this piece? Make a list of all the other sounds you hear. How would you categorize these sounds? What significance do these sounds have in relation to the overall meaning of this short film?

##### 2. Connection

As the next section of the film discusses, connection is essential in health. To be whole, you need to find connection in body, mind and soul. However, healing isn't just about connecting with yourself but with the world around you. This is proving more difficult as contemporary life obscures our connection to the natural world. However, all it takes is observing nature around you to see how we are married to the natural rhythms. Flowers open and close, while tides rise and fall with the coming of night and day. The seasons determine life cycles as the geese fly south in the fall, bears hibernate in the winter, and animals of all shapes and sizes mate in the spring and raise their young in the summer. It is only in more recent centuries that we have come to view ourselves as somehow exempt from the natural world. From this thinking also gave rise to the idea that our minds are also superior to the urges of the body. It is only this perceived superior intelligence that serves to separate us from the natural patterns in life.

How do you think this disconnect from the body and the world around us, affect our lives?

Throughout much of the short film, images of nature are overlapped with the body. What is the significance of this?

**Exercise:**

Research the First Nation peoples' Medicine Wheel and discuss how these philosophies and teachings relate to this short film. Look at your own life in terms of the medicine wheel. What can you learn from this new perspective?

## Chapter 12 Losing Your Mind: Returning to the Body

**4 minutes and 12 seconds**

As I state at the beginning of this chapter, "There is a lot of manipulation and control when you sit up in your mind that allows you to do very self destructive things to your body." It is my belief that disordered eating comes into existence and is supported from a place of body-mind separation. It is also my belief that through body-mind oneness, the compulsion of eating disorder tendencies can be quelled. Through practices that cultivate mindfulness such as yoga and meditation a profound level of healing can occur.

**Discussion Questions:**

**1. Mindfulness**

In 2008 I attended a 10-day Vipassana meditation retreat that greatly impacted how I experience my body and initiated a greater sense of well being in my life. I found it uncanny that what I tried to express in my short film really was encapsulated in my meditation experience. The following characteristic of mindfulness that I learned has been extremely helpful in coping with my addictive tendencies; "Mindfulness is an impartial watchfulness. It does not take sides. It does not get hung up in what is perceived. It just perceives. Mindfulness does not get infatuated with the good mental states. It does not try to sidestep the bad mental states. There is no clinging to the pleasant, no fleeing from the unpleasant. Mindfulness sees all experiences as equal, all thoughts as equal, all feelings as equal. Nothing is suppressed. Nothing is repressed. Mindfulness does not play favorites"

([www.urbandharma.org](http://www.urbandharma.org))

Discuss how coming to experience this characteristic of mindfulness would be helpful overcoming addiction?

**Exercise:**

Read the following link on mindfulness, in particular “The Characteristics of Mindfulness” <http://www.urbandharma.org/udharma4/mpe13.html>

What other characteristics of mindfulness would you think would be especially helpful for individuals struggling through an eating disorder or other addiction? Can you see how the value of mindfulness could relate to issues you struggle with in life?

## 2. Satisfaction in the Body

Body-mind psychotherapist Susan Aposhyan explains how, “Satisfaction only happens in the body and the mental stimulation that we are pursuing now in lieu of satisfaction isn’t satisfying. So we have to come into our bodies to feel satisfied. And we get lost in pursuing more and more stimulation because we are not satisfied. Spending more and more time on the internet, and staying up later, and getting more education, and pushing, pushing, pushing, looking but not finding.”

Can you relate to this constant drive to do and achieve more? What factors have led us away from turning towards ourselves, our bodies and living in the present moment? What activities bring you back to yourself? How do those moments feel?

**Recommended Resources:**

Aposhyan, Susan, Body Mind Psychotherapy (2004) Norton. ISBN - 10:0393704416  
ISBN - 13:9780393704419

Aposhyan, Susan, Natural Intelligence: Body-mind Integrations and Human Development (1999) Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, ISBN10: 0683305999/ ISBN13: 9780683305999

Cunningham, Annalisa, Healing Addiction with Yoga ( 2003) Findhorn Press, ISBN - 10:1844090205 / ISBN - 13:9781844090204

## Chapter 13 It Takes a Village: Creating Community

### 3 minutes 28 seconds

Experiencing health not only involves moving inward toward oneself, but also involves connecting outside oneself with other people, the community and the world at large. This chapter examines the importance of connection and the responsibility of community.

**Discussion Questions:**

### 1. A Lack of Connection

Dr. Stephen Madigan states, “The major reason why people have come to see me in therapy for all these years is because of a lack of connection. If I could center it down into one issue that would be it. And I don’t care if we are dealing with anxiety or depression or people struggling with anorexia or obesity or couple conflict or whatever it might be. And so, if it’s because of a lack of connection, one way to get through a problem would be to reconnect with people.”

Do you agree with this statement? What are some ways of reconnecting with people?

## 2. Community Responsibility

Both Patricia O’Hagen and Dr. Stephen Madigan discuss the importance of communities taking responsibility for illness and being an active part of the healing process. How would a community effort in helping someone in need more effective than dividing that person off to the institutions? How does the saying, “It takes a village to raise a child” apply to this idea of community responsibility?

# Chapter 14

## The State of the World: Global “Dis-ease”

### 3 minutes 33 seconds

In keeping with the theme of connection, healing extends not only from the individual to the community, but continues into the environment. One theory behind the cause of eating disorders is that people restrict their eating because they don’t want to take in a toxic environment. While such toxicity usually refers to familial or social relations, we believe it also literally applies to the environment.

Discussion Questions:

### 1. Refusing Toxicity

One interviewee, not included in the final cut, pointed out that given the polluted environment, in addition to factory farmed, pesticide ridden and genetically modified food, is it really any wonder that she didn’t want to eat? While we don’t want to promote this as justification for disordered eating, she does make an interesting point.

What positive actions can be taken to create a healthier environment and a healthier relationship to it?

Discuss the relationship between disease in terms of physical illness, and dis-ease in terms of emotional uneasiness.

2. Dr. Rahul Gupta explains, “In some ways when I think about the human body it’s a collection of fifty trillion cells. And I like to think of it almost like the earth and its population. The earth has got a population of six billion people. And yet there is dysfunction in both. There is dysfunction within our bodies and there is dysfunction happening around the earth and they are parallels. And really the way to overcome, the way to rise above the dysfunction is to create harmony within the communities and it makes sense for us to create harmony within the community of cells that we have within us just as it makes sense to create harmony with the relationships on earth.”

What do you think of this analogy that relates the cells of our body to the people populating the earth?

## Chapter 15

### Globalization: Exporting Eating Disorders

**1 minute 45 seconds**

Often when we think of globalization we think of the global markets and economics. However, given the expanse of western capitalism and the psychology that drives consumerism, globalization and culture are intricately connected.

#### Discussion Questions:

##### 1. Fiji

One of the best examples of how eating disorders are being exported globally is evident in Dr. Anne Becker's ground-breaking study on the effect of western media on Fijian culture.

Read the article, "Fijian girls succumb to Western dysmorphia" and discuss the implication of these findings. <http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2009/03.19/11-dysmorphia.html>

#### Recommended Resources:

Alexander, Bruce K. *The Globalisation of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of The Spirit* (2008) Oxford University Press ISBN-10:0199230129

## Chapter 16: The Numbers That Matter: The Increasing Normalcy of Hating Oneself

**4 minutes 17 seconds**

In creating this film we wanted to illustrate that disordered eating is an extreme symptom of something that most people experience daily. If we really want to tackle eating disorders we need to work on prevention. Just as awareness of racism and sexism took time and effort, becoming aware of the discriminatory attitudes and comments against our bodies that infiltrate our daily lives will take time.

#### Discussion Questions:

##### 1. Hating Our Bodies

How is it that we have come to believe that it is both normal and acceptable to be extremely dissatisfied or even hate one's body? What comments do you hear around you that support this ideology?

## Chapter 17: Looking Back: The Strength Gained

**2 minutes**

While the film by no means promotes disordered eating as something beneficial to go through, we did want to find the silver lining to this horrific experience. If you are in the depths of disordered eating or have reached a certain level of rediscovery, it is helpful to look at what you gained instead of focusing what you lost.

### **1. Life's Challenges**

What difficulties in life have you experiences that have given you strength and insight that make you a better person today?