University of Manitoba

# The Disciplinary Project of Body Perfection

M.A. Thesis

Sharon Anne Kuropatwa

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# THE DISCIPLINARY PROJECT OF BODY PERFECTION

BY

SHARON ANNE KUROPATWA

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

ABSTRACT

Why are women's bodies subject to examination, judgement and reconstruction? Scientific and socio-cultural discourses have combined to create an environment where most women are preoccupied with their bodies above all else. Recently, there has been an increased interest in the subjective experience involved in what could be considered the almost normative experience of negative body image. Many women become ill through their efforts, and many others are so preoccupied with body projects that there is no time or energy left to pursue other ambitions and aspirations. The objectives of this thesis are (1) to give voice to the subjective experience involved in weight preoccupation, and (2) to identify the under-lying socio-cultural causes.

This research presented uses data from 12 qualitative interviews with women self-selected from the University of Manitoba student population. The analysis of this data led to four significant themes: (1) the idea of personal and physical space, (2) the notion of a pervasive sense of `gaze,' (3) women's sexuality as tied to physical appearance, and (4) the separation of mind and body. The theoretical framework I used was a combination of the work of Michel Foucault and feminist poststructuralism. Foucault's theory of discourse and bodies in culture, combined with poststructural feminism's theory of gendered subjectivity, opens a specific discourse on women and bodies. The resulting analysis offers the opportunity to identify points of resistance and change. It is a critical analysis on the disciplinary project of body perfection.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Have no fear!" said the cat. "I will not let you fall. I will hold you up high as I stand on a ball. With a book on one hand! And a cup on my hat! But that is not all I can do!" Said the cat..."Look at me! Look at me now!" said the cat. "With a cup and a cake on the top of my hat! I can hold up two books! I can hold up the fish! And a little toy ship! And some milk on a dish! And look! I can hop up and down on the ball! But that is not all! Oh, no. That is not all!" (Seuss, 1957: p.16).

The hoops, the jumps, the grand leaps of faith - there were many times throughout my graduate career that I felt a special kinship with that Cat in the Hat! Yet somehow, despite many intellectual hurdles and personal obstacles, my work is finally completed. I can come down off the ball! There are many people to thank for their support of my efforts and belief in my work.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the generous financial support I received from the Jewish Foundation of Manitoba and the Manitoba Health Research Council. I would also like to thank the support staff of the Sociology Department for their consistent and kindly assistance. My heartfelt gratitude to my committee, Karen Grant, Barry Edginton, and Janice Ristock for all the illumination and inspiration. I would like to thank Karen Grant especially for both her grammar lessons and her unconditional advocacy of my work in general and myself in particular.

My family and friends who helped me through for all these years have earned my ever-lasting thanks, especially Bobb for his formatting finesse. To Steve expressly for all his patience and confidence. And finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my sisters: truly the most beautiful group of women I have the privilege and pleasure to know.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION: THE RESEARCH QUESTION

> She began to eat three decent meals a day and she cut down on her daily six mile walk. Naturally, she gained weight, began to take on a woman's form, and grew more attractive. I transferred her to group therapy, which she finally accepted after some initial resistance. Her menstrual period returned and became regular. Her weight rose to 140 pounds. She allowed herself to be kissed, petted, and finally engaged. Three years after she came to my office, she was a happy, normal wife and mother (Cappon, 1973: p.25).

Dr. Cappon suggests in his case presentation that the patient, a thirty year old woman diagnosed as anorexic, is cured now that she has the physical form of a woman and can perform as a wife and mother. Dr. Cappon's suggestion that these criteria are measures of cure is very telling. Medicine has long defined wellness as the ability to function (Cappon, 1973). In this doctor's analysis, the woman was well because she could function in the conventional female roles of wife and mother, yet the indicators of health and wellness go deeper than what a woman is capable of doing on a day to day basis.

Overwhelmingly, it is women who experience eating disorders in North America today (Rice, 1990). Anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are culture-bound syndromes (Swartz, 1985). Ritenbaugh defines a culture-bound syndrome as "a constellation of symptoms which has been categorized as a dysfunction or disease" (Ritenbaugh, 1982: p.351). A culture-bound syndrome must be understood within a specific cultural context. Its "etiology summarizes and symbolizes core meanings and behavioral norms of that culture" (Ritenbaugh, 1982: p.351). Appearance and beauty seem to be the central values in the measure of a woman's worth in a culture such as ours, which is dedicated to consumerism and conformity (Brown and Forgay, 1987). This support for the pursuit of the body beautiful has been traditionally ignored by medicine.

My research focuses on women and women's weight preoccupation.[1] The definition of weight preoccupation is specific to my use of the term in this research. Weight preoccupation is behaviour that may not be considered problematic to medical practitioners. Weight preoccupation is not necessarily behaviour that threatens a woman's life or physical well-being. It interferes with her confidence, her ambitions, her desires and energy. Time and money are lost to endless diets and fitness fads. Hours are spent in agony over what to wear and how to wear it. The work put into getting the right body takes energy away from other aspects of life, such as career or education. These issues are not given any consideration within the medical definition of eating disorders. In my research, however, weight preoccupation is defined as an umbrella term that covers all ends of the continuum; from the life threatening experience of anorexia and bulimia, to the sporadic diet and fitness habits of the woman losing the perennial ten pounds, through to the experience of over eating and obesity.

While the focus of my research is on the measures women take to achieve thinness, weight preoccupation is to be understood as including the full range of the continuum. Rice (1990) suggests that the medical practice of removing anorexia and bulimia from the continuum of weight preoccupation ignores the way women vacillate along this continuum throughout the course of their lives.

> While few researchers working in the area of eating problems would dispute the existence of a relationship between cultural pressures to be thin and the increased prevalence of weight preoccupation, most are reluctant to link dieting and eating disordered behaviours on a continuum because they perceive eating disorders as being qualitatively different from "normal" concerns. By highlighting the fundamental differences of those with eating disorders, researchers divorce anorexic and bulimic behaviours from "normal" dieting behaviours and from a larger socio-cultural context even though the degree of weight preoccupation in both groups may be similar and many women move from one so-called category to another throughout her lifetime (Rice, 1990: p.54).

[1]Given that both the subject and the focus of my research is women and women's experiences, the feminine pronoun will be used throughout my work.

Weight preoccupation, then, is not simply an extension of the medical definition of eating disorders. It is used in this research as a more inclusive and complex conception of the effort women make to achieve the body beautiful.

For women in our society there exists what could be called an epidemic of pain. This pain varies in intensity and duration, and exists on a continuum. There are women who diet and exercise sporadically, feel compelled to look a certain way, and purchase products that promise to help them achieve that goal. There are also women who cannot control in any way an eating or exercising regimen, and who cannot focus on any other aspect of life. Women in this society suffer in varying degrees along this continuum. They do not feel good about themselves - they hate the way they look, they hate the way they feel, they spend thousands of dollars on fitness and diet, they starve themselves, they stuff themselves, they despise themselves. Associated with this behaviour are a variety of serious eating disorders with physical and psychological ill-effects. The experience of individual women engaging in these various weight preoccupied behaviours is the topic of my research.

The objectives of this study are to explore the underlying social causes of weight preoccupation, and to give voice to the subjective experience involved. This is done through the use of a qualitative research design, in an effort to give voice to the lived experiences of women with body image problems. This is in keeping with a feminist model of inquiry that values subjective experience - a model of inquiry that is both non-reductionist and comprehensive (McCarl Neilson, 1990). My research is an exploratory study of these women's suffering, and their subjective understanding of why this has happened to them.

An exploration of the traditional biomedical approach and the sociological literature on eating disorders illuminates the very complex problem of women and weight preoccupation. At issue are the following questions: why women, why at this

point in human history, and why weight preoccupation? A critical analysis of the literature shows that eating disorders, self hatred, excessive dieting, and poor self-image are common experiences for women in North America today. Surrey suggests that women experience weight preoccupation to such an extent that it could be considered normative behaviour.

> According to current medical definitions (as reflected in life insurance tables) more than 50% of American women are considered overweight. Self-report studies indicate that between 50% and 75% of American women consider themselves to be overweight (Neilson, 1978)....the degree of preoccupation, the attempts at serious dieting, and the disturbances of self-esteem associated with the perceived failure to meet the ideal body weight vary significantly for individual women. However, if 50%-75% of American women are living with day to day worry about weight control, I believe it must be taken as a norm (Surrey, 1991: p.238).

Rice also claims that women's experience of weight preoccupation has become normative.

> A majority of women living in North America today struggle with food and weight concerns. In fact, 80-90 percent of us dislike the size and shape of our bodies, 80 percent of us have dieted by the age of eighteen, 70 percent of us are currently dieting, and 66 percent of women have experimented with bulimic behaviours in the hope of losing weight. In a culture where the size of a woman's body is of paramount importance, it is not surprising that dieting and other weight loss behaviours have become normative (Rice, 1990: p.54).

Despite the prevalence and the continuing growth of eating disorders, medicine continues to treat them as individual maladies. This kind of treatment presumes an individualistic cause. This perspective precludes the possibility that weight preoccupation originates, in large part, from social causes.

If the medical perspective on the cause of eating disorders is incomplete, the methods of intervention are also incomplete. The medical perspective is attractive because it offers an easy and pragmatic solution to a problem within the context of a system designed to treat the body as an object in and of itself. In other words, the field of medicine characteristically treats the body as if it were an enclosed entity that does

not have social-psychological and social structural influences affecting the health and well being of the person. A problem is identified as a problem in the body, and the treatment focuses on the restoration of body function.

The definition and diagnosis of illness are social constructions within the biomedical approach (Mishler, 1981). Health, illness and medical care are "...socially constructed categories that define and give meaning to certain classes of events" (Mishler, 1981: p.141). The medical focus on body function ignores the interpretive component of diagnosis. When one focuses only on the biological symptoms of a disease category, one does not address the social circumstances surrounding the onset of illness. The focus remains solely on body function and does not allow a more comprehensive approach in addressing the illness.

The restoration of body function is, admittedly, a priority when a person is feeling ill or when a life threatening condition is present. The need for such an approach to eating disorders is self-evident. What is at issue, however, is the medical contention that the physical wellness of a person indicates total wellness, or cure. Cure is understood here only as the absence of physical symptomatology. The medical perspective falls short of effecting lasting and meaningful change for a person when the focus remains this narrow. This is particularly problematic because it is predominantly medicine that offers the "expert" opinion on the subject of weight preoccupation, and has established various treatment programs to ameliorate the problems associated with weight preoccupation.

My research, in part then, is an effort to understand weight pre-occupation from a perspective other than classical medicine. Most of the current research in the area of weight preoccupation has been either medical or sociological. While it cannot be disputed that these disciplines have gathered important information about weight preoccupation, both medicine and sociology seem full of "half-rights" and "best-

guesses." Medicine addresses weight preoccupation as a problem of the body - a strictly biological breakdown that can be managed with medical intervention. It can be argued that the body is the focus of medicine, and medical research should not be expected to move beyond those boundaries. It becomes problematic, however, because treatment modalities are being developed on the basis of such a narrow focus. Sociology addresses weight preoccupation as a problem of culture - specifically, the priorities of a culture driven by the needs of capitalism and defined by the values of patriarchy. Again, while remaining within the prescribed boundaries of sociology per se, the existence of a real, tangible human body attached to the social ill is all but forgotten. Medicine ignores cultural context and social dynamics, and traditional sociological studies ignore the notion of individual resistance and the presence of a physical body.

My literature review shows a need for research that goes beyond both traditional medicine and classical sociology. The specific theoretical perspective I have used - a combination of Foucault's work on culture and society and feminist poststructuralism - offers a fresh perspective on the whole issue of weight preoccupation. Through the use of such parallel concepts as "normalizing gaze," "gendered subjectivity," "docile bodies," and "power as a process," this framework presents some hope for change in both the understanding of the experience of weight preoccupation, and the treatment modalities employed by practitioners in medicine and counselling. These concepts will be fully explored in the chapter in which I discuss theoretical considerations. For now, suffice it to say that it is the theoretical framework which compliments the substantive work of both sociology and medicine, and fills some of the gaps that these disciplines leave in addressing the experience of weight preoccupation. The theoretical framework I chose fully informed the research design,

which allowed me to explore these issues openly and vigorously. In chapter two, then, I fully explore the theoretical considerations of my research.

Chapter three consists of a literature review which highlights the existing medical and sociological material on weight preoccupation. My research methodology follows in chapter four, including a critique of the research process and some of my choices. I will analyze the thematic content in the fifth chapter - focusing on what is similar in the experience of weight preoccupation for the 12 women I interviewed. And finally, I will discuss the research findings, comment on certain limitations to my work, and explore the implications for future practice and research.

## CHAPTER TWO

## THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

My theoretical framework combines a feminist poststructuralist analysis with Michel Foucault's theoretical analysis of discipline/power. The research is informed by the relevant concepts and ideas offered by both.

In an effort to address the experience of weight preoccupation, I had to wade through a multitude of theoretical explanations presently available. It quickly became clear that feminist theory provided me with the best tools with which to work. However, there is no univocal, single-minded feminist theory to be found. There are many different branches of feminism, all useful for various reasons and at various times. While I chose feminist poststructuralist theory to frame my research specifically, the basic tenets of feminist theory in general underlie my own personal assumptions and perspective. These tenets warrant some discussion in order to be clear about my point of departure as a researcher.

Jaggar (1983) argues that established social theories do not account for women's oppression as they do not address the powerful combination of capitalism, racism, imperialism, and male dominance. Research within the feminist framework considers these systems of dominance as integral to understanding women's subjugation. Feminist research begins with the contention that biology is largely socially constructed. "Biology is gendered as well as sexed" (Jaggar, 1983: p.126). Gender emerges through activity that is organized around gender norms. The female organism is not born subservient and nurturing. These are the characteristics that are provided to women in this society through both the actions of others towards women, and activities deemed acceptable for women. Feminist thought considers:

> the acquisition of gendered character types as a result of specific social practices, particularly procreative practices, that are not determined by

> biology and that in principle, therefore, are alterable (Jaggar, 1983: p.126).

One can examine any specific social problem that is unique to women and find, in feminism, a theory that goes beyond the myth of scientific objectivity to reach the lived experiences of women. Scientific objectivity is a false premise upon which to conduct research of any kind. Science itself is a gendered and limited way of knowing. It is only one kind of knowing among many, and it enjoys a largely unquestioned acceptance it does not deserve. Hubbard states:

> The way we make scientific facts and build them into coherent theories and descriptions sets limits to the kinds of things we can come to understand...The scientific way to know has been labelled objective and identified as masculine; artistic, intuitive, and empathic ways of knowing are considered subjective and feminine. This knowledge has become gendered (1990: p.8).

There is an assumption that scientific, objective ways of knowing are both the best and the most true. However, no scientific activity is neutral. Science "responds to specific social agendas and needs" (Fee, 1981: p.388). Recognizing and identifying the social agenda of science is the first step to moving beyond the myth of objectivity and towards a less mystified and more complete, contextual way of perceiving the world.

Feminist poststructuralism suggests that science and scientific objectivity are socially constructed. It is in the discourse of science - in the actual discourse of research and objective facts, biology and medicine - that meaning and experience are created. In feminist poststructuralist theory

> Language...is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested...it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed. The assumption that subjectivity is constructed implies that it is not innate, not genetically determined, but socially produced...in a whole range of discursive practices - economic, social and political - the meanings of which are a constant site of struggle over power. Language is not the expression of unique individuality; it constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific (Weedon, 1987: p.21).

A poststructuralist perspective understands the category of female as a constructed subjectivity. A woman is not a woman because she has female genitalia, nor because there is anything essential to being a woman. Feminist poststructuralism recognizes the social production of such categories.

> In this theory the meaning of gender is both socially produced and variable between different forms of discourse. Pornography and much advertising, for example offer us models of femininity in which a particular version of female sexuality is paramount. It is a form of femininity in which women direct themselves totally to the satisfaction of the male gaze, male fantasies and male desires...This contrasts with other versions of femininity, which stress women's asexuality, exalting either virginity or motherhood (Weedon, 1987: p.22).

Butler (1990) takes the notion of gendered subjectivity one step further when she asserts that gender is neither an essence, nor a construction. For Butler, gender is a doing - a performance. Butler changes Simone De Beauvoir's "one is not born a woman, one becomes one" to "one cannot be born a woman, nor can one become one, because a woman is what a woman does." As Butler explicates:

> Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free floating attributes - gender proves to be performative - that is , constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results (1990: p.24-25).

The acting of gender constitutes gender. This kind of gender performance reaches far beyond the dramaturgical notion of acting out a script. Butler is not referring to playing out roles. Her claim is far more radical and promising than that. If the being is in the doing, it stands to follow that a change in the doing would bring about a change in the being. An illusion of core-self is created through various acts, and we are henceforth convinced of our own internal motivations and ambitions. That discourse can create specific, supporting performance is a testament to the power we have lent the given authorities and experts of our time.

> That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitutes its reality. Acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purpose of the regulation of sexuality with the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality. If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity (Butler, 1990: p.136).

Butler (1993) insists that one cannot have a discussion about performative gender without discussing materiality. She raises the question of bodies as the material point of departure for investigation into subjectivity. In other words, Butler goes so far as to suggest that what is as plain as day, a clearly visible physical form, has no form before the investment of power relations and discourse. Butler takes Foucault's assertion that materiality "is power in its formative or constitutive effects" (Butler, 1993: p.34) and queries further - are there modalities of materiality?

> Insofar as Foucault traces the process of materialization as an investiture of discourse and power, he focuses on that dimension of power that is productive and formative. But we need to ask what constrains the domain of what is materializable, and whether there are modalities of materialization (Butler, 1993: p.35).

It not my intention to engage in a lengthy discussion on the philosophical and epistemological tenets of Butler's assertions. I included her work for two reasons. First, her notion of performative gender and modalities of materiality further challenge the taken-for-granted nature of such nomenclature as `woman' and `women's experience.' And second, Butler's understanding of gender identity and how it comes to be reified offers some interesting opportunities for change. I will discuss these in the final chapter. For now, let Butler's work stand with that of the feminist poststructuralist material as a way to position my research in the search for non-elitist, non-exclusive feminist methodology.

One of the basic tenets of feminist poststructuralism attempts to do just that by asserting that there is nothing essential, fixed, or inherent about being a woman. Various discourses offer competing versions of womanhood and femininity. Individual subjectivity comes about as a result of the strength of any given discourse at any point in history. In feminist poststructuralism, then, there is no sovereign truth. "Meaning can have no external guarantee and subjectivity itself is an effect of discourse" (Weedon, 1987: p.86). Feminist poststructuralism, by definition, rejects all assumptions that invoke one truth, one reality, and the grandest of efforts to define anything and anyone once and for all (Ollenberg and Moore, 1992).

From this perspective, meaning is transient and fluid. What then can "fat," or "thin," or "good body" mean? Weight/height charts vary, and the body beautiful changes from one fashion season to the next. The assumptions involved in taking a neutral entity such as the body, and assigning to it the values of good and bad, must be questioned.

Feminist poststructuralism has been criticized for over-contextualizing experience (Weedon, 1987). It is as if there is nothing real about a woman's experience. It is all a matter of context and construct. Though this may be how it appears at first, this, in my view, is not the case. Feminist poststructuralism insists on contextualizing experience in order to avoid the "essentialist" trap. Such an analysis would not rely on what is natural or essential to a woman as the basis of her experience. It relies, rather, on the contention that a woman's experience can only be understood within the greater historical and cultural atmosphere in which it takes place. As Weedon says:

> Although the subject in poststructuralism is socially constructed in discursive practices, she nonetheless exists as a thinking,feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices. She is also a subject able to reflect upon the discursive relations which constitute her and the society in which she lives, and able to choose from the options available (1987: p.125).

There is a point at which feminist poststructuralists must be willing to define some behaviour/experience as problematic. Poststructuralism does not assert that all experience is not real, only that it is relative. All experience has a context, a history, that must be considered.

It is with some trepidation that I make this assertion. It can be argued that an historical context is important for some kinds of research. It can also be argued that a reliance on essentialist notions when examining specific social issues greatly limits the utility and relevance of any given work. The current debate within feminism on the essentialist and non-essentialist definitions rages on. Historicism and ahistoricism, essentialism and non-essentialism are pitted against each other as binary opposites and mutually exclusive. Historicism and ahistoricism refer to the notion of study or examination being placed within a historical context, giving it a specific periodic and social framework. Essentialism and non-essentialism refer to the assignation of immutable characteristics and qualities to a group or category. Despite the claims of some, this debate is by no means a dead issue. I cannot in good conscience continue my discussion of women and women's experiences without positioning myself within this debate, and explaining certain ontological and linguistic choices.

The battle against essentialism is primarily a reaction against an early theoretical error that used the white, middle class experience as the definitive experience for all women. This resulted in much theoretical and substantive material that was totally exclusive to women outside the white middle class experience. In many ways, this essentialist tenet persists to date. As Spelman suggests:

> there is a ...tendency in dominant Western feminist thought to posit an essential "womanness" that all women have and share despite the racial, class, religious, ethnic, and cultural differences(1988: p.ix).

Today, some of this material continues to guide contemporary feminist thought, research, and policy. This is a serious limitation to the use of a feminist framework. Spelman adamantly insists that "there are no short cuts through women's lives" (1988: p.187). Diversity and specificity must guide feminist research, not essentialism and generalization. For Spelman (1988) and Fuss (1989), to categorize is to generalize, and to generalize is to mask diversity and difference. Feminist theory was, for a time, moving dangerously close to being feminist theory of white, middle class privileged women.

There has been an effort to address this limitation in feminism in the last two decades (Fox, 1988). The debate on the character of "women" is ongoing. Spelman positions herself in this debate on the side of questioning current, popular notions of what is considered universal to women, such as "a woman's way of knowing". Stanley and Wise warn against using the category of `woman' to brush all women and women's experience with one broad stroke.

> A defining assumption of feminism is that `woman' is a necessary and valid category because all women share, by virtue of being women, a set of common experiences. `Woman' is a socially and politically constructed category, the ontological basis of which lies in a set of experiences rooted in the material world. However, to say that women share `experiences' is not to say that we share the same experiences. We argued that the experience of `women' is ontologically fractured and complex because we do not all share one single and unseamed material reality. The category of `woman' used in academic feminist writing actually reflected the experiences and analyses of white, middle class, heterosexual, First World women only, yet treated these as universals (Stanley and Wise, 1990: p.21-22).

While these concepts, and others like them, are not intended to be in any way exclusive, that is exactly what they have become. These concepts have come to stand for all women's experiences without consideration of the depth and richness of variety these experiences hold. While the current movement in feminism is toward greater sophistication of such concepts, Spelman suggests that there is still more work to be done.

In common vernacular and popular culture, terms such as "woman" and "women's work" do indeed bring to mind the most stereotypical, hackneyed vision of what these words signify. In a grand effort to re-vision such terminology, the move in feminist research has been to avoid this terminology altogether. The efficacy of such a manoeuvre is, in my mind, questionable. To hold the study of how women are different as qualitatively better than the study of how we are the same is really the flip side of the same, flawed coin. The lines have been drawn so hard as to either/or, there is little consideration given to the possibility of both/and. As Bordo points out: "the polarizing effects of the outbreak of phobias about `essentialism' have often found feminists lining up (or being lined up) on different sides of a divide" (1993: p.37). My question is: are we not tossing the baby out with the bath water? Is there no place in research for categorical terminology and conceptions? Martin asks the same questions in her discussion of essentialism and "other dangerous traps."

> Those of us who are white academic feminists have recognized the terrible mistake we made in assuming that all the individuals in the world called "women" were exactly like us. Paradoxically, though, our acts of unmasking the differences among women and revelling in them became occasions for imposing a false unity on our research. Condemning essence talk in connection with our bodies and ourselves, we came dangerously close to adopting it in relation to our methodologies. In our determination to honour diversity among women, we told one another to restrict our ambitions, limit our sights, bear a retreat from certain topics, refrain from using a rather long list of categories or concepts, and eschew generalization. I can think of no better prescription for the stunting of a field of intellectual growth (Martin, 1994: p.631).

Research without category is only one kind of research. It is true that every woman has her own history, her own experiences, her own individual life context. To know these things - to have her author her own story - has some merit. However, if we were to couple her story with stories of others in the same moment or circumstance as her, we may learn something that has practical value for those who find themselves in a

similar moment or circumstance. More important than trying to illuminate each and every difference between us, or mask our differences for the sake of generalization, we should be acknowledging what choices we have made and why. This way, we can avoid certain methodological traps and a priori thinking. This need not be an all or nothing proposition.

> Happily, to avoid the essentialist traps it is not necessary to eschew general categories or concepts. To steer clear of the ahistorical pitfall we do not have to endorse universal compulsory historicism. To navigate around false generalization we need not forgo generalization. So that ours can be an inclusive and collective enterprise it behooves us to find ways to keep out of the methodological traps and at the same time remain open to intellectual possibilities and receptive to different ideas (Martin, 1994: p.654-655).

In the words of a friend wiser than I, even in our sameness we are different, and in our difference, the same.

To be wary of essentialism and ahistoricism is not to deny the existence of certain commonalities and shared features of experience. I can articulate general experience without subsuming all women under these articulations. I can choose to focus on certain ones and not others if I make that selection clear, and my reasons are sound and useful. I can be aware of difference without rejecting similarity.

> We should be aware of the enormous differences between women. No woman should presume to speak for those whose experiences and aspirations may be very different. The ways we understand the world and the recommendations we make may not be especially similar. On the other hand, we should be encouraged to imagine alternatives to the oppression of contemporary society, to express our thoughts and evaluations concerning the problems we face and how to deal with them. Those who share our views and those who do not may be glad to have heard them (Held, 1993: p.18).

It is important to address these questions when utilizing a feminist poststructuralist framework. I neither wish to ignore diversity with some kind of intent, nor do I wish to pack all women into one, pre-fabricated box. What is useful about feminist

poststructuralism is that I can have this kind of debate, position myself within it, recognize its limitations, and see what it may have to offer nonetheless.

Much of what constitutes feminist poststructuralism comes out of the work of Michel Foucault. Weedon defines Foucault's discourses as "ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them" (1987: p.108). Nothing has meaning outside of discursive articulations, and the most powerful institutions have firm institutional bases. This would include, for example, medicine, science, education, law, and politics. Discourses must be articulated in order for them to be effective. They require the agency of individuals whom they both constitute and govern. "Discourses, as they are realized in institutional practices...constitute the meaning of the physical body, psychic energy, the emotions and desires, as well as conscious subjectivity" (Weedon, 1987: p.111).

Feminist poststructuralism also utilizes Foucault's concept of power as a process.

> power is shown to take the forms of the surveillance and assessment of individuals, realized in the practices of state institutions...The institutions discipline the body, mind and emotions, constituting them according to the needs of hierarchical forms of power such as gender or class. For instance, the day-to-day practice of education and socialization constitutes differences in strengths and skills between boys and girls, endowing individuals with specific perceptions of their identity and potential, which appear natural to the subjected individual, rather than as the product of diffuse forms of power (Weedon, 1987: p.121).

Power, in feminist poststructuralism, is not a static, tangible element that one can possess, nor does it have a seat in corporate high-rises or government offices. Power is not, by definition, bad. Power is what power does. It can only exist where it is given discursive articulation and action.

In feminist poststructuralism, social, historical, and cultural specificity needs to be considered. The context of experience and the plurality of meaning requires our attention. Feminist poststructuralism offers the possibility of change through the

recognition that power requires human agency and that the consideration of context lends itself to new and critical perspectives.

I am using feminist poststructuralism primarily for its focus on context. The discourse/context in which Foucault operates assumes a specific social structure/culture and time/space. Foucault does not, however, articulate what these specific contexts may be, only that they must be given consideration. Using a feminist framework allows me to suggest that there are specific features of our society that encourage the development of weight preoccupation. The sociological literature I have presented identifies cultural imagery (magazines, television, film, etc.) as one of specific contexts in which the pursuit of the body beautiful is encouraged (Brown and Forgay, 1987: Bordo, 1990: Garner and Garfinkel, 1980). The literature also identifies the social significance placed on a woman's ability to catch and secure a mate as the moral backdrop for the development of weight preoccupation (Szekely, 1988: Lawrence, 1979).

It is also important to note that, in present-day North America, women are also living in the socio-cultural atmosphere of patriarchy. I use patriarchy here as defined by Fox which combines an analysis of both social structure and gendered subjectivity/ideology.

> In conceptualizing patriarchy...we must do more than simply recognize social structure and its gender consequences...If patriarchy is to be seen as a system, it may most usually refer to the production and reproduction of people - which involves the family primarily but not exclusively. The mother - child relation, and the motherwork involved in raising a child, are at the heart of the process...The role of the state, in perpetuating the privatization of certain responsibilities and the ideology of the privatized family, is also crucial, as are changes in the organization of subsistence production which promoted a kind of public/private separation. In short, conceptions of male-female differences correspond to those of the distinction between public and private and originate not only in the family's creation of subjectivity, but also in an ideology that is sustained (if not created) by the state (Fox, 1988: p.177).

Feminist poststructualism points to gendered subjectivity as a guiding force in the experiences of women. Fox's conceptualization of patriarchy suggests that gendered subjectivity combines with social structure in such a way as to address the gender specificity of such social problems as weight preoccupation. The issue of women's oppression is brought into the discussion.

> More important than specifying patriarchy is consideration of both social structure - which establishes the consequences of being the sex that bears children - and gendered subjectivity/ideology when explaining women's oppression (Fox, 1988: p.177).

Feminist poststructuralism fits well into the discussion of Michel Foucault and disciplinary power. It is to this discussion that we now turn.

Foucault's analysis of the medical profession and the regulation of docile bodies is relevant to the discussion of weight pre-occupation. Foucault's contribution is a

> unique emphasis on the body as the place in which the most minute and local social practices are linked with the large scale organization of power (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: p.xxii).

Foucault takes issue with the idea that medicine claims to operate under an objective truth called science and can therefore legitimately regulate the actions and activities of others. Foucault assesses both claims as false.

As Jaggar (1983) and Hubbard (1990) state, the medical profession relies on an unquestioning acceptance of science as truth. Foucault attacks the truth claims medicine advances by showing the historical change in what constitutes medical truth. Dreyfus and Rabinow suggest that Foucault, by tracing the development of modern medicine, shows the arbitrary nature of such truth.

> Once we treat the language and practices of a discipline from another age as mere meaningless objects, we can gain access to a level of description which shows that what remains incomprehensible is not without its own systematic order. And once we can see that the organization of medical knowledge in the Classical Age had a comprehensive formal structure, we can see that what we regard as the meaningful truth claims of modern medicine can likewise be treated as governed by similar arbitrary structures (Foucault, 1982: p.13).

Foucault traces the development of medicine from the Renaissance, through the Classical age, to modern medicine. This review is not simply a record of a course of events. Foucault charts the increase of medical disciplinary power from one age to the next. Medicine began with confinement - removing the ill from the well - and then moved to intervention - making the ill responsible for being and getting well. The goal behind medical intervention, claims Foucault, was and still is to make the individual responsible for her own health and health problems. This was the beginning of the present-day reductionist model of medicine. Dreyfus and Rabinow discuss Foucault's suggestion that the patient becomes her own watchdog.

> Since the patient was seen to be responsible for his [sic] illness, therapeutic intervention in the form of punishments became a standard mode of treatment. The goal of these interventions was to bring the patient to an awareness of his status as a subject, responsible for his own actions. Hence the subject, **observed and punished** by his warders, was led by a carefully structured series of procedures **to do the same thing to himself**. Once this internalization was accomplished, so the theory goes, the patient would be cured (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: p.8). [emphasis added]

This simultaneous increase in the individual emphasis on health and illness within the medical profession, as well as the increased medicalization (defining a wide range of problematic behaviours as illnesses) of the human body resulted in what Foucault calls bio-power. Bio-power is the political technology in Foucault's analysis. It functions by

> ordering in all realms under the guise of improving the welfare of the individual and the population. To the genealogist, this order reveals itself to be a strategy, with no one directing it and everyone increasingly enmeshed in it, whose only end is the increase of power and order itself (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: p.xxii).

There are two poles of bio-power: the control of the body and the control of the population. The merging of knowledge and power allow for the exercising of such control. "Power is exercised within discourses in the ways in which they constitute and

govern individual subjects" (Weedon, 1987: p.113). Medical knowledge is one such discourse. The technology of medical discipline outlines the normative and acceptable range of variation in terms of health, body structure, body composition, types of illness, etc. Individuals within a population reflect on these norms, internalize them, and end up policing themselves and each other. As such, the medical profession is circuitously legitimized, and "the discursive and the institutional are...brought back into a complex relationship" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: p.7). Bio-power is at its strongest when a technology of discipline is localized within a cultural institution.

> Power is not restricted to political institutions. Power plays a directly productive role; it comes from below; it is multidirectional, operating from the top down and also from the bottom up. We have seen that political technologies cannot be identified with particular institutions. But we have also seen that it is precisely when these technologies find a localization within specific institutions...when they invest these institutions, that bio-power really begins its take-off. When the disciplinary technologies establish links between these institutional settings, then disciplinary technology is truly effective (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: p.157).

Foucault's analysis of medicine is an analysis of disciplines. Disciplines are techniques of "power which provide procedures for training or for coercing bodies" (Smart, 1985: p.85). In North American society today, medicine enacts discipline with powerful force. It is a technology of discipline that generates both conformity and resistance. Foucault brings the discussion of disciplines and technologies directly into his conception of docile bodies. These are regulated bodies - bodies which are policed in terms of action and thought. The policing is done both by the individual and the collective. The creation of docile, regulated bodies was a necessary precondition for the development of capitalism and the needs of production. "Without the insertion of disciplined, orderly individuals into the machinery of production, the new demands of capitalism would have been stymied" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: p.135).

> The basic goal of disciplinary power was to produce a human being who could be treated as a docile body. This docile body also had to be a productive body. The technology of discipline developed and was perfected in workshops,

> barracks, prisons and hospitals; in each of these settings the general aim was a parallel increase in the usefulness and docility of individuals and populations (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: p.134).

Foucault, with his analysis of docile bodies, is relevant to the discussion of weight preoccupation in two ways. First, the body is a "text of culture" (Bordo, 1990: p.13). The body is a powerful symbolic entity that reflects culture in what is eaten, what is worn, and what is done in ritual and habitual activity. As a text, culture can literally be read on an individual's body. Second, the body is "a practical, direct locus of social control" (Bordo, 1990: p.13). Bordo discusses Foucault's analysis of the body in culture and how it is a locus of control.

> Through the organisation and regulation of the time, space, and movements of our daily lives, our bodies are trained, shaped and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity, and femininity (Bordo, 1990: p.13).

Foucault's concept of the docile body is a body that is "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault, 1979: p.136). The docile body is a product of control. The focus of control is the individual, the objective of control is the economy and efficiency of body movements and organisation, and control is exercised through

> an uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its results and it is exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, movement (Foucault, 1979: p.137).

Disciplines function directly to dissociate power from the body through a kind of political anatomy of detail. They are embodied by technologies of power that are committed to the scrutiny of each member of society. Foucault identifies the army, prison, schools, and hospitals as such technologies.

Sheridan clarifies the connection between the disciplines and the practical application of power.

> Discipline...is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and instruments of its exercise. This power is not triumphant, excessive, omnipotent, but modest, suspicious, calculating. It

> operates through hierarchical observation, normalization, judgement, and their combination in the examination ( Sheridan, 1980: p.152).

An insidious kind of power results in self-surveillance that is more controlling than the overt exercise of power. Foucault uses Bentham's panopticon to conceptualize this system of surveillance. The panopticon is the "paradigmatic example of a disciplinary technology" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: p.188). In Bentham's architectural concept, the surveillance tower of the prison yard is a centrally located pillar with windows all around. The prison cells surround the tower with the barred door of each cell facing the central observation tower. The prisoner is made to feel as though he is always being observed. In fact, the structure is designed in such a way that there may be no actual prison guard watching out of any window in the tower. The prisoner would not know, and continues to act as if being watched. The architecture created "a state of consciousness and permanent visibility" (Sheridan, 1980: p.153), assuring the automatic functioning of power. Dreyfus and Rabinow explain how the panopticon is a perfect technology of discipline.

> Whereas in the monarchical regimes it was the sovereign who had the greatest visibility, under the institutions of bio-power it is those who are to be disciplined...who are made most visible. Bentham's Panopticon captures and manifests this reversal of visibility in its organization of space...it is not a symbol of power; it doesn't refer to anything else. Nor does it have any deep, hidden meaning. It carries within itself its own interpretation, a certain transparency. Its function is to increase control. Its very form, its materiality, every aspect down to the smallest detail...yields the interpretation of what it does. The mechanism itself is neutral and, in its own fashion, universal. It is a perfect technology (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: p.191).

The spread of power is most efficient in this exemplary technology. Power is conceptualized as something to be exercised in the control of bodies and space. Control of bodies is exercised specifically in the interest of increasing power. Surveillance, whether real or imagined, fosters obedience, docility and self-discipline. Even if the panopticon is never actually constructed; if the physical form of surveillance outlined by Bentham never materializes, power through surveillance can still be

achieved. Philo suggests that "panopticism" is more about disciplinary techniques than about institutional design. It is the issue of surveillance that should be focused on.

> Foucault deploys the term "panopticism" to capture not only the role of institutional plans and architectures, but also the nature of many other "disciplinary techniques"...through which human subjects were converted into responsible "docile bodies" whose labours would serve to "strengthen social forces"...designed as spatial strategies in the production of socially useful individuals (Philo, 1989: p.264-265).

According to Foucault, disciplinary power is achieved through hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and the examination. The goal is "control through surveillance, efficiency through the gaze, order through spatial structure" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: p.156). Hierarchical observation is defined as "the connection between visibility and power, that an apparatus designed for observation induces effects of power and that a means of coercion makes those subject to it potentially visible" (Smart, 1985: p.85). It is a kind of optics of power, where the "act of looking over and being looked over will be a central means by which individuals are linked together in a disciplinary space" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: p.156).

Normalizing judgement refers to sanctions, or punitive measures which are enacted in the event of non-conformity. This normalizing tactic can manifest itself in reward as well. Foucault suggests that "at the heart of a disciplinary system of power there lies an...extra-legal penalty which is exercised over a mass of behaviours" (Smart, 1985: p.86). Hierarchical observation, combined with normalizing tactics utilized in maintaining disciplinary power, creates an ominous, ever-present sense of being scrutinized and controlled. Foucault presents the examination as the normalizing "gaze" by which individuals are classified and judged. This classification effectively locks individuals into a position of constant - real or perceived -visibility.

> Through the mechanism of the examination individuals are located in a field of visibility, subjected to a mechanism of objectification, and thereby to the exercise of power. Disciplinary power...itself remains invisible whilst those subject

> to it are rendered visible. Such a relationship of visibility, or even potential visibility has constituted an important technique through which discipline has come to be exercised over the individual in a variety of institutions (Smart, 1985: p.87).

Disciplinary power, hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and the examination all work to create docile bodies. Each individual becomes the watchdog of her own actions and the actions of others. The power of the disciplines is maintained by individual participation - where an individual plays a part in her own subjugation and surveillance.

For Foucault, society is, by definition, normalizing. Normalization has become a necessary part of maintaining discipline and docility. In Foucault's analysis, "normalizing society has turned out to be a powerful and insidious form of domination" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: p.198). Normalizing technology sets the standards, and then enforces them.

> Normalizing technologies...operate by establishing a common definition of goals and procedures, which take the form of...agreed upon examples of how a well-ordered domain of human activity should be organized. These exemplars, such as the Panopticon...immediately define what is normal (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: p.198).

Foucault's analysis of docile bodies and the disciplines is useful in the analysis of women and weight preoccupation. The concepts of docile bodies, hierarchical power, the disciplines, normalization, the examination and the gaze address issues of culture that have a direct bearing on the oppression of women. They are disciplinary practices that "produce a body which in gesture and appearance is recognizably feminine" (Bartky, 1988: p.61). Using Foucault's analysis of the disciplines, one can address what in this culture amounts to **the disciplinary project of body perfection.** Body size, shape, surface and style are all subject to disciplines in this culture. Bartky articulates this best.

> In the regime of institutionalized heterosexuality, woman must make herself object and prey for the man...in contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness

> of most women: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgement (Bartky, 1988: p.72).

The work of Foucault combines with a feminist poststructuralist analysis to make up the theoretical framework for this research. There are limitations to the use of such a framework. In particular, Foucault has been criticized for not considering the role of the state and institutionalized forms of domination (Smart, 1985). There is a kind of logical impasse when addressing this criticism because Foucault does not identify a seat of power. His analysis does not give power to a ruling class, a phallic symbol, or a governing body. For Foucault, power is not a thing but a process.

Foucault is also criticized for not offering answers to the problems he so carefully details. How is one to resist a form of power in which one cooperates? How is one to resist a form of domination whose source cannot be identified? These are valid questions that Foucault does not really address. Foucault seems confident in claiming that he offers a concrete diagnosis of society's ills.

Dreyfus and Rabinow assert that it is possible to work within Foucault's framework and discover our own answers that are historically and culturally specific.

> Short of offering us an answer to this extremely thorny problem, it would seem incumbent on Foucault to use his work to locate the endangered species of resistant practices and to consider how they could be strengthened in nontotalizing, nontheoretical and nonnormalizing ways. If truth is to operate in society so as to resist technological power, we must find a way to make it positive and productive (1982: p.201).

The use of both feminist poststructuralism and Michel Foucault demands attention to historical, cultural, and social specificity. Such a framework allows for an exploration of the subjective experience of women with weight preoccupation. The principles of Foucault and feminist poststructuralism

> can be applied to all discursive practices as a way of analyzing how they are structured, what power relations they produce and reproduce, where there are

resistances and where we might look for weak points more open to challenge and transformation (Weedon, 1987: p.136).

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 3R (1987) (DSM 3R) provides a very extensive definition of anorexia nervosa.

> The...essential features of this disorder (anorexia) are: refusal to maintain body weight over a minimal normal weight for age and height; intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat, even though underweight; a distorted body image; and amenorrhea (in females) (DSM 3R, 1987: p.65).

This definition suggests volition on the part of the anorexic. The anorexic is said to refuse to maintain a specific body weight, as if to want to do so would somehow eliminate the problem. The DSM 3R also states specific personality characteristics that predispose an individual to anorexia. This individual is a perfectionist by nature, and was likely a model child in early life (DSM 3R, 1987).

The DSM 3R also provides a definition of bulimia nervosa. The essential features of this disorder are:

> recurrent episodes of binge eating (rapid consumption of a larger amount of food in a discreet period of time): a feeling of lack of control over eating behaviour during the eating binges: the person regularly engages in either self induced vomiting, use of laxatives or diuretics, strict dieting or fasting, or vigorous exercise in order to prevent weight gain: a minimum average of two eating episodes a week for at least three months: persistent over concern with body shape and weight (DSM 3R, 1987: p.67-69).

The DSM 3R indicates that the common background for women suffering bulimia nervosa is a combination of experiencing obesity in adolescence and having at least one obese parent. Bulimia is distinguished from anorexia by the amount of weight fluctuation involved. Anorexia results in extreme weight loss, while bulimia results in extreme weight fluctuation that is not as life threatening. However, women have died from sudden heart arrest, kidney/renal failure, and dehydration caused by bulimic behaviour. The definition provided for bulimia nervosa is extremely broad. Eating

preoccupied behaviour that is not discussed explicitly in this definition is covered by the last criteria; a persistent over concern with body shape and weight. The term "over concern" leaves room for a wide interpretation of what constitutes bulimic behaviour. If preoccupation with weight, exercise, food, and the very act of eating itself all fall under the rubric of bulimic behaviour, bulimia nervosa could also be considered a normative experience for women in North America today (Rice, 1990: Surrey, 1991).

Jones et al. define anorexia as a

> pathological obsession with body size resulting in inability, or refusal, to recognize hunger. In association with this, there is also inability to recognize body size and image and inability to interpret fatigue (1986: p.755).

Since the focus is on individual pathology, the recommended treatment is at the individual level.

Jones et al. attribute the development of anorexia to the personal levels of ambition and drive of the anorexic. "The weight fixation is interpreted as the intense desire of these bright, perfectionist individuals to develop complete self control" (Jones et al., 1986: p.755). Jones et al. also present a therapeutic point of view that encourages a two fold plan to cure anorexia. The first is nutritional revitalization; the anorexic must be put on a short term refeeding program as soon as possible. The second stage of treatment is psychiatric in nature; the individual is encouraged to seek out the unconscious and mysterious motivation behind the development of anorexia.

My thesis opens with an excerpt from Dr. Cappon's file on one of his anorexic patients. He claims a victory by returning an anorexic woman to what he felt was functional normalcy. If a woman can be an effective wife and mother, she is considered cured: levels of functioning guide the course of medical intervention.

Cappon developed a technique for weight maintenance that he terms simple arithmetic. Individuals can lose a pound by decreasing their calorie intake, and can

gain a pound by increasing their calorie intake. These are the terms in which he speaks of the efforts by women to gain and lose weight. The problem, as he sees it, is that "...people cannot or will not apply this simple bit of arithmetic to their bodies" (Cappon, 1973: p.10).

> If a person is too fat it is because he [sic] eats too much and exercises too little. If a person is too thin it is because he eats too little and exercises (or worries) too much. It's that simple (Cappon, 1973: p.19).

Powers (1980) also contends that the cure for anorexia and/or bulimia relies on individual efforts. Her research concentrates on the physical condition and cause of eating disorders. Powers asserts that an individual will avoid experiencing an eating disorder if she is weaned on breast milk as a baby, remains physically active throughout her childhood, and maintains lifelong open communication with her family. In this model, Powers addresses certain social conditions. The focus is still, however, on individual action in effecting prevention. As well, such a model could only operate in certain traditional social arrangements: such as a nursing mother and one, lifelong nuclear family. Although Powers does situate eating disorders in a social context, it is a context that is limited to specific family arrangements and individual prevention measures.

Andreoli et al. (1990) make three claims that are relevant to the discussion of anorexia and bulimia. First, they claim that the overall prevalence of anorexia and bulimia is unknown. It is known, however, that the occurrence of eating disorders increased dramatically in the last decade, and that women are affected more than ten times as often as men (Andreoli et al., 1990). Epidemiological studies demonstrate that anorexia and bulimia increased from 0.55 per 100,000 population in 1970 to 3.26 per 100,000 population in 1980 in Canada and the United States (Currie, 1988). Andreoli et al. indicate that anorexia causes death in at least 5 per cent of all reported cases,

and that it is often a lifelong disease. The cure rate is approximately 40 to 60 per cent of all diagnosed cases. Cure is defined here as registering normal on the appropriate weight, blood pressure, heart rate and blood sugar scales for the respective age and height charts. The validity of such measures as indicators of success is questionable. Garner et al. (1980) point out that such measures vary within history. What is considered appropriate in terms of weight-height charts, changes from one point in time to the next. The concept of cure then - as understood within this model - is flexible, fashionable, and seemingly arbitrary.

The second point concerns treatment. Andreoli et al. suggest that:

> Most difficult is the restructuring of attitudes about body shape and weight. It is often necessary to accept the misconceptions as immutable while nonetheless encouraging adaptive behaviour (1990: p.424).

Andreoli et al. state that women have misconceptions about their body shape and weight. They propose that these misconceptions are immutable, unchangeable and permanent. What the medical focus precludes is the possibility that the misconceptions are at the core of the problem. It is not suggested that these misconceptions be rectified, or even addressed. Rather, it is suggested that the individual adapt. The issue of adaptive behaviour demonstrates the focus on individual change, while ignoring the need for greater social change.

Finally, Andreoli et al. suggest a curative approach to anorexia and bulimia that is entirely chemical in nature. Drug therapy is the method by which individuals who suffer with anorexia and bulimia are to adapt to their circumstances and live with their misconceptions.

The focus of the medical perspective on anorexia and bulimia centres on a definition that considers the biological and psychiatric effects, addresses treatment in terms of drug and psychiatric therapy, and assesses cause on a very individual level of

excessive achievement orientation. Hacker addresses these three foci in explaining the etiology and treatment of anorexia.

> Anorexia nervosa is primarily a psychologic disorder manifested by hypothalamic dysfunction. It is associated with amenorrhea (absence of menses) and weight loss greater than twenty five percent of ideal body weight. It is most common in white, middle to upper class, success and achievement oriented females. Patients generally deny they are underweight and may manifest lanugo, bradycardia,hyperactivity, constipation, hypotension, or hypercarotenemia. Because death can occur in severe cases, recognition and effective management are important. Therapy consists of explanation, general counselling, and, most importantly, a sufficient caloric intake. In some patients,hormonal replacements and psychiatric care may be required (Hacker, 1986: p.425).

This is the discourse medicine uses to address the problem of eating disorders. This is appropriate for dealing with one aspect of eating disorders; the physical condition itself. This discourse is not appropriate to the discussion of cause and treatment. The medical approach requires a social perspective in order to address adequately both cause and treatment.

The medical approach traditionally used to treat anorexia and bulimia is not having much success, despite claims to the contrary. Gregory (1983) states that the number of women surviving the starvation of anorexia is about 80 per cent of those diagnosed. Of those who do survive, some develop schizophrenia or histrionic personality. Many continue to have eating problems including sporadic and serial bouts of bulimia. While medicine may be saving the lives of women with eating disorders, it is not eliminating the problem. This calls into question what the criteria for cure are within the medical model.

The idea of a cure rate is dependent upon the criteria used to measure it. Throughout most of the medical literature reviewed, cure is represented as restored weight, restored ability to carry out day to day activities, and participation in psychotherapy. These criteria represent the psychological-physical focus in the

concept of cure. Brady (1980) states that cure is, in effect, when two aspects have been addressed: (1) when a psychologic analysis is undertaken in therapy, and (2) when a neuro-endocrinological analysis in the hospital setting is completed. Eating disorders are subsumed under the rubric of medical intervention and the focus does not go further than the physical and psychological components of anorexia and bulimia.

Marcus and Weiner (1989) discuss anorexia nervosa as a psychiatric disorder. Five patterns enacted in childhood make up the steps leading to anorexia. The focus is the individual and the individual's family. They have identified a "...resistant and rebellious quality to the child's (anorexic's) transactions with her family" (Marcus and Weiner, 1989: p.350). This psychosexual-transactional approach aligns family interaction with the development of anorexia. While interesting, this thesis can hardly account for the increase of anorexia in the last two decades, the overwhelming predominance of female anorexia, the significance of socialization outside the familial unit, and the specific, demographic profile of most anorexics. The psychiatric focus of Marcus and Weiner leads inevitably to a reductionist interpretation of anorexic behaviour. There is no consideration of the social circumstances surrounding the events in a woman's life. A woman's actions are assessed without consideration of context. This is a common theme that is evident in all the medical literature I have reviewed. The sociological literature provides a cultural analysis that is so important in understanding weight preoccupation and eating disorders. It does not, however, address the factor of biology or the element of individual response.

Szekely (1988) presents a series of interviews with women who have experienced anorexia or bulimia. Her analysis weds women's relentless pursuit of thinness with society's preoccupation with youth, fitness, fashion and diet. She includes such socio-cultural factors as the changing role of women, the super-woman model, and the cultural icon of thin, controlled flesh.

Szekely (1988) found that the goal of being thin was not genetic or biochemical, but social in nature. The women she interviewed expressed clearly that thinness was a vehicle for asserting an identity. It was as if these women were saying that they didn't exist if they were not thin or pursuing thinness. They were trying to find a way to make their individual existence matter in a social way. Szekely did not specify why only some women experience eating disorders as a result of this cultural expectation (this is an important question that resurfaces throughout my work, and one that I will address in my discussion). For those who did, however, Szekely identified a socio-cultural context to these women's lives that has created a necessity to engage in the relentless pursuit of thinness.

Hutchinson asserts that North American culture "...places a high values on beauty, appearance, and outer image...If this is true for the culture as a whole, it is doubly true for its women" (1982: p.60). In white, middle-class North America, a woman is conditioned to feel accepted and worthwhile only if she can fit a specific body image. Otherwise, she risks being cast as unworthy, unwanted, and unnecessary (Szekely, 1988). Hutchinson maintains that this is chiefly because

> in the fabric of American culture...woman's chief, and perhaps only, role is as ornament, wife, and mother. Fundamental to carrying out her expected role and its consequent fulfilment is the condition that she be attractive enough to snare a mate who can give her the opportunity to live out her biological and social destiny. Thus to be fulfilled in life a woman learns that she must have at least a modicum of that highly prized commodity known as physical beauty (1982: p.60).

Chernin (1985, 1981), expressing similar ideas, suggests that a woman's identity is inextricably tied to appearance. Through all institutions that support or transmit the social order (media, education, employment agencies, government, business, etc.), women are given the message loud and clear that they are what they look like. Eating disorders are a reaction against a kind of female identity that is shallow and

meaningless at best. If a woman is defined by her appearance, and society restricts the image of that appearance to embody thinness, proper muscular structure and appropriate clothing style, a woman may find herself struggling to fit an image that leaves her feeling exhausted and inadequate.

Bazan claims that the source of eating disorders is to be found in the way that this society presents appearance as the measure of a woman.

> Until major changes are made in society, particularly in the status of women as second class Barbie-dolls, there will always be women suffering from eating disorders. We will continue to be defined by our looks, while men are judged by their achievements (Bazan, 1987: p.107).

A woman is defined by how she looks. Appearance suggests qualities of character. To be thin is to be perceived as good, worthy, valuable, and likeable. To be overweight or flabby is to be perceived as slovenly, lazy, and suspicious.

Wooley (1986) studied women who were involved in intensive group therapy for anorexia and bulimia. She found a clear relationship between the development of eating disorders and the cultural importance of thinness. Wooley states that "for the 80's woman, thinness is weighted with meaning. It's become symbolic of strength, independence and achievement, as well as attractiveness" (1986: p.71). Wooley found that the eating behaviour displayed by women in the therapy group was directly related to who these women wanted to be and how they thought they might achieve that.

Koslow (1988) looked at the personal estimates of body fat in eleven and twelve year old girls and boys. His results show that even at this young age, girls tend to overestimate their personal levels of body fat, while boys are usually close to or right on the mark. Koslow states that the distortion of personal body fat that girls (as young as eleven years old) seem to demonstrate relates to the development of anorexia and bulimia in later life.

Turner suggests that the development of anorexia nervosa will not decrease without greater social change. Turner proposes that

> Eating and dieting are of course the topics of a global agro-industry which, through advertising symbolism, connects food with personal status, sexuality and sociability. These socio-cultural problems are compounded for women because we have become an obesophobic society. Although fatness has become a stigmatic sign which transcends class and gender, the demands of ascetic thinness weigh heavier on the bodies of women than men (1990: p.167).

Women are subject to greater sanctions associated with not fitting the thin mould of our culture. Being thin is not just about being a certain body size; it is about all the social baggage attached to body size, like personal worth and sexuality.

Brown and Forgay have researched the causes and conditions surrounding anorexia and bulimia. They suggest that the origins of eating disorders are distinctly social, and the individual's self is affected by these social influences.

> Women's magazines, the fashion industry and the media in general continually reinforce the centrality of appearance ... Prompting the idea that only thin is beautiful, they imply that we are failures if we are fat. The body ideal marketed by these industries creates what Kim Chernin calls the ' tyranny of slenderness' producing self-hate, guilt and insecurity in the majority who inevitably fail to measure up. Under the guise of messages about fashion and fitness, we are really being told women are not good enough. Success, happiness, societal acceptance and self esteem all depend upon being thin (Brown and Forgay, 1987: p.13).

Bordo discusses the tyranny of slenderness and how we are to read this new, slender body. Excess body weight has come to be seen as reflecting personal and moral inadequacy - a lack of will. In order to attain personal adequacy and to demonstrate will power, women have engaged in crash dieting, compulsive exercise and laxative abuse. Bordo suggests that slenderness has become a metaphor for the correct management of desires.

> In the anorexic's lexicon, and throughout dominant Western religious and philosophical traditions, the virile capacity for self-management is decisively coded as male. By contrast, all those bodily spontaneities - hunger, sexuality, the emotions - seen as needful of containment and

> control have been culturally constructed and coded as female (Bordo, 1990: p.101-103).

Maternal femininity, as represented by the classical hourglass figure, is associated with home, husband and family. In an era of change, an era where women are trying to achieve success outside the home, this figure is rejected.

A study by Garner et al. supports Bordo's analysis of a new slender body and women's changing role in society. Garner et al. studied the changing female form from 1970 to 1980. They make the connection between lean bodies and the dieting craze. Garner et al. suggest that

> there has appeared to be a shift in the idealised female shape from the voluptuous, curved figure to the angular, lean look of today. The impact of this changing idealised female shape is exemplified by the pervasiveness of dieting among women (1980: p.483).

Weight preoccupation is linked to the cultural pressures on women to be thin and to diet. Garner et al. documented the weights and measurements of Playboy centrefolds, Miss America pageant contestants, and the general population over the course of a decade. They found that while the centrefolds and pageant contestants were getting thinner and more muscular, the average American woman was getting heavier by about 5 pounds. As Garner et al. indicated, the result of a shrinking ideal for a population that is growing in size will be "intense pressure on some women to diet in spite of possible adverse physical and emotional consequences" (1980: p.490).

An integral feature in the discussion of both Garner et al. and Bordo is that of power to control the course of one's own life. There is a rejection of the narrow, confining role women are expected to perform. Lawrence (1979) suggests that anorexic behaviour is the exercise of power in a society that does not allow or encourage women to have power. Women are conceptualized as caregivers - a group of individuals who are somehow intrinsically characterized by warmth, generosity and servitude. The anorexic exercises power over this perception by rejecting it. The issue of

sexuality is brought into this discussion. Lawrence states that women in North American culture are conceptualized as sexual objects as well as emotional caregivers. The anorexic may be rejecting the narrow and shallow nature of what it is to be female in North America.

> Anorexics appear to need to separate themselves from the environment. They need to define their own limits and set boundaries around themselves. The setting of boundaries around the self is a difficult problem for women as they are at least in part regarded as an aspect of the environment of others. Woman is the carer, the facilitator, receptive and waiting to allow herself to become something in someone else's life. Being very thin seems to say to the world `I have sharp contours, I am not soft, I do not merge with you. I have nothing to give you' (Lawrence, 1979: p.94).

Boskind Lodahl (1976) claims that women are subject to a kind of mixed message in this society. On the one hand, women are expected to enter the wage economy and participate as active and contributing members of the modern world; this entails making money, spending money, and dressing appropriately. On the other hand, women are still expected to be the primary nurturer of husband and children. This entails activities such as reproduction, cooking, cleaning, and maintaining the family in general. Women still get the message loud and clear that their role is to please others. This expectation leads to women looking to others for validation and self-worth (Boskind-Lodahl, 1976). Boskind-Lodahl brings socialization, then, into the discussion of control and anorexia. Women's "heritage of sexual inequality" (Boskind-Lodahl,1976:354) has socialized them to dependency. This sexual inequality must be addressed in any discussion of anorexia, bulimia, and weight preoccupation.

The sociological literature on the development and experience of eating disorders indicates that there are numerous socio-cultural elements involved. The relentless pursuit of thinness is created within a culture that defines women by their appearance. Women learn to discipline their bodies to a greater or lesser degree. The

experience of anorexia and/or bulimia is a direct result of the measures taken to achieve the body beautiful. The various kinds and intensities of behaviours associated with weight preoccupation reflect the even wider range of possible body projects.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

My research was conducted using a qualitative approach to understanding the social causes of weight preoccupation. The value of such an approach is that it allows an individual to transmit to the research the details of an experience in her own words. The methodology is one that recognizes the researcher's inability to articulate a priori the unique and personal experience of another. This methodology also promotes a sensitive approach to a very personal experience. One of the goals of this research was to explore the subjective experience of women who have wrestled with weight preoccupation and associated disorders. Allowing them to tell their own stories in their own words was the best way to achieve this particular goal.

The method of data collection was face-to-face interviews with women self-selected from the university population. The empirical literature suggests that the experience of eating disorders occurs largely in the population between 16 and 28 years of age (Hacker et al., 1986). There is also a far greater occurrence of eating disorders in the middle to upper class female population (Hacker et al., 1986). Women attending university are generally young and middle income, and therefore this group made a reasonable data base.

A purposive, non probability sample was gathered through the use of newspaper advertising on the University of Manitoba campus (see Appendix 1). The advertisement requested the participation of women who define weight preoccupation as problematic in their lives. The sample choice was somewhat problematic. Some selection bias was inevitable. The university population as a sample group was bound to be more or less homogeneous in terms of socio-economic status. A sample drawn from an advertisement also favoured individuals who read the university

paper, were willing to respond to an ad, and wanted to talk about their experience. However, the sample choice was valid for the scope of this study.

The university population was an excellent source of data for the specific age group and background of women who experience weight preoccupation. Interviewing women who vary on the continuum of weight preoccupation resulted in a comprehensive exploration of the experience. They were at various stages of dealing with their experience. Some had never been clinically diagnosed. Others had been in a hospital program, and some had attended counselling sessions. As well, there were those who subjectively defined weight preoccupation as interfering in the course of their lives. So, despite the presumed socioeconomic homogeneity of this population base, the decision to use the university population as a sample group did result in the gathering of rich and descriptive stories from the women involved.

The interview was guided by a very general, open-ended format. The content of the interview schedule was a series of questions relating to the major concepts of both feminist poststructuralism and Foucault (see Appendix 2). In general, the women were asked to describe their background and experiences up to this point in their lives. They were asked what their personal experience had been. In keeping with a Foucauldian analysis, the interview schedule addressed individual, interpersonal, and cultural elements. The interview schedule resulted in the collection of specific information that provided an in-depth look at the reasons why women are preoccupied with their weight, what their understanding is of the genesis of their condition, and how they feel their condition (and that of others like them) can best be ameliorated.

The interview schedule followed the style of Eichler and Lapointe (1985) who suggest a one instance interview to maximize response, as well as interviews that are interactive, involved, and informal in nature. Oakley (1981) details how to conduct an interview that is more fluid in nature than the standard researcher - researched format.

Empathy and rapport play a role in the administering of such an interview. As outlined earlier, the gathering of data is never an objective task. Science, whether social or natural, always has a purpose, a guess, a goal. It is incumbent upon the researcher to identify those goals and admit biases. In the actual interview process, the dialogue must be mutual. Interviewing this way reveals the thin veil of scientific objectivity for the myth that it is, and allows the person to contribute to research rather than be researched.

My methodological decisions were loosely based on some of the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967). My decision to analyze and collect data simultaneously, thereby allowing categories to emerge, was guided by their work on grounded theory. Technically, grounded theory suggests conducting research without the use of a theoretical mandate. However, the theoretical framework for my study did exist a priori. I wanted to utilize only two specific features of grounded theory, however, that would allow me ever more freedom in the interview process. Glaser and Strauss developed grounded theory as a means to allow for conceptual categories and their properties to emerge through the course of data collection. The interview process in my study did allow the categories of these women's experience to be articulated by them directly.

According to Glaser and Strauss, the categories of grounded theory emerge. It is the data itself which creates and modifies these categories, thus ensuring what is called an emergent fit. The use of grounded theory supports the kind of qualitative, inductive research I have done. Grounded theory was also utilized at the stage of analysis, in order to allow for open coding (coding significant categories at first, and selectively reducing coding to a few major categories, concepts, or themes) and emergent fit of the data.

Once my research design was in place, I began the research process by developing an interview guide to be used in the conversation between myself and the

women. The guide consisted of 6 basic themes on the topic of weight preoccupation. The first theme was that of general demographics. The women were asked to tell a little bit about themselves in terms of age, family composition, career aspirations, romantic involvements, and living arrangements. The second theme explored the women's own definition and perception of weight preoccupation. The third theme was an account of the women's past and present behaviour that was considered, by them, to be weight preoccupied. This discussion detailed the specific measures taken by each woman to reach her body ideal. The fourth theme was that of sexuality and attraction. This highlighted how each woman perceived the connection between the pursuit of body perfection and feelings of sexual identity, and the positive or negative judgement of them by others. The fifth theme was a discussion of the interpersonal relationships of each woman. The reaction of others to their weight preoccupation and their exposure to it by others was at the heart of this discussion. Finally, the sixth theme dealt with cultural dynamics. This theme moved the discussion beyond the personal lives of the women, and gave them an opportunity to assess weight preoccupation at a socio-cultural level.

The interview themes, then, moved the conversation to ever more abstract levels of analysis - from the intra-personal, to the interpersonal, to the societal. This was intentional on my part so as to address the pervasive, omnipresent nature of weight preoccupation. It became clear throughout the interviews that this was an accurate assumption - women do experience weight preoccupation as a total experience - personally, interpersonally, and culturally. These themes were developed on the basis of an extensive literature review.

Once the interview guide was completed, an advertisement was placed in The Manitoban, the University student newspaper. On January 15th, 1992, the ad was run in the classified section of the student paper. The ad specifically solicited the participation

of women who were willing to be interviewed about their experience with weight preoccupation and body image. Willing participants were asked to contact me at my home phone number. Confidentiality was guaranteed directly in the advertisement. The advertisement ran from January 15th to January 31, 1992. During that time, 16 women responded and expressed their willingness to participate and their general interest in the research. Of those original 16, 12 were actually interviewed. Two of the original women did not return my phone calls to arrange a meeting time after the initial contact was made by them. One woman informed me just prior to our interview date that she had changed her mind, and did not feel comfortable discussing her experiences with anyone at this time. One other woman did return my phone calls and arranged a time for an interview. At the scheduled time, however, she did not show up, and said that she was too busy when I contacted her again to inquire what had happened. Of the 12 who did participate, all had read the advertisement in the newspaper, and took the initiative to phone and arrange an interview. The quality of the data collected in the interviews with these 12 women was substantial, and rich in description and analysis.

Prior to the interviews actually taking place, I developed a consent form for each woman to read and sign (see Appendix 3). The consent form consisted of an information page, and a written agreement of participation for the woman to sign. The information page presented a short synopsis of the stated goals and objectives of the research, as well as a brief discussion of why such research was important. The terms of participation were outlined in detail, including what would be asked in the interview, what would be done with the data, what the rights of the participant were, and my assurance of strict confidentiality. I also expressed my gratitude for the respondent's participation in the research. The written agreement of participation was signed and dated by both myself and the participant just prior to the beginning of the interview.

The interviews took place in a designated office at the University of Manitoba. They were conducted between the beginning of February, 1992 and the middle of March, 1992. The interviews ranged in length anywhere from 1 to 3 hours. All interviews were audiotaped, and transcribed. The actual interview process was both exciting and difficult. The chosen method of data collection made for a very fluid, circular process filled with questions, confirmations, illuminations, and discoveries. I document the process of the actual data collection to show both its virtues and pitfalls.

Initially, the interview process was not targeting the issues very well. The first interview was not that well directed, and much of the potential for rich and descriptive data was lost as I tried to keep the conversation on topic. Eventually, through the course of the first interview, some changes were made to the interview guide that better addressed weight preoccupation and body image. The kind of emotions one associated with a negative body image was an issue that came up, and a question about this was added to the interview guide. I also added a question on how one assessed the attractiveness of others. This addition brought out a common perception - that other people can be attractive regardless of shape or fashion, while a weight preoccupied woman does not consider herself attractive to others in any way. Both these changes were made to the interview guide when I saw what kind of valuable information the discussion of these issues brought forth.

In the second interview, a third component was added to the guide. The woman discussed how being physically closed - caused by body insecurity and feelings of inadequacy - led to being emotionally closed. This caused her to feel that she was unable to be intimate with her partner on any level. She suggested that being unsatisfied with her body made her romantic relationships equally unsatisfactory. This was an important issue that I had wanted to address, but did not in the original guide. The original questions did address romantic relationships. Initially, however, these

questions did not illicit the responses I was seeking. The second woman I interviewed helped me to focus my questions in this area, and the interview guide was reformulated accordingly. I included a group of questions on how being weight preoccupied did or did not interfere with the ability to be open to experiences, relationships, and ideas.

Two other important questions were added to the guide by the end of the second interview. In the section on interpersonal relationships, I began to ask if any of the women's friends or family members had ever been involved in weight preoccupied behaviour, and how, if at all, this may have affected them. It was useful to know how these women assessed the experiences of others, and how they felt those experiences shaped or influenced their own behaviour. As well, I wanted to know if there were any circumstances under which these women felt it was okay to suspend weight preoccupied behaviour (e.g., pregnancy, long term commitment, old age). This became a very good way to explore why women felt the need to engage in body projects in the first place. The question of whether the body is at the core of female sexuality was addressed directly through this kind of discussion. In the course of only 2 interviews, 2 major themes had already been made evident - that weight preoccupation was directly involved in some way with issues of sexuality, and that the body was considered entirely separate from the self.

There are final changes to the interview guide that are worth noting. In trying to understand how attractiveness and un-attractiveness were perceived, and how these definitions are packaged, I asked women to describe to me what each type of woman is like. I had hoped to get a full description of the perceived lifestyle and appearance of attractive and unattractive women. It was an effort to explore some of the characteristics associated with appearance (e.g. overweight people as slovenly and lazy, and thin people as popular and interesting). This turned out to be a more difficult question than I had anticipated. It did not at all get to the root of what kind of lifestyle

baggage comes with what kind of body type, and how these character assessments affect women's self perceptions. Some women had an easier time thinking of people they know; women they think are attractive, and women they think are unattractive. The problem I encountered with this angle was that the women could not separate liking someone, and thinking they were attractive, and vice versa. In the end, this line of questioning was abandoned altogether.

The final change made to the interview guide came about as women offered their methods of coping strategies for dealing with weight preoccupation. Many of the women, particularly the older ones, had developed methods and strategies to avoid getting into the kinds of destructive body behaviours they had engaged in when they were younger. The extent to which many of them had to go to remain outside weight preoccupation was so extreme, I felt it strongly indicated the extent of the original problem. I formally added it to the interview guide by the fourth interview.

As well, by the fourth interview, 2 other major themes became evident. The third theme I identified was the issue of space. All of the women discussed the issue of space as the way they perceived their body's imperfections. These women consistently described themselves as taking up too much space, or fitting into too large clothing, or feeling emotionally over sized (too big, too boisterous, too visible). In some way, each woman described feeling like Gulliver in Lilliput, either physically or personally. No matter what the woman's actual size, she felt she was too big for her world. Or is it that the world is presented as unrealistically small?

The fourth theme I identified was the strongest, most often cited perception associated with weight preoccupation and body image. That was the feeling of always being watched, and watching others. It was other people's negative judgements, real or imagined, that contributed to these women defining themselves as inadequate. For most of the women in this study, this resulted in them becoming incapable of defining

themselves as good, strong, attractive, desirable people. Some women had even stopped going out. The feeling of "all eyes on her" was crippling to many of the women. The unshakable sense that someone was not just looking, but judging her, made each woman want to hide at some time or another. The judges themselves were identified by the women as both male and female, equals and superiors, intimates and total strangers.

There were a few other issues that arose during the course of the interviews. One woman told me that the language in my questioning was undeniably heterosexist. In both my language and my direction, I was assuming that women were seeking permanent heterosexual unions by designing the body perfect. It was as though, she claimed, I was assuming that women involved in weight preoccupation were constructing their bodies for men, and that the end goal was to catch a man. In discussing her experience of weight preoccupation, she identified women as the primary judges in the competition for body perfection. Women friends were harder on her appearance than male friends. As a lesbian, she had also experienced pressures to appear just so from her female partners. She stated that in her relationships with both men and women, there was equally strong pressure of being assessed as beautiful. This gaze that has been identified by every woman in this study, and in other research, is not limited to a male gaze. The pervasive feeling of being watched and judged comes from a source greater than individual men or women. The idea of women being perfect in body and form has pervaded every relationship in our society. On an even greater level, the need to please generally characterizes women's human relationships in this culture. It does not matter whether these relationships are romantic, platonic, or familial. From that point forward, I ensured that my language was inclusive and I stopped making the assumption that all weight preoccupied women are trying to seek and secure Mr. Right.

Another area of difficulty I encountered during the interview process was that many of the women asked me what they could do to break the cycle of weight preoccupation they had been living with. I was unsure as to how much help and advice I could offer as a researcher in the process of data collection. It seemed to me, however, that my chosen method of research allowed me to move beyond those kinds of strict relationship definitions within the context of research. I was trying to make the process as non-hierarchical and mutually beneficial as possible. Therefore, I did offer some advice, and directed some women to other sources for help when it was requested. I do not feel that this violated any ethical considerations in the research. On the contrary, I feel that it would have been entirely unethical to deny these women access to resources I knew of, simply to maintain some kind of false pretence of research purity.

This leads me to another issue that I had to address during the research process. The method I chose to use necessitated the presence of my voice in the research. My own participation in the interviews was as strong and visible as that of the women. There can be no doubt that I was a factor in the course that each interview took. My agenda, my moods, my appearance, my private assessment of each woman - in some way these all had to affect each conversation differently. There was, in fact, very little uniformity from one interview to the next. How does any of this effect the research? No one method allows for the complete removal of researcher effect. Even when one completes a survey in privacy, the presence of the researcher is felt in the work, and anticipated in the chosen responses. Each researcher, regardless of the method chosen, affects her research in some way. It is as Oakley states:

> A feminist methodology of social science requires that...the mythology of `hygenic' research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than

> dangerous bias - it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives (1981: p.58).

The way in which my voice affected my research was more of an addition than a detriment. Often times, the level of personal information that was relayed to me was a direct result of my own disclosure. I clearly stated my position when asked, and this often led to further, more in depth information through conversation. I found that Oakley's (1981) position on researcher involvement supported my participation with the women in this study.

As well, as mentioned earlier, many of the women requested resources to help them better understand their own experience with weight preoccupation. I directed them to literature and organizations that may help them come to terms with their own personal struggles. So, did my voice as a presence in the research have an effect? It most certainly did. Is that a cause for concern, or a potential cause of skewed research results? Not at all. The quality of data was enhanced by all aspects of the chosen method - the presence of my voice included.

This brings me to the discussion of the chosen method as a whole. It is my assessment that the method chosen for this research was highly successful and positive. There were many issues that I had to grapple with throughout the course of the research. It was the method that allowed me the room to negotiate my way through this messy process. I discovered early on that research is not as sanitary and linear as it seems when presented in journal articles. Stanley and Wise (1979) discuss research experience as value-laden and entirely non-hygenic.

> Research experience...is almost invariably different from most descriptions of social science research. The mythology of `hygenic research' not only presents an over-simplistic picture, it is frequently misleading in that it emphasizes the `objective, value-free' involvement of the researcher and suggests that she can be there without having any greater involvement than simple presence. We emphasize that all research involves, as its basis, a relationship, an interaction, between researcher and researched...Essentially, this critique maintains that

> distinctions between aspects of research which can, and which cannot, be conducted in a value-free manner (Weber,1949) are unrealistic (Stanley and Wise, 1979: p.372).

In my own research experience, I discovered that research is a constant process of forward progression, road block encounters, strategy adjustments, and shots in the dark. I did not have building block theory on which to base my data collection. I did not have a hypothesis to prove or disprove. What I did have was extensive substantive knowledge of the research problem, Foucault's theory of culture coupled with post structuralism's theory of gender identity to inform my work, and some techniques in grounded research. This allowed me to explore issues as they arose, analyze data as it formed, alter the process as necessary, and remain above the standard subject-object tradition of research relationships. This was perhaps the most significant element of the entire research process, and on its own is worthy of further discussion.

It was the choice of method that allowed for much of the richness and depth of the data collected. The main goal of this research was to allow women to speak of their lived experiences in their own words. There was no better design to ensure that this goal was reached than the design utilized. Letting the `subject' speak also meant having to take notice of the subject. There was no false division between the researcher and the object of research, nor was there any premise of anonymity or facelessness. Every woman who participated in the research had to be recognized as an individual, with unique experiences and perceptions. Only from the women themselves could I have heard how these women perceive their experience in relation to the greater culture. Also, the research design enabled me to bring out the theoretical issues that I have discussed previously. I would not have understood how taking a heterosexist position on this issue excluded homosexual relationships and platonic relationships between women. I would not have been able to document the depth of the problem without

exploring women's own coping strategies. I would not have considered that `space' was an issue that could be addressed theoretically.

The virtues to this kind of data collection are clear. I was allowed to explore in depth the perception of weight preoccupation by women involved in it. I was able to document the lived experiences of these women, and draw out the commonalities and uniqueness within them. And, finally, I found specific theoretical issues within the data that profoundly effects the way weight preoccupation must be understood, and addressed by health care practitioners and women alike.

The experience of this research was, for me, invaluable. As discussed previously, my research was notably richer for the choice of methodology. As well, my understanding of and appreciation for research in general was greatly enhanced. In the messy, scattered process, I discovered the creative side of research. Through this process, I can now outline four very important themes that seem to characterize the experience of weight preoccupation for the women in my study. These themes are (1) the idea of physical and personal space, (2) the notion of a pervasive sense of gaze, (3) women's sexual identity as inextricably tied to physical appearance, and finally, (4) the separation of mind and body as encouraged by participation in weight preoccupation. These themes will be explored in the chapters which follow.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## PRESENTATION OF THE DATA: INTERVIEW PRECIS

Prior to the discussion of the thematic content, I have included the interview precis to familiarize the reader with the women involved in the research, and to hear their individual stories specifically. The names of the women are pseudonyms meant to ensure the promise of confidentiality. Some of the women's personal details have not been included in the precis so as not to jeopardize the confidential nature of the study. An in-depth discussion of the analysis will follow the precis.

### LAURA

Laura is 21 years old and currently resides with her family of origin which consists of 2 parents, 3 brothers, and 1 sister. At this time, Laura is engaged to be married to her boyfriend of 3 years. Laura has been involved in weight preoccupied behaviour since she was 9 years old. Her dance coach informed her that she would not proceed to the higher levels of dance if she did not lose weight. From that time forward, Laura was concerned with her body. She took great pains to maintain discipline and control in her eating and fitness habits. At one time, Laura was obsessive about running, dancing, and dieting. Laura identified many different ways she hides her body in clothes, positions, and activity. She often felt as though she was taking up too much space - in clothing, during sexual activity, and as a general physical presence. Her greatest difficulty with the whole body image issue is the endless watching - her watching herself, her watching others, others watching her, etc. She identified a hierarchy of view, so to speak, as in the case of coaches, bosses, and parents. The judgements of these "higher-ups" mattered a great deal to her. Laura was not too critical of her situation or the situation of women in general in terms of weight preoccupation. She admitted that she is still seriously involved in and with body image issues, and that she always will be if that's what it takes to achieve physical desirability. The opinion of her fiance did not in

any way ameliorate these feelings. Laura still conducts her life according to the "no pain, no gain" motto.

SARAH

Sarah is 26 years old, born in Winnipeg, and currently resides with her husband of 2 years. Her family of origin consists of 2 parents, and 1 younger brother. Sarah has been involved in weight preoccupied behaviour since she was 11 years old. At that time, her gymnastics coach informed her that if she planned to continue to the higher levels of competition, she must reduce her fat to muscle ratio. Since that time, Sarah has been afraid of never being accepted for who she is, if she did not fit the right physical mould. For her, it became an issue that affected all areas of her life - it was the defining factor in all subsequent relationships and choices.

At one time, Sarah was totally absorbed in the business of body construction. She ran sometimes twice a day, and monitored everything that she ate. Sarah admitted that this issue still interferes in her life in various ways. She is still sent into a tailspin if she can't fit into her size clothing; she cannot let herself be with her husband sexually if she feels fat, and she experiences enormous guilt if she does not stick to her diet and fitness regimen. That regimen presently consists of running one half hour a day, and planning and preparing healthy, nutritious meals for her and her husband.

Sarah discussed, at great length, the separation she feels between who she knows she is, and what her body presents. This separation of body and self causes for Sarah a kind of personality split. While she admits that she is tired of addressing her body as a foreign object, she does not feel that, in this society, she can ignore the issue without sanction. Sarah identified such sanctions as coming from both men and women.

One interesting point Sarah raised was that she knew there was an element of human agency in all this. Sarah felt that if she could ever take control and turn away

from body centred pressures and expectations, she would be free to pursue other more important, and satisfying, avenues.

JEANANNE

Jeananne is 23 years old, born and raised in Winnipeg, and currently resides with her family of origin, which consists of 2 parents and 1 younger brother. Jeananne has been involved in weight preoccupied behaviour since she was 10 years old. She became aware of her body as problematic because of her family's constant jibes and insults about her "baby fat." Jeananne has since been constantly concerned with how she looks to others, what others are thinking about her appearance, and how she can achieve some physical state of satisfaction where she would not have to focus on these issues anymore.

Jeananne has at one time or another been on every kind of formal diet, as well as fasts, pills, and shakes. She punishes herself when she strays from her regimens, and is embarrassed about having to be involved in these regimens at all. Jeananne also identified feeling as though her body and her person were not the same thing. While personality was intrinsic and acceptable, the body was considered deviant and somehow separate from who she is. Jeananne feels she will not achieve a sense of comfort, confidence, or satisfaction until she achieves her version of an ideal body. Her anxiety is compounded by the frustration she feels at being subject to these feelings of inadequacy in the first place.

Diets, weight, and clothing size have been the focus of Jeananne's successes and failures for so long now that she cannot imagine ever relaxing her body ideal to something she knows would be more realistic. Weight preoccupation has become an intrinsic part of who she is. For her, the issue is about control and punishment. Control is the path to body perfection, and punishment is the consequence for straying off the path.

Jeananne made the point that the language and tone of my research implied a heterosexual individual in search of a heterosexual relationship. Jeananne pointed out that such an assumption is erroneous, and that for lesbians, the pressure to maintain the body beautiful is no less than the pressure on heterosexual women. Jeananne stated that women have become their own jailers, and punish each other as readily as they punish themselves This is discussed in some detail in Chapter 6.

LENA

Lena is 18 years old, born in the Middle East and raised in Winnipeg, and currently resides with her family of origin, which consists of 2 parents. Her two older sisters live outside the home. Lena has been involved in weight preoccupied behaviour since her early teens. She became aware of her body as problematic when her older sisters began to tease her about her weight and chest size. Lena has chosen to focus more on fitness than diet. Lena is quite confident and outgoing in her relationships and activities. She finds it frustrating that her body remains an issue for her at all.

Lena's first point was about not feeling like she could show her true self with her body being less than perfect. She could not choose clothes that exhibited her personality, and could not join activities that would make her happy. Lena considers her body an obstacle to full living. She is frustrated by her feelings of discomfort with her appearance. There is always a feeling that something is wrong with her. Lena feels like an unwilling participant in the "cultural contest for the best body." She felt that no matter what she looked like, whoever was judging the contest would never let her win.

Lena spoke in detail about fitting in. Issues of space were addressed in relation to how one fits in the world. Lena feels as though she is squeezed in - clothes don't fit, furniture is uncomfortable, rooms are too small. Lena always feels as though she is being watched. Confidence and happiness allude her as long as she feels she is judged as inadequate. Lena had a lot of trouble answering the questions because she has tried to

convince herself that these issues no longer affect her. However, as Lena herself notes, as long as she considers her fitness regimen mandatory, and certain social situations make her feel inadequate and uncomfortable, weight preoccupation issues exist for her in a very real way. The most Lena hopes for is one day to be able to ignore it all.

MAGGIE

Maggie is 22 years old, born and raised in Winnipeg, and currently resides with her family of origin, which consists of 2 parents, and 2 older brothers. Maggie began her experience with weight preoccupation when, at the age of 8, her mother began monitoring her food intake and not that of her older brothers. The message that her body was substandard was repeated by her swimming coach at the same time, who told her that if she did not lose weight, she could not continue competition. Since that time, Maggie has been involved in counting calories, diet pills, and her own weight loss diets. Maggie has recently tried to insert a sense of balance into her life, and tries to exercise more than deny herself food. However, when she is not working out or monitoring her food, Maggie cannot help but feel like a "lazy sloth."

She is constantly involved in monitoring and assessing her body. Maggie says she has made a life skill out of regulating herself. If she does not maintain this regulation, she becomes disgusted with herself. At that point, Maggie feels the whole world must know how she has slipped, and they too must be disgusted with her. Being attractive to other people is very important to Maggie. She can be sexually attracted to someone's personality, but cannot conceive of how someone could ever be attracted to her because of how she looks.

Maggie has always felt that nothing she ever does is good enough. This includes her appearance. Maggie identified her weight preoccupation and that of other women as a tradition - one that is inadvertently passed down from generation to

generation. This tradition is, for Maggie, here to stay. Maggie is convinced that she will never be comfortable with, or in, her own skin.

SHEILA

Sheila is 19 years old, born and raised in Winnipeg, and is currently living with her family of origin, which consists of 2 parents, 2 brothers, and 4 sisters. Sheila and her sister closest in age are the only 2 children presently living at home. Sheila has had difficulty with weight preoccupation since she was 9 years old. At that time, she was teased by her brother about being pudgy and chubby, and looking pregnant. Since that time, Sheila has not had a moment's peace with her body.

Everything in her life is affected by her weight preoccupation. Sheila identified such feelings as fear, anger, discomfort, and nervousness as characterizing most aspects of her everyday life. There is no control in her life. Sheila feels that her body refuses to be controlled. Her characterization of her body and food in general is that of an unwavering enemy, always plotting her demise.

In the recent past, Sheila took diet pills, laxatives, went on fasts, counted calories, went on Weight Watcher's, Slim-Fast, and the Pritikin diet. She has tried pills that speed up your metabolism and others that suppress your appetite. She has tried vomiting and starvation many times before. The reason she has tried to stop doing these things is because she felt as though she was lost to herself. Sheila doesn't know who she is anymore, and it scares her.

Sheila stated that she was so introspective, and self absorbed at one point, she could not even think of anything else. Her grades suffered, her relationships suffered, and her sense of personal identity suffered. She is trying hard to get back on track now, but did suggest that this is going to be a struggle forever. Food and the body were characterized as the enemies.

Sheila feels she takes up too much space, and is constantly aware of being watched and measured up by others. Sheila goes to great lengths to hide herself, her body, and her problems from those around her. She also does not trust the opinion of anyone else, so even if she could ask for help, she wouldn't. Sheila stated that she has nowhere where she feels safe - "there is no safe place." She doesn't want somewhere where this issue is not important, but rather a place where her body is considered perfect in every way. Avoidance is Sheila's only coping strategy right now. She is trying to focus on health instead of weight, but is finding that any focus on body at all leads her to the same place - uncontrollable dissatisfaction with her body, herself, and her life.

KATHERINE

Katherine is 21 years old, born and raised in Winnipeg, and currently resides with her family of origin. Katherine is Sheila's sister. They live at home together. For Katherine, weight preoccupation has always been a question of allowance -what you are or are not allowed to eat, wear, do, etc. The degree of allowance always had to be watched and controlled. Slipping up meant painful, self-inflicted disciplinary measures. Katherine has been involved in weight preoccupied behaviour since she was in grade seven. A fellow classmate was comparing the breasts of all the girls in the class, and Katherine overheard him say that hers were too soft and flabby. Katherine remembers being totally devastated by this comment, and began her adversarial relationship with her body at that time. She felt that she could not be herself while her body was anything less than perfect. It was as if she had to hide her personality until her body accurately reflected what a special, vivacious, interesting person she was. She mentioned feeling as though she were losing herself when she got too involved in body image issues.

Katherine also experienced difficulty with space. She felt too big in social situations, clothing, and day to day living in general. Katherine went to great lengths to

hide. She would play wallflower at social gatherings, she would dress in baggy clothes, she would sometimes just stay home. Katherine described one incident when she did get up the courage to go swimming, and ended up sneaking out of the pool with her back directly up against the wall. She is constantly judging herself according to how she believes others must see her. While she cannot escape this kind of behaviour, it "enrages" her.

Katherine feels that it is unfair and ludicrous that she should experience these feelings at all. Katherine also feels that she cannot escape a guilt-ridden relationship with food. Food is constructed as the enemy. Katherine feels that she is caught between a rock and a hard place. She is sanctioned if she does not monitor her weight and appearance, and she feels ridiculous when she does. Katherine lives day to day with the feeling of not being able to "get it right." She feels terrible when she is being "policed" by others, and feels worse when she catches herself doing it to others. It is what Katherine calls "the unwritten rules of our culture." The beginning of the end of weight preoccupation is, for Katherine, the breaking of the chain at the grassroots level. Katherine wants to begin by changing the way she treats herself and the way she treats others. This is something she has recently begun doing. Katherine believes that this will translate into greater social change at some level.

MARLA

Marla is 23 years old, born and raised in Northwestern Ontario, and currently lives with her family of origin in Winnipeg, which consists of her father, her step-mother, an older sister, and 2 half-sisters. Marla has been involved in weight preoccupied behaviour since she was 12 years old. At that time, Marla began to see herself in photographs as unusually large. There was a particular photo taken at a school dance that Marla felt made her "look like a cow." From that point forward, Marla has tried to control her body development in every way.

She has been dieting since she was 13 years old. She has not eaten a morsel in as long as two weeks, has eaten as little as 600 calories a day, taken laxatives, vomited, and is presently eating only 1200 calories a day. When asked what weight preoccupation was about for her, Marla responded that it was all about space. How much space she took up, and what all her sizes were relative to others has been Marla's obsession for almost 10 years. If she were only smaller, Marla claims she would be happier, more confident, and more appealing. If only she were smaller, everything would be easier.

Marla also felt judged and watched by everyone. She doesn't trust anyone's opinion, and feels every compliment and criticism has some underlying motive. Marla feels that everyone who looks at her (and she believes everyone does) sees a woman whose hips, thighs, stomach, breasts, and buttocks are "so enormous it is grotesque." There is no freedom for Marla, no respite from trying to control her body and her appetite. She stated outright that she cannot trust herself, or anyone else, on the issue of her body or her appearance.

Marla also admitted that she judges others as harshly as she judges herself. If a woman is heavier, regardless of age, or even pregnancy, she is to be sanctioned. Marla feels that large women should be ashamed of themselves. Happiness comes only with appetite control, and food is the proverbial devil on the shoulder. Marla feels that the source of all "body obsessions" is men's need to perceive women as "embodied perfection." If women had the power men have, Marla states, women would expect the same perfection of men. It is "the way of the world." Marla does not foresee a change of any kind in the future, and does not expect ever to escape weight preoccupation in her lifetime.

LUCY

Lucy is 20 years old, born and raised in a small town in western Manitoba, and currently living in residence at the university. She is an only child of two parents, who still live in her home town. Lucy has been involved in weight preoccupied behaviour since she was 11 years old. Since that time, everything she has done has been body conscious. Lucy remembers the first time she became aware of her body as problematic. It was at a family wedding, and two of her uncles warned her about getting as big as her cousin, who was quite large. The very next day, Lucy stopped eating, in effect, for the rest of the summer, and lost 25 pounds. She was rewarded with compliments and the envy of others.

To this day, Lucy engages in behaviour that will win the envy of others again. For her, it is a game "where you see how far you can push yourself before you can't go on." When Lucy does slip up on her regimen, she is repulsed and disgusted with herself. Lucy works out compulsively and hardly eats at all. If she could afford it, she would have cosmetic surgery on everything - liposuction, facelifts, lip injections, breast augmentation, dyed eye colour, and a nose job. Weight preoccupation has become such a focus in her life that Lucy feels she cannot abandon her behaviour. She would, as she states, "lose herself." Who she is has become what she does in terms of body construction. Lucy does not understand how women live without this kind of focus guiding their lives. Women who do not participate in successful weight preoccupation are considered "slovenly" and "pathetic."

Lucy does not see anything wrong with her behaviour. While on the one hand, she would like to spend her time in other ways, she cannot think of a greater success than achieving the perfect body. Lucy is willing to do anything to make that happen. She does not appreciate anyone telling her that what she is doing is dangerous or unnecessary. People who suggest that to her (friends, doctors) are not to be trusted. Lucy feels that given half a chance, people will sabotage her efforts in order to

undermine her popularity. Her romantic relationships have never survived for any length of time because, inevitably, her boyfriends want her to do something other than obsess about her body, and at that point, she leaves them.

Lucy knows that she has a negative image of herself, but she claims that that is who she is, and she wants that left well enough alone. Lucy feels that what she does is her choice, and her business. She was quite hostile on this point. She will stop hurting herself when she is happy with her body, although she feels that day may never come. Lucy intends to continue constructing her body in whatever ways she can. Lucy does not see any social cause or origin of her problems. This is her life, her problem, and she has no expectations of being alive long enough to consider what may happen as she grows older. Lucy said that she will not live past 30, but she "will die a beautiful corpse."

ANNA

Anna is 23 years old, born and raised in Winnipeg, and currently resides with her family of origin, which consists of 2 parents, and 1 younger brother. Anna has been involved in weight preoccupation since she was 16 years old. At that time, she accompanied a girlfriend to the beach, and when she saw her friend's body, she could not believe that model figures actually existed outside of movies and magazines, and she felt totally inadequate. From that day forward, she has dieted constantly, weighed herself everyday, taken bennies (illegal amphetamines) and diet pills, eaten very little, and exercised twice a day. Anna claimed that doing these things gave her a sense of relief and control, as well approval.

Anna stated that it does make her very angry that weight preoccupation has this kind of impact on her whole life, but she does not feel that she can escape it. It is very frustrating to her to understand where her feelings of inadequacy are coming from, and still to feel like she has to participate in body construction. Anna tries to hide herself when she feels like she is being looked at, which is most of the time. Her body

and appearance are always forefront on her mind, and she believes that is also on the minds of people looking at her. Anna expressed a sense of "wanting the earth to open up and swallow [her]" when she feels stared at. The gazes of others and her own gaze of herself makes her paralysingly self conscious.

For Anna, self control and self esteem are one in the same. She cannot feel good at all if she is not actively pursuing body perfection. Even when she is involved in weight preoccupied behaviour, and has some measure of control over her appearance, she cannot shake the feeling that she is fooling everybody. Anna claims that even when she should feel adequate, and successful, she finds things to feel bad about. Nothing is ever good enough. Anna cannot let herself get involved romantically with someone because she cannot believe anyone finds her attractive. In a sexual situation, Anna is too busy remaining stretched out and slender to enjoy physical contact. She cannot accept any kind of compliment, sexual or otherwise.

Anna lives with a mind - body split that characterizes so many weight preoccupied women. Who she is is not accurately reflected by her body. It is as if her body betrays her true self. Anna believes that if young girls can be taught to appreciate things about themselves other than being pretty and desirable, there is a chance for future generations of women not to waste themselves and their lives on this "hollow pursuit."

Anna identifies a strong link between not being able to succeed at things and being obsessed with looking good. Being sexually appealing is the defining factor for most young women's lives and choices. Anna would like to see other kinds of successes being touted as acceptable and admirable pursuits for women. Anna believes that much of her problem stems from a deeply planted need to please others. Anna believes that if young girls learn that they are valuable, and that their needs can be taken care of first, weight preoccupation may subside for future generations. Anna

does not rule out the possibility that one day, she will learn to put all this in perspective and move on to other things in her life as well.

MARIA

Maria is 23 years old, born and raised in Winnipeg, and currently resides with her mother and step-father. She has 2 older brothers who live outside the family home. Maria is engaged to be married within the year. Maria's difficulty with weight preoccupation began when she was in grade 3. At that time, her mother began to warn her about getting too fat, and told her to lose some weight. Maria began dieting and hasn't stopped to this day. Maria stated that she feels terrible about what she does to lose weight, but feels that she has no choice. The primary feeling that characterizes her weight preoccupation is guilt. Maria identified a double bind of feeling badly when she did diet, and badly when she did not. The reason Maria chooses to remain a chronic dieter is because then, although she feels bad, she also feels some sense of control - an aspect missing from most things in her life.

Maria is constantly concerned about what other people think of her. She feels that she is always being evaluated by seen and unseen eyes. It makes her look at herself more critically than she would like to. If Maria could, she said she would just forget the whole thing. She only recently started to normalize her eating habits. Maria was scared by the fact that she did not have any kind of normal menstrual cycle for well over a year. As well, her fiance is helping her get over some of her weight preoccupation. One of Maria's biggest complaints about weight preoccupation is how much money other people are making on her insecurities. When she learned some of what big business makes in the diet and fitness industry, Maria began to re-evaluate her involvement. She also began to question the benefits of diet and fitness as presented by the industry. Maria claimed that when she looked at the issue critically, she was

appalled to see the fostering of insecurity and unhappiness that characterizes the business and their advertising.

Maria suffers from a pervasive feeling a failure and not measuring up. She knows that she is not alone in never feeling that she is good enough. But she cannot escape the feeling that she "should suffer" for appearance. Maria feels that her weight preoccupation interferes with all her choices, activities, and relationships. She cannot be confident enough or satisfied with herself enough to go out into the world and do what she wants. Weight preoccupation affects her emotionally, spiritually, and sexually. Maria doesn't want to be controlled by what she sees and hears, but she knows that that is where her sense of inadequacy comes from - the greater culture. Some days, Maria wishes she were small enough to be invisible. After stating this, Maria acknowledged that that is exactly how she is supposed to feel - as a woman in this society.

TANNIS

Tannis is 26 years old, born and raised in Winnipeg, and currently resides with her family of origin, which consists of 2 parents. Tannis has 1 older sister who lives outside the family home. Tannis has been involved in weight preoccupied behaviour since she was 10 years old. At that time, Tannis was visiting family, and one of her older cousins told her that she was getting fat and should watch out. From that time forward, Tannis has watched her weight and exercised with religious regularity. Tannis stated that it was empowering to know that she was controlling the size and shape of her body. Tannis believed she was fighting biology and genetics, and winning. She acknowledged feeling that she was always being watched and evaluated by others. Tannis believes that with discipline, evaluation can be positive.

She stated that the opinion of others was important, and everybody cared about what everybody else thinks. "Those people who say that they don't are only

fooling themselves," according to Tannis. "Nobody is happy being fat." For Tannis, fat is not just physical. It means "sluggish, slow, lazy and tired." That fat feeling can sneak up on you without any actual change in appearance. At one time, Tannis was involved in anorexic behaviour. It got to the point where it controlled Tannis instead of the other way around. Tannis identified losing herself in it all and being very scared by that. That was when she turned away from starving herself to controlling her fat intake and exercising religiously. At least this way, Tannis claims, her "head stayed in the game."

Tannis admits that she evaluates other women all the time. Sometimes, when she evaluates someone negatively, it makes her feel better that there are others in worse shape than she. While these kinds of assessments don't make her feel very good about herself, she cannot seem to help doing it. Tannis is waiting for "one definitive experience" to get her out of the dieting cycle. She wants to re-claim her body, her feelings, and her personality, but she does not know where to begin. Tannis feels that a lot of what she does, she does for men. She cannot separate sexuality and appearance, and feels that that is an intentional connection on the part of the fashion and diet industry. How one looks is not who one is, sexually or otherwise. But that is exactly the way Tannis sees it being marketed.

Tannis is convinced that the best diet is to just stop worrying about it, and live with balance. But, for Tannis, this is easier said than done. There is a real difficulty with that kind of decision in this kind of society. As Tannis states, "women will always walk around thinking they're less than they are, and men think they're more." Interestingly, Tannis claims that she has a greater fear of getting old looking than getting fat. Tannis suggested that it was easier to control weight than age. For Tannis, food is a definite enemy against beauty. She is trying to overcome this, but admits that it is not easy when everyone around her has that same perception.

Tannis is tired of living in denial, and in competition. Women against women are far worse for Tannis that men against women. Tannis wants to see a bond between women on this issue instead of one pitted against the other. Tannis has travelled extensively, and feels that if women could see the way some people have to live, they would snap out of this "silly obsession." Tannis wants women to remember what normal, balanced living is like, instead of the warped focus on body and food that she lives with in this culture. Tannis believes that she has to start with herself if things are ever going to change.

## CHAPTER SIX

## ANALYSIS OF THEMATIC CONTENT

What was most interesting in the study findings were those themes, or experiences, that were common to the 12 women I interviewed. While there were individual differences in the kind of body projects engaged in, the duration and timing of the worst of weight preoccupied behaviour, and the response and reaction a given woman received from her family, friends, and various practitioners, it was the 4 common themes that were the most thought provoking and promising ideas produced by this research. As outlined in chapter 4, these themes highlight the characteristic features of the experience of weight preoccupation for the women I interviewed. They also represent 4 important components of weight preoccupation that have received little discussion from the various disciplines looking at the issue. The thematic content of this research, then, adds immeasurably to the existing body of work on women, the body, and society.

### PERSONAL AND PHYSICAL SPACE

The first theme I will explore is the concept of `space' in relation to body image. The notion of physical and personal space was discussed in almost every interview. The feeling of `taking up too much space' was a common sentiment expressed by the women. This feeling was both material (physical) and psycho-social. Physical space was defined as a pervasive feeling of being physically too large for clothes, furniture, rooms, sports, and sexual activity. It is all about actual numbers in relation to size.

> I think I've...always had these issues floating around for quite awhile. I always felt like I should be able to fit into the size 26 jeans. And if I couldn't get those jeans on, then there were problems...Well, it's not so bad if I'm feeling uncomfortable about my weight. But if I'm feeling uncomfortable about it, which can mean maybe that my clothes are starting to fit me maybe a little bit tighter than they normally do, it can completely take over as to how I'm feeling about certain things. I mean,

> even just sort of sitting down, and if my pants feel a little bit too tight, I'll get really depressed about it. - Sarah
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> Like, alot of my guy friends still say that I have a decent figure, you know? Well, thanks guys. I don't want an okay figure, I don't want a decent figure, I don't want a good figure. I want an excellent figure. Because when I lose weight, I lose it proportionately. - Lucy
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> I was all sweaty, and feeling really strong and everything, and then I went and I got on the scale and I weighed myself. And immediately, I saw how much I weighed...and I thought my body looked fine before I got on the scale. And then afterwards, I thought "138 pounds!? I should be 5"8 to be carrying this weight!" And my body had not changed in those 5 minutes at all. But my whole perception of my body changed. - Tannis
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> once he had touched something somewhere around my stomach or something. And I said "get your hand off my fat", jokingly. But he brought it up at another point and kind of laughed about it. And I thought "yeah, you know, I did say it, and I said it jokingly, but it was pretty much what I was thinking." - Anna

Personal space was discussed as an overall sense of being over-sized - standing out in some negative way, feeling too visible and, therefore, vulnerable, and being afraid of appearing too loud, too boisterous, and altogether too noticeable. Taking up a small amount of space was directly associated with being accepted and attractive.

> It's about size...I guess it's more space than people expect me to be taking up. You know? I think I would just be easier to be around if I was smaller. They're probably more comfortable with me if I am that way, you know? It's probably easier to be around an attractive person than an unattractive person. - Marla
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> Because of it, I don't let a lot of things show about myself - that I know about myself that I don't want to show to other people...but, not that I don't want to show to other people, but that it restricts me from showing it to other people...when you're trying to hide your body, you end up hiding some of your personality as well. - Sheila
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> As a woman, it seems that the primary responsibility or primary objective is to look, and then to be. The thing that I hear most when people describe women, you know, when someone is getting a pep talk, or being told that they're good..."you're pretty, you're intelligent." Always in that order. It's never "you're intelligent, you're pretty." - Anna
>
> When there's clothes I want to wear and I can't, that really upsets me because then...I don't know. I think I can look better if I do have

> something like that. And...I like that kind of style and to me, not to be able to wear what I like...kind of makes me feel like I'm not showing who I am. - Lena

> I think my jeans were tight, and I'm not one to wear tight jeans. And they hadn't always been tight. And so it's probably the first time I had noticed myself gaining weight in the hip area to the thigh area or whatever. I think it happened then...because, well, standing up is more like you're on display than if you're sitting down...sitting down is a much safer stance, I'd say...it was standing up for "Oh Canada," and so the whole class is standing up. And that's sort of when you check each other out...and you want to look the way they want you to look. - Katherine

The notion of space as central to the experience of weight preoccupation specifically, and body construction in general, is discussed at some length by Foucault, post-structuralist feminism, and some of the literature on women and weight. Foucault characterized the human body not as a unit, but as mechanism of separate, usable parts. These parts had to be trained to be utilized for specific social and political purposes. How bodies were constructed and utilized varied throughout history depending on such purposes. For example, prior to industrialized labour, the female body was constructed as a vehicle of reproduction and specific production labour on the family farm. A strong, healthy, traditionally maternal figure was considered most desirable. In modern times, the female body has been constructed primarily as a sexual vehicle. A slim, athletic, feminine figure is considered most desirable today. This is what Foucault (1979: p.139) called a "political anatomy of detail." A population of disciplined bodies is meticulously constructed through the use of various mechanisms. One such mechanism is space.

To create a population of disciplined bodies, the necessary conditions had to be implemented. One of these conditions was spatial, or what Foucault called the cell. The cell is defined as "the space in which individuals are subject to discipline ... divided or sub-divided into more or less self contained units" (Sheridan, 1980: p.150). Foucault's cell refers to the actual use of physical space. Discipline is accomplished by a

calculated distribution of individuals in space. As Foucault (1979) states: "Each individual has his own place, and each place its individual" (p.143). Foucault utilized the monastic cell as the original model of discipline through space. Schools, hospitals, prisons, and work factories were all designed in that original form. The architecture of the monastic cell was such that the primary goal was easily served (learning, production, etc.), while the population within was supervised, rewarded and punished (Sheridan, 1980).

So educational space, medical space, and production space were and still are designed to maximize the discipline of the specific population involved. This is precisely what is done by women with respect to their space. Weedon (1987) discusses how women's subjectivity is constructed to fit the social norms of femininity. At present, to be a woman is to be a body. Women are defined by their bodies, and experience their own gendered subjectivity through their bodies. Weedon defines gendered subjectivity as

> the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world (1987, p.32).

The mind, body, and emotions of a woman are disciplined in order to constitute them "according to the needs of hierarchical forms of power such as gender" (Weedon, 1987: p.121). A woman's identity, then - who she identifies herself as - is physically mapped out on her body, the most personal of spaces.

The world of fashion and fashion models has dictated the correct sizes and spaces that women should fit. Wolf (1990) questions the use of female fashion models as role models. She questions why women react so strongly to these images. Wolf goes on to assert that it is the dissection of the female body, the political anatomy of female detail, that forges this false connection.

> Since the fourteenth century, male culture has silenced women by taking them beautifully apart: The catalog of features, developed by the

> troubadours, first paralysed the beloved woman into beauty's silence...we inherit that catalog in forms ranging from the list-your-good-points articles in women's magazines to fantasies in mass culture that assemble the perfect woman (Wolf, 1990: p.59).

A woman's body is mapped in such a way that she is not a whole unit of person and body. Instead, she is a series of physical compartments to be regularly inspected and constructed. And, specifically, what it is that she is expected to discipline is most telling. Hips, breasts, thighs, buttocks - the parts of the body most distinctly female. As Wolf states, it is a misogynist culture that "has succeeded in making women hate what misogynists hate" (1990: p.150).

> Stomach, thighs, hips, butt, everywhere basically! -Lucy

> Like, if I wear a skirt, more often I'll wear a full skirt instead of one that's really slim, because if I think...you know...my hips don't look good in that skirt, I'm not going to wear it. - Laura

> If you put me in a bathing suit right now, I could tell you! All of a sudden I don't feel like I can be myself cause my personality is sort of...sinks down into the bottom of me and I'm taken over with - oh my god...you know, what do my thighs look like, what do people in the back of...what are they looking at? It's just those thighs that I really hate. So I guess if I could walk sideways along a wall, I'd be fine in a bathing suit! -Katherine

> I'm pretty thin on top...like, you can count my ribs, but I just feel like my thighs and my hips and my butt are just enormous. - Marla

That which is most female that is most criticized and regulated. Specifically, the mature, adult female body is cast as negative and undesirable. Women are expected to take up small spaces: the fully grown female form is sizeable and rounded. Women are expected to be less visible than men - breasts, hips and thighs are highly sexualized in this culture, and therefore, highly visible. To be a beautiful woman in this culture is to be a small non-threatening woman, almost child-like in form. The form of a child signifies the social place of a child - dependent and relatively powerless. Brown suggests that to be beautiful, a woman must be only minimally female.

> A beautiful woman is a woman small in body, and whose body exhibits minimal evidence of female secondary sexual characteristics, e.g.,

> breast tissue, subcutaneous fat layer, hips, rounded belly. This woman is beautiful in patriarchy's eyes because she is less visible, and because she occupies a minimum amount of space (Brown, 1985: p.63).

Hutchinson echoes this same sentiment.

> At best, puberty is a time of bodily awkwardness, rapid change, and body image confusion. It is at this time that we feel exquisitely whether we or our bodies fit in or fail to do so. The experiences and messages surrounding the body for many women become stuck or frozen into the body image at this time when our bodies are developing and transforming us from little girls to nubile young women...this burgeoning womanliness was something to be hidden (Hutchinson, 1982: p.63).

Bordo describes how the notion of space can pervade the experience of weight preoccupation. The political anatomy of the female body creates the disciplines that women are engaged in - disciplines used to construct themselves as necessary and useful.

> Understanding the "political anatomy" (as Foucault would call it) of the slender body requires ... interrogation of the practices or "disciplines" of diet and exercise which structure the organization of time, space, and the experience of the embodiment for subjects; and, in our image-bedazzled culture, interrogation of the popular representations through which meaning is crystallized, symbolized, metaphorically encoded, and transmitted. My overall argument emphasizes the primacy of practice for evaluating the role of bodies in the nexus of power relations. In this light, we should certainly be "politically" disturbed by recent statistics on the number of young girls who are making dedicated dieting the organizing principle of their days (Bordo, 1990: p.86).

Disciplines structure the organization of space. The disciplining of the female body requires specific design of space and concepts of space in order to be a successful, political discipline.

Anyone involved in the multi-billion dollar industry of `packaging' women can tell you just how important space and conceptions of space actually are. An article that appeared in The Age, an Australian daily paper, hails the arrival of a new marketing concept for the world of retail clothing. Trioli writes:

> as the Australian woman becomes stronger, healthier, and bigger, clothing companies are simply upping the ante - and hoping to boost their sales - by shifting their sizes one level down. So, if you are a standard

> size 12, in shops such as Country Road, you are magically a 10. And doesn't that feel good (1992, p.1)?

No matter how strong or healthy a woman may be, her clothing must reflect smallness of space. Even if such smallness is totally artificial - created by sly marketing techniques alone. This is preferable to actually admitting one's natural size and living in an honest world.

Emily and Per Ola d'Aulaire (1991) discuss how mannequins -mere representations of human form - have become instruments of aspiration. They state that the mannequins of today continue to model an ideal despite a very different reality. Constructed bodies have become the measure of how bodies should be constructed.

> Mannequins still represent the ideal. About 65 percent of women in this country wear size 14 and above, but mannequins are said to represent the "optimal" size 8, and are actually often closer to a size 6 (d'Aulaire, 1991: p.74)

Size is not just important, it is **everything**. A woman is judged by her outward appearance. The key element in creating that appearance is one's figure - one's measurements. What is reflected back to women as they look out, searching for the model of ideal appearance, is an impossible figure that has no basis in reality whatsoever. In fact, the honest portrayal of size and legitimate, desirable space is purposely ignored. It is not that mannequins have any singular effect on a woman's self perception. It is the cumulative effect that is to be considered. Everywhere a woman looks, the body beautiful is being marketed to her as desirable and necessary. This specific body is recognized by her as unavailable and unattainable without engaging in meticulous body construction of her own.

These marketing tactics may be subliminal in their message. Self-help columnist Ann Landers can only be described as brutally blunt. In a November 1991 issue of the Winnipeg Free Press, one woman writes to Ms. Landers about how tired she is of the dating game. She expressed exasperation at being passed over time and time again

because of her weight. She expressed belief that she was a worthwhile person inside, and that if her dates would only take the time to get to know her, her appearance would not matter so much. Ms. Landers responds with nothing less than her party line on the status quo.

> **Dear Peach:** You're right about too many men being interested in what's on the outside, but let's face it, packaging is of prime importance, as any retailer will tell you. A terrific product deserves to be well presented. The smart woman knows this (Landers, 1991: p.947).

This message has been bought, wrapped, and paid for by women in our society.

> What I'm really concerned about in terms of body image is how I look as a package, I guess you'd say. And how pretty or not pretty I am. Cause that's really my soft spot. So, that's really my main insecurity - is, you know, if someone says that I look pretty, that means a lot more to me than when someone says you look slim, or thin. - Katherine

> So, an attractive, successful woman would be a woman who was on a professional career track - who was tall, thin and muscular body structure, basically. The whole nine yards. - Lucy

> It's weight, appearance...oh, actions, mannerisms, everything. It's the whole package. - Sheila

The women in this study talked about having to present a package - a complete picture of a beautiful woman. Body size, body structure, proportion, demeanour, style and fashion all had to come together to achieve `the look' - fulfilling the necessary criteria to win the title of beauty and worth. This position of beauty occupies a specific space. There are physical boundaries (e.g., height-weight charts, clothing sizes), as well as personal boundaries (e.g. nurturing, subordination) a woman must remain within if she is to lay claim to this space.

## GAZE

The limited space a woman is allowed to occupy in this culture is clearly a mechanism of control. To remain small in size and character is to be restricted in action and thought. According to Foucault (1979), designated space for specific populations is

maintained through visibility and surveillance. Foucault's concept of surveillance is not simply one way - from some greater power to some lesser power. Foucault's surveillance is practised everywhere, at all levels of action and interaction. The disciplinary project of body perfection relies on a system of surveillance that is experienced as omnipresent - at the level of intra-personal, interpersonal and societal relations. These multiple layers of the gaze create a system of surveillance that absolutely ensures docility. In Foucault's analysis, surveillance equals control. In this case, the various layers and forms of the gaze serve as a system of control - all three levels are experienced cumulatively and simultaneously. Foucault states that

> By means of such surveillance, disciplinary power became an integrated system, linked from the inside to the economy and to the aims of the mechanism in which it was practised. It was also organized as a multiple, automatic and anonymous power; for although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network holds the whole together and traverses its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors, perpetually supervised (1979: p.176-177).

This kind of surveillance was discussed by all of the women in this study. The idea that a woman is constantly watched and judged by others, as well as involved in watching and judging herself and others, was voiced consistently throughout each interview. This theme of a pervasive `gaze' was discussed in many different ways by each woman. While the various gazes appear to come from different sources, the consequences of the gazes remain the same - a pervasive sense of being watched, judged, and disciplined.

In description, gaze is presented as a complex and varied notion. Beyond what is considered a typical male-to-female gaze, there are many other ways in which gaze manifests itself. What is important to note is how much gaze pervades the experience of weight preoccupation, however that gaze was described.

The most general type of gaze discussed was an overall sense of being watched. There is a sense of the gazer(s). The act of gazing represents seeing, knowing, and judging. The `watchers' were no one in particular, and everyone in general. In this scenario, no one actually had to be with the woman for her to feel this gaze. This description characterizes the intra-personal gaze that the women in this study identified. While these gazes are experienced as coming from an internal, independent source, clearly these perceptions are the culmination of internalized information mitigated by personal and social relationships.

> Maybe someone would be thinking "where does she think...does she actually think she looks good in that?" What does she think she's trying to pull off? -Jeananne

The generalized gaze produces a kind of self-sanctioning behaviour. While it cannot be identified at any one given source, this gaze produces self-sanctioning behaviour and fosters both surveillance and discipline. The generalized gaze implies that women watch and judge themselves, without provocation or instigation by any others. This was described as a totally internalized experience, and was common to almost all the women in the study. Between a woman and her society, acceptable images and appropriate ambitions are transmitted and negotiated. The end result is often an internalized agreement that she will make what is acceptable to society acceptable to her. She uses prescribed social measures to gaze at herself as an object. The result of these kinds of introspective gazes was invariably a negative self image and a pervading sense of inadequacy. This particular gaze was identified as leading most often to taking up body projects to find comfort and satisfaction in one's own skin.

> I think cause no matter how much I discuss weight preoccupation, no matter how much I've dealt with the way I was brought up, deep down, I still want to lose 10 pounds!I'm not really comfortable with the way I am now. And I want to...deep, deep, deep down, I want to change that. That's what it's sort of like, you know, like I was caught doing something that I know deep down that I shouldn't be doing. - Jeananne

The kinds of gazes experienced at the interpersonal level were many and varied. These gazes were experienced in relationships with both men and women, as well as with people in differential power relationships with the women in this study. Many of the women moved beyond the general sense of being watched to the more specific sense of being watched by men. The notion of gaze developed a gendered dimension. Many women discussed how the gaze was specifically male - they felt that they were being watched and judged by men. The feeling was that it is under the watchful eye of men, and ultimately for the benefit of men, that women engage in active body construction.

> I think it's a men-women thing. I still think it is, you know? It's men's perception of us. It doesn't matter so much to me what...how big women think I am. But, I still think it's a male thing. Well, I guess if it was the...if you looked at the other side of the coin, if women were allowed to create an ideal image for men, probably without thinking we would just have perfect men. Perfect men all the time in magazines and on t.v. and that would probably be the way...the way we would...we'd probably have an ideal man, okay? As a whole, you know? We sort of have a general idea of what the ideal man should look like. And I think men have done that. Men have been so conditioned to looking at these perfect women, that that's what they expect of us. - Marla

Marla raises an interesting point by suggesting that an equally unattainable ideal would exist for men if women were the image makers. Given that the context of our lives is dominated by a male-oriented tradition, we cannot say what women would create as an ideal image for men if they were given the opportunity to do so. In North American society today, it is within the context of patriarchy that the images of men and women are created, and it is the interests of patriarchy those images will serve.

There was also a sense of a female gaze - that women also were judging and inspecting other women's appearance. This added another dimension to gaze - that of competition. To gaze at another woman was to watch her, judge her, and assess her in

comparison with oneself. It is described as though women create a competition of appearance between themselves.

> Men don't notice. Women are so critical of other women. Women dress for other women. Women don't dress for themselves, as they should. As far as I'm concerned, women totally dress for other women...they might think that they're dressing for a man. But it's really women that are super critical. Men, I don't think, think of these things. Because I've asked my male friends about stuff like that, and they just say that they hardly notice. - Tannis

Situations of hierarchical difference added further complexity to the notion of gaze. The societal gaze was one that came from the top down. In the case of a doctor - patient relationship, for example, the gaze from the position of medical authority implied judgement and advised action. This particular gaze moves beyond the sense of judgement by general or specific others. This gaze assumes a dimension of expertise in the assessment of bodies, making the judgement all the more harsh. This type of gaze leads readily to active body projects.

> Another time when I went to see Dr. (name), and I had an ear infection, and I couldn't eat for a day because he had put me on something, and he made a joke like "well, it looks like there's plenty in the bank, I wouldn't worry about it." And I was like 11 or 12. -Tannis

Foucault (1979) discusses the concept of gaze at some length. In Foucault's analysis, bodies are regulated by disciplinary techniques in order to maintain a specific social order. Hierarchical observation and normalizing judgement are two key elements in the successful operation of disciplinary techniques. A constant sense of surveillance, or a sense of a pervasive gaze, is the desired net effect of observation and judgement. Women in our culture are exposed to more hierarchical observation and normalizing judgement than men (doctors, partners, teachers, employers, complete strangers) because there is a premium placed on appearance for women specifically.

> The goal is to make surveillance an integral part of production and control. The act of looking over and being looked over will be a central means by which individuals are linked together in a disciplinary space.

> The control of bodies depends on an optics of power...control through surveillance (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1986: p.156).

Society is designed, both physically and socially, to ensure a perceived state of permanent visibility. This perception of visibility fosters a sense of being watched and judged at all times - whether one is engaged in activity warranting judgement or not, whether one is alone or not, whether one is actually visible or not. This visibility also fosters a sense of legitimacy in judging and policing others. While each individual may not necessarily be actively involved in this policing, there is a collective sense of somebody watching out for the ones who step out of line. Sheridan simplifies the historical process that led to a population today that religiously polices itself.

> Crime produced the prison; the prison the delinquent class; the existence of a delinquent class an excuse for the policing of the entire population. This policing led to the extraction and recording of information about groups and individuals; the human sciences gained a terrain and a patron; crime came to be seen as a departure from the norm, a sickness to be understood if not cured; this provided a justification for the examination of the entire population (Sheridan, 1980: p.161-162).

This could read as an analogy to weight preoccupation: Patriarchy produced the ideal image of women; the ideal image the weight preoccupation; the existence of weight preoccupation the perpetuation of self-policing and surveillance.

We live in a society that demands normality and exacts swift and serious punishment for anything less than conformity. These judges of normality are everywhere. As indicated in the women's accounts, these judges are the women themselves, their partners, their friends, the culture, the media, and medicine. The sense of being watched, or the compulsion to watch others, is common to the women in this study because it is fostered in each one of us. It has become a way of life for women in our society; it has become a normative characteristic of being female. One might say that to be a woman in this society is to be in a constant state of assessment - "do I measure up, or not?"

> I think I was about 16. 15 or 16. We went to the beach and, yeah...realizing, like, sort of...sort of just looking at the 2 of us, and thinking "hmm," you know? I really didn't think it was possible to look like the women in the magazine. And then seeing her, and seeing how she did look was sort of..."well, maybe it is possible, maybe I...why don't I look like her?" - Anna

> I'm easier on men than I am on women, but I am still hardest on myself. - Marla

> I hate the way I look now. I look in the mirror and it's basically a nauseating experience. And I have basically no confidence. People think I'm just...you know, not a care in the world and basically, I have no confidence. And when I was thinner I was alot more sure of myself, and I want that back. - Lucy

Often, women are also measuring other women. Many women in this study discussed the competition of bodies that is fostered between women. It is as though watching other women is as critical as watching oneself. Unfortunately, the judgements are equally harsh.

> It comes from all kinds of commercials, magazines, everything out there. Everything out there has got this ideal body, like...they never have people...they even have contests on whose body is better! - Lena

> I have a friend that I was talking to once when she...she used to go to the European Health Spa, and she was telling me about this woman that was wearing tights. And she said she was, like, 250 pounds. And she said "can you believe she has the nerve to wear that!?" - Anna

> We had this staff Christmas party. And she's all proud of herself cause...she dieted and she lost 2 pounds a week, very healthy, the whole bit. And she was all proud of herself because her pants fit loose and the whole bit. She went out and bought a new dress, and she looked like a stuffed sausage roll! It was peach, and...you know, her gut was wrapped in this thing, and she just looked horrible! - Laura

It is important to note that while most of the women found fault as easily with other women as they did themselves, the standards of judgment were much higher for their own appearance. Many of the women agreed that a woman who had some physical flaws (including some extra weight) could still be attractive if she dressed in fashion and exuded a level of comfort with herself. None of the women interviewed,

however, were willing to give the same concession to their own appearance. Each woman seemed convinced that there was some intrinsic, immutable reason why, despite her efforts, she will never fit the beauty standard.

One woman states clearly that she knows that judging others on physical appearance is not appropriate. She has what she calls "better judgment" and finds herself still making those kinds of assessments when watching others. The cumulative effect of the many gazes we are all subject to cannot be understated.

> I'd like not to judge so much. Certainly not judge on the things I'm judging on because I know...my better judgement tells me that that's the exact wrong thing to be looking at when you're looking at a person! - Katherine

Foucault provides an excellent analysis as to why we are so preoccupied with the regulation and proper construction of the body. What Foucault does not address, however, is why it is specifically women who have become so preoccupied with the disciplinary project of body perfection. Post-structuralist feminism talks about a `gendered subjectivity.' Gender socialization clearly has a role here to the extent that it bears upon the gazes that men and women adopt and are subject to. From the very beginning of life we are socialized into a specific gendered subjectivity - a way of looking at ourselves and our world that is based on our gender. Weedon explains how, over time, the external social world becomes our internal individual world, and how these worlds are uniquely female or male.

> The social institutions which we enter as individuals -for example, the family, schools and colleges, teenage fashion and pop culture, the church and the worlds of work and leisure - pre-exist us. We learn their modes of operation and the values which they seek to maintain as true, natural or good. As children we learn what girls and boys should be and, later, women and men. These subject positions - ways of being an individual -and the values inherent in them may not all be compatible and we will learn that we can choose between them. As women we have a range of possibilities. In theory almost every walk of life is open to us, but all the possibilities which we share with men involve accepting, negotiating or rejecting what is constantly being offered to us as our

> primary role - that of wife and mother. Whatever else we do, we should be attractive and desirable to men, and, ideally, our sexuality should be given to one man and our emotional energy directed at him and the children of the marriage (Weedon, 1987: p.4).

We learn from a very young age that, as women, our appearance is our primary edge in the competition for a mate and position. We also learn that procuring the desired mate and position is of utmost importance to a sense or personal success and social approval. The gazes we adopt are in keeping with the general world view we have been socialized into. That is, our looks matter greatly. Looking better than other women matters greatly. How we appear to men is of premium importance if we are to be successful in the ultimate goal of wife and mother. Some women take this world view more to heart than others, but we are all subject to its message. And, as Weedon (1987) states, to arrange a different list of priorities is to do so against the very strong and significant institutions of socialization.

I did not address what differentiates weight preoccupied women from non-weight preoccupied women. I do not know why some women experience this driving need to fit the ideal at all costs, and some do not. I do know that, while we are all subject to the message of the importance of body perfection, some of us resist this discourse and choose not to participate in body projects of any kind. This is a point worthy of further investigation at some later date.

Another interesting question is whether these gazes are framed by the capitalist and patriarchal structures of our lives, and such regulatory and oppressive practices such as heterosexism, classism, and racism. The body is the site of regulation and discipline. For example, within the context of a culture based on priviledge, the female body is subject to evaluation by both men and women, by heterosexuals and homosexuals, by rich and poor, etc. This evaluation (examination) is based on the heterosexist notion that all men want a type of woman and all women want to be that

type for their men. The focus is entirely on the woman's body, and the evaluation measures her overall worth. It may be that women of difference (i.e., lesbian, Aboriginal, poor women) experience that same body imperative - to look and be looked at - because the heterosexist and patriarchal mandate is so pervasive in our society. While I did not pursue these questions further, they are certainly a point for future research.

A further point of analysis is at the societal level. I will address this by looking at capitalism and patriarchy as defining features to the context of our lives. I have discussed how capitalism as a mode of production defines many of the institutions of socialization. Patriarchy as well defines such institutions and social values, by characterizing women as primarily wives and mothers. Hesse-Biber notes that using the body as a locus of disciplinary power and control

> allowed nineteenth century capitalism to operate efficiently and profitably. As Dreyfus and Rabinow note: "Without the insertion of disciplined, orderly individuals into the machinery of production, the new demands of capitalism would have been stymied" (1983:135). In addition to increasing capitalism's capacity to mass produce goods, disciplinary control over bodies motivated producers to exploit new markets by stimulating ever-changing consumer needs and buying patterns centred around the body and its functioning. Patriarchal interests, which characterized women primarily as good wives and mothers and the objects of decorative worth, fit the needs of a political economy which required "the economic pattern of individual domestic consumption to fuel its growth" (Ehrenreich and English, 1979: p.27). In developing a consumer market, the mass media, especially advertising, were crucial for defining women's roles primarily as that of consumer, both of household items (important symbols of being a good wife and mother) and of beauty products (signs of one's femininity and ability to "hold on to her man"). These mechanisms provided an important socio-cultural environment that defined women's consumption role and attitude toward their bodies (1991: p.175).

There is, then, a patriarchal dimension to projects of body perfection. The term `patriarchal' is to be understood here as defined by Weedon.

> The term `patriarchal' refers to power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men. These power relations take

> many forms, from the sexual division of labour and the social organization of procreation to the internalized norms of femininity by which we live. Patriarchal power rests on the social meanings given to biological sexual difference. In patriarchal discourse, the nature and social role of women are defined in relation to a norm which is male (Weedon, 1987: p.2).

That women are prone to internalize appearance standards as normative is a sign that there are strong material and ideological elements within a capitalist, patriarchal social structure that encourages this. Jaggar (1983) discusses the oppression of women within such a social structure. This kind of discussion is relevant to the issue of women and weight preoccupation, as I consider the appearance norms that women are subject to a form of female oppression.

Jaggar asserts that the most significant material basis of women's oppression is the sexual division of labour that characterizes our culture.

> From a Marxist perspective, the material basis of women's oppression must be found in the sexual division of labour. Under capitalism, this division is defined characteristically by two spheres: the "public" sphere of the market and the "private" sphere of the family. The former is defined as the sphere of men; the latter as the sphere of women (Jaggar, 1983: p.70).

Although most women do participate in the paid work force, it is still largely a male sphere in that women are not paid equal pay for equal work, and cannot expect to move up in their chosen field at the same rate as men (Jaggar, 1983). And while there are more men who `help out' at home, it is still largely a female sphere in that it is the woman who is ultimately responsible for the housework and child care.

There is also an ideological basis to women's oppression. In a capitalist, patriarchal society such as ours, the class structure and the mode of production combine to determine the dominant ideology. As Jaggar states:

> In class society, the ruling class ultimately dominates the production and distribution of scientific, religious and artistic ideas. For this reason, it can exert fairly direct control over the concepts and values that are generated and disseminated. More indirectly and subtly, however, the

> mode of production also determines the dominant ideology through its structuring of daily life (1983: p.57).

The ruling class - the class that accumulates wealth, controls capital and produces and distributes ideas - has a vested interest in perpetuating the notion that women need to buy their beauty. Their ability to accumulate relies on a dominant ideology that supports conspicuous consumption. The mode of production in capitalism, by dividing the home and market, structures the daily lives of women in such a way as to reinforce and determine this ideology. Work that women do, either at home or in the paid labour force, is devalued. Women are encouraged to find their value in their appearance. A woman's appearance has market value - the measure of all things in a capitalist society.

The specific practices of control that are exerted on women to invest in body projects are not as obvious as physical force or threat of violence. The dominant ideology of our society defines what it is to be feminine - to be a woman. The definition revolves around appearance as most important. Women perpetuate the values of patriarchy in order to maintain self-esteem and identity. To do otherwise is to revision entirely what it means to be a woman. These body projects are not vain, flighty pursuits for good looks. They are at the very heart of what it means to be female in a capitalist, patriarchal society. As Hesse-Biber states:

> While women are subject to more modern forms of power (which rely less on force and more on social and psychological mechanisms), patriarchal power...also exists within contemporary societies...the site of patriarchy itself has shifted from "private" (where control resides in the husband or father) increasingly toward "public" patriarchy (the state, the labour market), as women's roles alter from dependent (e.g., private household workers) to independent (e.g., paid workers) (1991: p.175).

Women's preoccupation with weight and their bodies, then, is not accidental. Women have been taught to be concerned with appearance as a way of life. The disciplinary techniques that women engage in to master appearance and body are

fostered by a culture that forges a false association between being a woman and being totally, constantly visible. While Foucault asserts that the total population is thoroughly and constantly visible, the various discourses promoting surveillance and policing (medicine, education, sport, fashion/diet industry) focus on women as more in need of both surveillance and discipline.

Turner draws attention to the fact that dietary management is instrumental in the production of disciplined, docile bodies. He states that: "diet, asceticism and regimen are obviously forms of control exercised over bodies with the aim of establishing a discipline" (1982: p.24). We know, however, that dietary management is marketed almost exclusively to women (Featherstone, 1991). It is women specifically, then, who are the primary target of a cultural campaign designed to ensure a disciplined female population. Almost all of the women in the study voiced some awareness of being prime targets. Many of the women were very much aware of being on display, and how that translated into pursuing the perfect body.

> As a woman, you're very much on display, to not only men, but women as well. And there's a lot of pressure for you to look and dress a certain way. - Sarah

> At the same time I wish that, you know, we could all just, you know, just do whatever we want until we have that perfect body, so that...not how society looks down and makes us embarrassed. - Sheila

Some of the women discussed how, from a young age onwards, they knew that their looks were the first and foremost measure of their worth.

> I used to swim and my coach used to pull a couple of us aside and say "you've got to lose weight, you've got to lose 10 or 15 pounds." And the thing is, we were kids. We're kids out there to have fun, and once we started getting good, he was, like, "you have to start losing weight." Even to some of the thinner girls, he was saying this to. And, I don't know. We just got all, like, really pissed off, you know? Why doesn't he tell the guys this, you know? - Maggie

> I think it has a lot to do with male domination in culture, and because you're valued for what you look like, not for what you think. Not for what

> you say or what you do, but what you look like...It's just that women are treated as toys in certain ways. And definitely, appearance is placed...there's a premium placed on appearance, and I really don't know how that began. I just would like to forget about the whole thing, really. We'd all be so much happier if we could forget about the whole thing. - Tannis

> Just your image. I mean, whether it's going in for a job interview or whatever, you need to...I don't know. What is at stake? That's a very good question. I guess not much is at stake in reality. It doesn't really matter what they think, but it's still...you have to...it's the image you're portraying. I guess society says that we should be attractive to everyone. It's important, I guess. - Maggie

Some also addressed a sense of being inundated with the body perfect message before knowing any better, and how pervasive this message was.

> What was I supposed to do? I was 12 years old and I didn't know about liking myself for what I was...you buy into it but you're not given any other option when you're a kid and this is what you're hearing. And all your slim friends have boyfriends. - Jeananne

> It's perpetuated by the media when you're older, but I would say it came from peers, people around you, teachers, you know? It's almost a tradition that the story is told and carries on and on and on - forever and ever. - Maggie

> What's the answer, really? How can you change society? I mean, it's obviously society, but what can you do? And I can't stand to see so many people making huge business out of diets, and you see the commercials, and you see the ads, and you see the pills, and that...it's sickening. - Maria

These women know that their insecurities with themselves and their bodies are fostered at all levels - from media imagery, to personal relationships, to their own internal sense of self. They have also identified two possible reasons for the fostering of such insecurities. First, there is the suggestion that big business has a vested interest in keeping women actively involved in the $60 billion a year (Wolf, 1990) beauty industry. Featherstone supports the notion that women's bodies are being marketed to them as imperfect and in need of work in order to sustain a consumer market.

> Women are of course most clearly trapped in the narcissistic, self-surveillance world of images...being accorded the major responsibility in

> organising the purchase and consumption of commodities (Featherstone, 1991: p.178-179).

Sexuality is being equated with beauty - beauty that must be earned through hard work and large sums of money. Wolf identifies specific industries which are actively involved in creating an unattainable ideal of beauty to which women feel compelled to aspire.

> The mass depiction of the modern woman as a "beauty" is a contradiction: Where modern women are growing, moving, and expressing their individuality, as the myth has it, "beauty" is by definition inert, timeless, and generic. That this hallucination is necessary and deliberate is evident in the way "beauty" so directly contradicts women's real situations. And the unconscious hallucination grows ever more influential and pervasive because of what is now conscious market manipulation: powerful industries - the 33-billion dollar-a-year diet industry, the 20-billion cosmetics industry, the 300-million cosmetic surgery industry, and the 7-billion dollar pornography industry - have arisen from the capital made out of unconscious anxieties (Wolf, 1990: p.17).

Second, there is the suggestion that society has a vested interest in keeping women preoccupied with weight and body issues. Many women who were interviewed admitted that their weight preoccupation interfered regularly with doing other things. The sustained effort of a diet and fitness regimen took away time and energy from other pursuits, rendering some women paralysed by their own insecurity.

> I didn't feel that I could get anywhere anymore...I couldn't get myself to actually live cause I was too worried about everything with food and weight preoccupation. I was...too self absorbed - Sheila

> If I feel like I look like shit, or even if I've over stuffed myself and feel like a huge pig, I'll not go to a party that I was invited to. But I sometimes think that's really a self defeating thing. I was nervous about going to the party anyways, and so I sabotaged myself by not doing my laundry, or not being able to find anything to wear, or whatever. - Katherine

> Some women dedicated an inordinate amount of time to body work every day.

> I was absolutely obsessed with weighing myself every morning...and getting on the scale, and if it was 1 pound too much, then it was sort of for the rest of the day, I wouldn't eat anything. And I was taking bennies and beans in incredible numbers per day. And I would exercise a couple of times a day and eat, like, a salad, a bowl of soup. I knew I was

> physically torturing myself. I could feel my heart beating, like I was going to have a heart attack, when I was exercising. But I did it anyways. - Anna
>
> I was biking 3 hours a night....and then, there were days that I would go and run, like, 3 times. Like, do 3 miles at a time, go back a couple of hours later, do it again, go back a couple of hours later, do it again, go home, do aerobics! Or, get up in the morning before class, go do aerobics, then go to the gym, run. - Lucy

For many of the women interviewed, how they felt about their bodies on any given day directed their choices and emotions for that day.

> It's like a snowball effect. If I start eating large quantities, then I just don't stop. And also, there have been times when I won't go out to the bar or to a social or something because I feel so fat, whereas I'll only be 3 or 4 pounds heavier than I want to be. -Marla
>
> If I had the perfect body, I think it would make me more comfortable with myself and enable me to go out and do things or try new things or approach people about certain things that I might not necessarily be able to do. So, it's a fear of not being accepted as I normally should be. - Sarah

We live in a society that relies on women staying out of certain kinds of competition. If available wealth is a pie, slices of that pie get smaller as more people compete for a share. Traditionally, it has been men who have accumulated most available wealth. For most of Western history, society has been designed to ensure that tradition. It is only recently, with the introduction of women into the workforce as a way of life, that the status quo has been threatened. The relatively recent introduction of the beauty imperative undermines women's efforts to forge ahead into areas of life considered traditionally male.

> During the past decade, women breached the power structure: meanwhile, eating disorders rose exponentially and cosmetic surgery became the fastest-growing medical specialty. During the past five years, consumer spending doubled, pornography became the main media category, ahead of legitimate films and records combined, and thirty-three thousand American women told researchers that they would rather lose ten to fifteen pounds than achieve any other goal. More women have more money and power and scope and legal recognition than we have ever had before; but in terms of how we feel about

> ourselves physically, we may actually be worse off than our unliberated grandmothers (Wolf, 1990: p.10).

So, the beauty myth evolved out of social necessity: a perceived need to quell the growing independence and self-assurance of women that was being encouraged during the feminist movement of the late 1960's and early 1970's. The beauty myth exists to control the forward progress of modern women; in much the same way that myths of domesticity, motherhood, and chastity controlled generations of women in the past.

> We are in the midst of a...backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement: the beauty myth. It is the modern version of a social reflex that has been in force since the Industrial Revolution. As women released themselves from the feminine mystique of domesticity, the beauty myth took over its lost ground, expanding as it waned to carry on its work of social control (Wolf,1990: p.10).

The functioning of the gaze is essential to the success of the beauty myth. It is a critical element in that it fosters a sense of constant and total visibility: a woman's appearance is at all times of foremost importance. As Foucault's analysis suggests, an internal police force is installed in every woman from day one so that she becomes both subject and object of the necessary gaze.

> Female sexuality is turned inside out from birth, so "beauty" can take its place, keeping women's eyes lowered to their own bodies, glancing up only to check their reflections in the eyes of men (Wolf, 1990: p.155).

The notion of the gaze as discussed by the women who were interviewed is neither casual nor natural. It is actively cultivated by a society that requires women's insecurity. It is essential to the smooth operation of Western capitalism in a patriarchal society. It is a necessary precondition to the constructed subjectivity of women as somehow less than something and in need of someone.

## SEXUALITY

A third theme that was evident consistently throughout this research was sexuality. The American Heritage Dictionary (1982: p.1124) defines sexuality as "the

quality of possessing a sexual character or potency." For the purposes of my analysis, this is a useful definition. The quality of possessing a sexual character must, however, be situated in a specific historical and cultural context. Foucault situates the modern notion of sexuality in the context of modern economics. Foucault's analysis supports the idea that sexuality is "deployed" in a society where the greater economic good supersedes all else, and the physical control of a given population is a necessary precondition. As Foucault explains:

> the deployment of sexuality...engenders a continual extension of areas and forms of control. For the first, what is pertinent is the link between partners and definite statuses; the second is concerned with the sensations of the body, the quality of pleasures, and the nature of impressions...the deployment of sexuality is linked to the economy through...the body - the body that produces and consumes. The deployment of sexuality has as its reason for being, not in reproducing itself, but in proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way, and in controlling populations, in an increasingly comprehensive way (1978: p.106-107).

The modern Western tradition casts women as first a body, then a person. A woman's body must be proficient sexually in order for her to consider herself in possession of sexual character or potency. The body once again becomes the centre of female identity.

All 12 women experienced, to some degree, the sense of their sexuality as inextricably tied to their physical appearance. They expressed the feeling that who one is as a woman is defined, to a large extent, by how one looks. More specifically, one's external appearance assigns internal characteristics of validity and self-worth. It became apparent that appearance or beauty is integral to a woman's sense of her own sexuality. Clearly, this has to do with the common cultural notion of beauty as important for women, as well as how such beauty is attained and maintained. For the most part, the women in this study felt that they were not what is commonly considered "beautiful." They felt they did not live up to the images of beauty - images that are

offered up to both men and women as desirable and necessary. This, in turn, led to the feeling that their own sexuality was somehow suspect, or lacking in some way.

> I feel like there's something wrong with me cause I don't match the cookie cutter. It's just sort of like a pervasive, negative feeling...like, you know...you just don't measure up. - Tannis

> You see me without my clothes on, and you're going to be ill. - Lucy

> No matter how far you come in this thing, it's still..."oh, I don't want to put that bathing suit on..."...or..."oh, I don't want to do that." Why should I have to feel disgusted with myself because other people are going to look at me in this way? - Maggie

The idea that a woman's sexual identity is tied to her appearance was clearly expressed throughout the interviews. Not measuring up physically somehow meant not measuring up at all. A woman's worth is measured not by personal achievements, intellectual abilities, or economic activities. A woman's worth is measured by her looks - a transient and fickle measure that is at best arbitrary, and at worst, calculated to distract women from leading lives of authenticity and value. As Hutchinson states:

> It is the adequacy and attractiveness of her body that seals a woman's fate, that assures her future acceptance and security, that dictates to a certain degree her level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the course of her life. Or so the myth goes. It is this body-self-role parallel - the identification of a woman with her body - that sets the stage for this enormous charge that so many women carry around their bodies and their attractiveness as well as for the impact that body image distortion has on self-image (1992: p.61).

Hutchinson's notion of a body-self-role parallel was voiced repeatedly throughout the interviews. The women I spoke to felt that they were defined by their bodies. A woman is not only identified with her body, she is demarcated by it.

> I like to show people exactly who I am, and when I can't do that because of how I look, it upsets me because...I don't know. It just upsets me, I guess.-Lena

> It's like my body is my enemy. It interferes with my being able to be me...like, I can't be pretty and funny and happy when people see me as ugly and embarrassing and weak. - Sheila

Appearance and sexual attraction are issues of great importance for women in North America today. The appearance game has very dire consequences for women. Our level of attractiveness is directly related to our level of success and happiness. The women I interviewed discuss this in two ways. First, they themselves felt happier when they felt attractive. Second, other people lent them more credibility and opportunities and basic social niceties when they were assessed as attractive.

> It's empowering knowing you feel good, knowing you look good. It's all psychological. I mean, I look no different on Monday than I do on Thursday. But sometimes you put on a little mascara, and wear a colour that looks good on you, and fuck, it changes your whole day! You feel better as a person, inside and out. - Tannis

> She should be able to be accepted at work and in her life no matter what she looks like. But the reality is, though, that we know about the studies being done about...you know...the attractive women getting the jobs and the friends and the relationships and the life! And the unattractive ones...well, they're sometimes not getting anything because of their looks. I mean, it's just on a continuum of conformity. And if you conform to the look, you win. If you don't conform ...to a certain extent, you're S.O.L. - Sarah

Hesse-Biber claims that there is a direct relationship between a woman's appearance and her hopes for personal and social success.

> The stakes of physical attractiveness for women are high: appearance is a strong selection factor for social success and body weight is a significant factor in physical attraction (Hesse-Biber, 1991: p.178).

The connection between female beauty and female identity is understood as an essential truth in our culture. This truth has been questioned as of late in much of the literature.

Wolf argues that a socially constructed version of beauty has replaced female sexuality. Beauty does not, by definition, equal sexuality. It does, however, in a society that casts female sexuality as a function of beauty almost exclusively. A woman's sexuality is largely defined by an ever changing, nearly un-reachable measure of

beauty that is presented as essential to both a positive self-image and a positive assessment by others.

> Germaine Greer wrote that women will be free when they have a positive definition of female sexuality...A generation later, women still lack it. Female sexuality is not only negatively defined, it is negatively constructed. Women are vulnerable to absorbing the beauty myth's intervention in our sexuality because our sexual education is set up to ensure that vulnerability (Wolf, 1990: p.154-155).

Female sexuality has been reduced in our culture to what Wolf calls "outside-in eroticism"(1990: p.155). For women, sexuality is not three dimensional - it is not experienced as a part of a core self, as a deeply personal component of self that includes the mind, the body and the soul. The Western tradition of female sexuality is limited to the realm of the body only. And it is not left to the woman to define, or evaluate, her own sexuality, even if it does reside in personal appearance. That is up to those who view her from the position of "other," and judge her according to the ever-changing social standards of beauty. Hutchinson claims that women are taught to be "other-directed," and cannot help but refer to external references for a sense of self.

> Raised to be other-directed, women have tended to operate from an external frame of reference looking to the outside for cues about who they are, how to be, how to look, whether they are adequate or inadequate, and about how to think of themselves. The comparison of self and body to cultural images as well as to family and peers is the context in which a woman defines herself and her worth (Hutchinson, 1982: p.62).

It is little wonder that women feel disengaged from their own sexuality. For many of the women I interviewed, any consideration of their own sexuality brings to mind only short-comings, faults and failures.

> I'd like to say..."oh, I'm very comfortable with my body...like, I love myself for what I am and therefore you should love me for the way I am." But deep down, I'm thinking..."summer's coming up, and I'd really like to wear a sleeveless dress or something, and I can't." Well, I can. But I won't. - Jeananne

> These issues...they make me feel out of control - not in control of my own body, of my own sexuality. It effects my relationship with my partner in the sense that when I'm feeling less good about myself, I'm not as open with him. - Sarah

> What I'm really concerned about...is how I look as a package, I guess you'd say. And how pretty or not pretty I am...I don't believe in things like dying my hair blonde and getting blue contacts and getting cellulite injections into my lips...I don't believe in that kind of...I'd like just...I have that inner conflict of what I believe should be acceptable, and what I wish I looked like anyways. - Katherine

The concept of sexuality is quite complex and multi-faceted. One such aspect of sexuality includes the perception of oneself as a sexual being. Many of the women in this study felt somehow lacking in their ability to be a sexual person because of their body image issues. Their sense of physical inadequacy led to a sense of sexual inadequacy.

> I basically have what you would call performance anxiety. Like, if you look at me, you're going to be wanting to be out of here - not be around me. - Lucy

> Talking about being in a romantic clutch...he had...he had touched me...I don't know...something...somewhere around my stomach or something. And I said "get your hand off my fat!" And he brought it up at another time and laughed it off. And I thought...yeah, I did say it, and I said it jokingly, but it was...it was pretty much what I was thinking and feeling. - Anna

> It is a emotional and physical constraint for me. Yeah, definitely. I think it's a big sexual one too. Like it really is, and...I don't know. Like...it really...not being so confident when it comes to sex, to the point of not having sex. - Jeananne

For some, this sense of sexual inadequacy led to further difficulties in romantic relationships - like not being able to be totally open with a partner, and feeling unworthy of any relationship at all.

> I know twice for sure at the beginning of new relationships things have ended pretty quickly because I felt so uncomfortable with myself. Like, I wouldn't let myself get closer physically to these people cause I felt too fat. And I was waiting, you know? Waiting to take off...you know..."I'll wait until I lose 5 pounds and then I can get involved in a serious relationship." - Marla

> I'm not as...not as willing to let myself be together with him in that way when I'm not feeling great about myself. Even though I know intellectually that he doesn't care. But still, it's a very personal thing for me - to be able to accept my own body before I can let someone else accept it. - Sarah

A healthy sense of one's own sexuality, then, is usurped by a false sense of physical inadequacy. In fact, there is no one body type that makes one woman more sexual than another. Larger women can be erotic and sexy as readily as smaller women can be sexually disinterested and unmotivated. The women I spoke to asserted that there are all kinds of beauty, and all varieties of sexuality.

> I see those women who are those tall, beautiful models, and I think they really look fabulous...And I also see women who are very strong and who obviously don't fit into that tall model category, and I find that attractive as well. - Sarah

> What a gorgeous woman looks like? No, because...it's just like saying a gorgeous man...I don't have a type...But, I've liked blondes. And I find blonde women attractive as well. It's a matter entirely of personal preference. Cause I know women I think are gorgeous and sexy that other people think aren't at all. - Tannis

> People I know who are physically...who are, you know, would be viewed as attractive are not at all physically confident. I mean, in theory it should be that way, but I don't think it is. Personality and looks combined create sexual attraction. All kinds of women are beautiful then. - Maggie

At this point in history the model of the modern sexually confident, satisfied woman is ultra-thin, muscular, and beautiful. The message is: the only way to be sexual is to be beautiful, and the only way to be beautiful is to be thin. Through imagery, interaction, and institutions of socialization, a woman learns early on that what is sexual is beautiful, and what is beautiful is thin; therefore, to be sexual is to be thin. This is a model that does not transcend history or culture. It is a creation of both history and culture. The ultra-thin ideal body type belongs to a specific time, space and place.

> Beauty and sexuality are both commonly misunderstood as some transcendent inevitable fact: falsely interlocking the two makes it seem doubly true that a woman must be beautiful to be sexual. That of course is not true at all. The definitions of both beautiful and sexual constantly

> change to serve the social order, and the connection between the two is a recent invention (Wolf, 1990: p.150).

Foucault defines sexuality as an historical construct that changes over time for specific socio-cultural reasons.

> Sexuality...is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the simulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1978: p.105-106).

Sexuality is a social construct that is used to influence bodies and control populations - in this case, the bodies of the female population.

Foucault's conceptualization of sexuality in general is easily applied to the discussion of female sexuality specifically. There is no natural body - no one definitive model of beauty that somehow supersedes history and culture. Weedon (1987) also discusses how, in feminist poststructuralism, sexuality has no fixed meaning or nature. Rather, sexuality is historically and culturally specific. It is constitutive in nature - by exercising control through bodies, and being a focus for the development of subjective identity. Sexuality, then, is a specific social construct designed to fulfil specific social needs. In this case, the need is economic.

What is sexual or beautiful in women has been targeted as an economic market in a capitalist culture. Hesse-Biber discusses how capitalist interests have co-opted female sexuality and sold it back to women in the form of the ultra-thin ideal body type.

> The present-day partnership of capitalist interests (diet, beauty, cosmetic, toy and health industries) and patriarchal perspectives (defining women as objects of decorative worth as a means of subverting them to the authority of men) continues to control women's bodies through socio-cultural pressures on women to be thin. Eating disorders...are the logical conclusion of extreme self-imposed body control to attain the ideal of ultra-thinness (Hesse-Biber, 1991: p.166-167).

Female sexuality is "repressed for economic reasons" (Foucault, 1990: p.114). If women believed themselves to be beautiful without the help of beauty products - if women felt they were sexual beings by nature, and beautiful in their own way - two distinct possibilities arise. First, the economic base of the beauty industry would be at least threatened, and perhaps inevitably diminished. And second, the general population of women may in fact feel more free to be their strongest, most confident, competent selves. Women may choose to participate and compete in projects of profit and advancement instead of projects of body perfection. Hesse-Biber points out that participation in the beauty business keeps women out of more profitable and rewarding ventures.

> An ultra-slender ideal body norm for women...meshes well with patriarchal interests: to attain the ultra-slender ideal requires women to consume diet products and spend enormous amounts of time and emotional energy...these activities drain economic and emotional capital away from other investments women might make in, for example, political activity, education, and career advancements - activities which would promote empowerment (Hesse-Biber, 1991: p.185).

The women in this study were all well aware of how their sexuality was being marketed. They discussed how the accepted image of what it is to be female and feminine is limited and elusive. Many felt there was a need to address the source of these images in order to facilitate change for future generations. In almost every interview, women did identify some source of the body beautiful - and the power that image wields -as well as how we might resist that power.

> Where do I think in general the body beautiful comes from? Everywhere. I can't say one specific place. In general, it's everywhere, from everyone. From school, from work places, and from the family. - Katherine

> Media creates it. But I think that it's reciprocal at the same time. There is that ideology that exists, and people reproduce that ideology as well. It's not just something that shapes and molds us. There is an element of participation. We have agency. - Sarah

> They have all these repair books out everywhere, and in every magazine. In every single issue you'll find at least one article saying...do these things. As if it's just a car part, and not a body part. You can just restore, or replace it. - Laura

> From media, from school, from work...just from...I mean, everybody already has the mentality, so everybody gets it from everybody else. It seems like women are supposed to be good at everything in the house, and look really good, and now be professional, and be really good at it. There are just really high expectations for women. Even more so than men. I'm just trying not to dwell on it. I'm trying to get on with other things. - Sheila

> It is society. It is the media. We have been so conditioned to look at perfect women, that's what we expect. I think there needs to be a lot bigger awareness of what's going on. - Marla

The issue of body image and weight preoccupation is very much tied into issues of sexuality in a society where a woman's sexuality is defined by her body. This is not a subtle undertone in these women's experiences. As evidenced by the women's own words, this is a social fact that is experienced at every level of their lives. In our society, the defined limits of female sexuality have little variation, less personal differences, and no allowance for exceptions. The acceptable physical model of the attractive woman occurs naturally in less than two per cent of the North American population (Wolf, 1990). The women I interviewed wanted to be sexual/beautiful beings despite and because of their variations from the norm.

> I want to be sexy. I am, I think...at home, in my bedroom with my partner. But I am not considered attractive or sexy by others...on the surface. I wish that were different. I wish I didn't care so much. -Katherine

> Sexuality is...my sexuality is not as okay as other women's...the more you fit the ideal of beauty, the more sexual you are allowed to be, and appear. - Sarah

> I can't even think of myself that way. I am so far from the norm - I can't even...you know, it's like I'm only half a woman cause I'm not sexy or pretty or anything. I'm not much to look at, and that's all that seems to count. - Sheila

The norms of femininity centre on a woman's body. A woman's body is equated with her sexuality. Sexuality is an ascribed characteristic in our society granted to those women who fit these norms. Hesse-Biber says:

> What is ultimately required is a re-visioning of what it means to be feminine. It requires us to look at current socio-cultural norms of femininity...to identify and resist those "micro" social practices and relations that emanate from a variety of institutional sites and whose primary goal is the disciplinary control of women's bodies. The ultimate response is to resist those practices at their origin point (for example, through boycotting practices/products) and their destination (the body) through re-visioning social practices and discourses, which promote alternative concepts of "femininity" (1991: p.186-187).

## SEPARATION OF MIND AND BODY

The fourth theme that characterized the experience of weight preoccupation for the women in my study was the separation of the mind from the body. A woman's body was experienced as something alien to her - something to be reckoned with and conquered.

> My body wasn't me. It didn't show who I really was. I sort of treated it like an enemy, and I still have a hard time liking what I see when I look at myself naked. It's like the real me hasn't had a chance to surface because of this big, oversized me that's in the way. - Sheila

> I guess if I think about it, I do look at my body as a thing - not as a part of me, but as a separate thing ...a vessel that carries my soul. I am not at all at peace with my body...I can't help but feel like it belongs to someone else. My body is slim and muscular and smooth, and this body is so lumpy and shitty and weak. - Sarah

> I will win the battle of the bulge if it kills me. My body needs help, and I can give it what it needs - less food, more exercise, better clothes and, shall we say, kinder reviews. - Lucy

In description, the body was dissected into parts and components, with various areas needing specific "work."

> My butt and my hips - they need the most work. They don't match the rest of me. - Marla

> When I split my body into parts, my face kicks ass over the rest of my body, you know? I think I have a nicer face than the rest of my body. I don't have "that body," you know? - Tannis

Hutchinson asserts that:

> What appears to be at the heart of the negative body image is a state of disembodiment. The body is experienced as alien and lost to awareness or as an adversary - two sides of the coin of disembodiment. Somewhere there has occurred a loss of the sense of integrity. The body has broken away or has been severed from the mind and is experienced as a foreign object, an albatross, or a hated antagonist. It becomes something to ignore, deny, deprive or otherwise whip into shape or get under control. The pain of separation of mind and body ranges from the dull ache of deadness and depression to the excrutiation of self-torture (1982, p.59-60).

For women who suffer from weight preoccupation, the mind and the body are not experienced as an integrated whole. The mind is conceptualized by these women as the seat of personality - the inner place where the character of the self resides. The body is conceptualized as the text of the self - the outer place where a woman's character and worth can be symbolically read by all. There doesn't seem to be a sense of the connectedness and symbiosis between the two. The women in this research articulated this division of self and the hardship it caused.

> I really can't stand to look at myself. Basically, I can't stand the way I look, you know? It's not the real me. That's inside...buried under all this shit. -Jeananne

> It's like I can't be me in this body. I watch other women and I think..."I can be that outgoing - funny -sexy - whatever." But I can't. Not in this body. What I look like is miles away from who I am. - Maggie

Maggie uses the phrase "this body" - as opposed to "my body." It is as if there is no ownership involved. She describes how "this body" interferes with her ability to live an authentic life - to be the "real" person she is. As if like any other obstacle in life, the body is conceptualized as a purposive, strategically placed barrier to ultimate happiness and success.

For many of the women in this study, however, they recall a time when their bodies were not an issue at all. Some women recognized that they learned to define their bodies this way over time and with experience. They knew that their bodies were once just fine in both form and function.

> As soon as I started to grow breasts - you know, puberty - that's when I started to look at my body the way somebody else might. And I wondered...would they like this curve or that bulge? Could they see this flab or that roll? - Lena

> I was very comfortable with the way I was. I had won just about every single competition I was in. I was just this little kid having a good time. And then, all of a sudden, it started to be..."well, if you want to be coached by the Canadian National coach, then you're going to have to go on a diet and lose some of the baby fat." - Sarah

> I remember when I was in Mexico, I saw this beautiful little Spanish girl. She was dark and so perfect - her skin and her eyes. And then I thought to myself..."she will have to lose some weight soon, though." Then I couldn't believe what went through my head! She was so lovely, and I was sad for her because I knew that soon, - because that's the way life is - she wouldn't be lovely anymore. It's so sad. I hate this...all of this. - Maria

From the day we are born, our bodies belong to us, they are a part of us - we are our bodies. They are a requisite, vital, and enjoyable element of being. The use of the body through food, rest, play and motion bring us joy and comfort without guilt or worry. At some point, this changes. Bodies become defined as good or bad - acceptable or unacceptable. This happens through cultural ideology that suggests to a young girl at every turn that she is dire need of this or that product or effort to win her popularity and social standing. It also happens through "routines, rules and practices (Bordo, 1993: p.165)." As a student of Foucault, Bordo agrees that practice has primacy over belief, and that for women in our culture, the body is indeed a practical locus of social control.

> Not chiefly through ideology, but through the organization and regulation of time, space, and movements of our daily lives, our bodies trained, shaped, and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood,desire, masculinity, femininity (Bordo, 1993: p.165-166)

What was once taken for granted now gives us pause for thought - do we measure up, do we like what we see, do others? We begin to look at our outer selves critically - seeing what others might see and trying to assess judgement. We become separated from our bodies - viewing them from the position of "other," and losing the balance of body and soul.

The mind-body separation that so characterizes these women's experiences is a disciplinary technique designed to ensure docility. This quote from Bordo articulates this best when she states that:

> Through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity - a pursuit without a terminus, requiring that women constantly tend to minute and often whimsical changes in fashion - female bodies become docile bodies - bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, "improvement." Through the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, make-up, and dress - central organizing principles of time and space in the day of many women - we are rendered less socially oriented and more centripetally focused on self-modification. Through these disciplines, we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel and conviction of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough...Viewed historically, the discipline and normalization of the female body...has to be acknowledged as an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control (1993: p.165-166).

It is part of the North American female rite of passage - to learn how to wear make-up, use hair accessories, and match outfits. It is through these kinds of minute, detailed rituals that we learn to take an external stance in viewing our own bodies. We gaze into the mirror, trying to see what others might see. Through the "normalizing disciplines of diet, make-up and dress" (Bordo, 1993: 166), we lose our connection with our bodies as ourselves, and move to a new adversarial position with our bodies against ourselves. The women in my study often found this position untenable.

> The worst is that feeling when you realize this is your body for life - you can only change it so much, and it will never be what they're asking it to be. I am not perfect...nobody is really. But I'm supposed to be, and I know that, and everyone else knows that, and I am enraged by the knowledge that what I am will never be good enough. I wish I could just

> live with myself -feel whole and comfortable. That shouldn't be so impossible, you know? - Katherine
>
> If I could run away from myself, I would. I'm willing to cut myself open and remove parts of myself to get the "look." My body is a bigger enemy to me than food, and this causes me so much grief - because I can't get away from myself, right? Every time I look in the mirror, I see what is terribly wrong with me. It's like they picked the one thing I can never reach - perfect bodies - for me as a goal...Now, it's a catch-all. I can't stand how I look and I have to live with this body every day. I am damned to live in it. - Marla
>
> The truth is, I can't live with myself this way. I don't want to. I'm all fucked up inside and out, and I feel lost to myself. Like, being lost in the woods and you don't even have some half-assed clue as to which direction to go. To be honest, I'd really rather die than go on this way. - Lucy

The experience is described as though the woman - the real, beautiful, acceptable woman - is trapped inside a body that constrains and imprisons her. This notion of mind/body dualism is not a new one. From Plato, to Augustine, to Descartes, there is a dualistic heritage of conceptualizing the body as a completely separate realm from that of the mind.

> All three - Plato, Augustine, and, most explicitly, Descartes - provide instructions, rules, or models of how to gain control over the body, with the ultimate aim - for this is what their regimen finally boils down to - of learning to live without it. By that is meant: to achieve intellectual independence from the lure of the body's illusions, to become impervious to its distractions, and, most important, to kill off its desires and hungers. Once control has become the central issue for the soul, these are the only possible terms of victory (Bordo, 1993: p.145).

Bordo asserts that the central features in the body imagery of the anorectic are that the body is experienced as an alien, confining enemy that is beyond all control. This "dualist axis" (Bordo, 1993) is a specific element in our culture that allows for the separation of mind and body as described by the women in this study. It encourages the general population to divide the mind from the body in everyday practice and perception. It is a social precondition to the heightened sense of disembodiment for women with weight preoccupation. Since the body is the primary focus of a woman's beauty efforts,

and it is the body that is cast as the primary vehicle to beauty, the further separation of mind and body seems almost inevitable. What is lost to these women, then, is a sense of personal integration and union. The sadness of this was clearly evident in the experiences of many of the women interviewed.

> It's like I just want to feel comfortable in my skin -I remember being a little kid and thinking about big, important things. How I looked was never an issue. Who I was going to be - now that was one to chew on! It's so sad to me that I don't think about that anymore. I'm too busy planning what I can eat, what I should wear, etc. - Anna

> Crazy people have these thoughts...like, people who cut themselves and tear their hair and stuff. I just can't believe I hate...really loathe my own body that much that sometimes I want to hurt it. I forget that it's me too. - Marla

> I find it so upsetting - to be stuck with my body and to be so unhappy about that. People tell me to learn to love myself...I do, just not how I am now. 15 pounds from now, okay! I feel ripped off and responsible for feeling that way all at the same time. It's really pathetic ...a sad, sad mess. - Katherine

> Embarrassment is the first feeling I can think of -embarrassed about looking this way, embarrassed about giving a shit at all, embarrassed about making myself sick and miserable. I feel sad for the years I've lost...my years as a younger person were so full of friends and activity. And now...well, I don't have the energy or the confidence to do much more than count my calories. I'm not me anymore. I don't know who I am now. - Sheila

The separation of mind and body results in a loss of overall health for these women. Physical and mental health relies on a balance of energy/activity and engagement/motivation. This balance is seriously disrupted by body construction projects -where energy is drained by compulsive exercise and reduced calories, and engagement is minimized by feelings of self-loathing and lack of self-esteem.

Clearly, there is a systematic objectification of women at work here. This is a kind of objectification far more insidious than the ideal image of woman-as-object that is reflected back to us in popular culture. This objectification includes becoming an object to oneself - fragmenting the woman in such a way as to displace her from her

own body. According to Foucault, the modern individual is, by definition, an objectified, analyzed and fixed individual (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982). If this is true for the general population, it is doubly true for women. Consider Foucault's assertion:

> There is no universal person on whom power has performed its operations and knowledge, its inquiries. Rather, the individual is the effect and object of a certain crossing of power and knowledge. He [sic] is the product of the complex strategic developments in the field of power and the multiple developments in the human sciences (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: p.159-160).

Foucault claims that the individual has been socially constructed as an object through the functioning of bio-power. Bio-power enacts "a set of historical practices which produces human objects systematized by structuralism and the human subjects explicated by hermeneutics" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: p.103). In the modern Western tradition, it is specifically women who are constructed as objects in both structure (e.g., media, education, medicine) and commentary (e.g., literature, fashion, popular psychology). Women are considered to be bodies above all else - the body is socially constructed as the centre of our subjectivity. As Bordo suggests:

> For women, associated with the body and largely confined to a life centred on the body (both with the beautification of one's own body and the reproduction, care and maintenance of the bodies of others), culture's grip on the body is a constant, intimate fact of everyday life (1993, p.17).

The women I spoke with gave voice to this very same sentiment - a woman's body is at once the centre of her life, and not hers at all.

> I check myself out in the mirror everyday. My ritual is very important. What I see during this checking stage sets the tone for the rest of my day. It sets my mood, my choices, my level of functioning, and obviously, my appearance...I guess my body dictates me in a way I wish it wouldn't. - Marla

> My scale is like my whipping post. If it says something I don't like, I chuck it across the room, swear at it, throw it in the garbage...and then go look for somebody to scream at til I feel better! If I like it though, I am walking on clouds all day. You know what though? Sometimes I think I have all

these blessings, and something so stupid controls the course of my day, you know? It's humiliating. - Anna

I caught this guy on the bus staring at my chest. He was just outright staring. I tried to stare him down, to embarrass him at getting caught or something. But he never lifted his eyes! It's like my breasts were totally unattached...all on their own, available for his seedy little stare. I felt like crawling out of my body and hiding somewhere til he went away. I actually felt like crying. - Maggie

These feelings of being dictated by the body, and of experiencing others treating the body as if it was indeed detached from a person, were common to all of the women with whom I spoke. For a weight preoccupied woman, such a common cultural occurrence can be demoralizing. Once a woman has cast her own body as a source of embarrassment and discomfort - once a woman has grown to hate her body and agreed to try almost anything to remake her physical self - she is vulnerable to the judgments and criticisms levelled at her by others. She will lend them credibility because she is ashamed and apologetic - humiliated by her own appearance and sorry to offend the people who have to look at her.

I was at this wedding, and I was wearing a very low cut...but pretty black velvet dress. It was long and off the shoulder, but I have big boobs and they showed a little. Well, I passed this couple, and I heard them snicker and comment about my boobs when I walked by. First I was livid. I figured she was jealous! Then I was embarrassed - it had taken a lot to get me into that dress in the first place, and my husband convinced me it looked good. Then, to my own surprise really, I felt badly for them, to have to look at me. I know. Sick, eh? - Sarah

My boyfriend told me that his mother thought I was heavy. I don't know why he told me, but he did. And I didn't get angry at him, or her, and I should have.I let this perfect stranger dictate my mood for the rest of the day, and I was embarrassed that she had noticed enough to say something. - Lena

I was told in dance class that my tights and top were too fitted. I had left the house thinking I looked like the girl from Flashdance, and came home feeling like the homeliest thing that ever walked the face of the earth...And the same thing happened to me when I went for swim team try-outs. I wore a scoop neck red suit and was told that nobody was here to see my "titties", and could I wear something a little more appropriate next time. I was 12 years old, for gods sake! - Maggie

Why do weight preoccupied women experience a feeling of being separated from their own bodies? Given the social circumstances surrounding their experience, the more pertinent question seems to be how can any woman avoid it? As women, we are trained to experience life through our bodies. Not, however, in a healthy and vital way - where we are free to revel in our appetites, desires, and functions. Rather, we are encouraged to participate in an endless, elusive struggle against our physical selves and our own sense of personal synthesis. If there was one thing the women I spoke to wished for, it was a reunion with themselves - to release themselves from the endless pursuit of body perfection and to rejoin their mind and body to "get back to the business of living."

> More than anything else, I just want this to be over. I want to go back to how I was when I didn't give a shit what anybody else thought...when I liked myself as I was, and that's all the thought I'd give it. - Anna

> If I could have anything now, it wouldn't be the perfect body or the to-die-for wardrobe...I would forgive myself for not being perfect and love myself anyways. I know that sounds corny, but sometimes I feel that that is really all I need to do to get out of this and get back to the business of living. - Katherine

> I wish I could get all those years back...I was so lost. I am only starting to get back to myself, you know? It's like, "gee, there's all this other stuff about me that is great that I forgot, or ignored for so long." I can write, and run, and enjoy films and books without everything relating to my weight, my weight, my weight. - Sheila.

For some, though, the division between mind and body is so sharp and so hard that they feel they may never be whole again.

> I will never be over this. I will always care about this more than anything else, and never accept anything less than my best effort to be ideal. My body will always be something to me in need of desperate repair. No man or experience or information will ever change that. If I could have anything, it would be a better body before it would be world peace! - Marla

> Sometimes I think I'm better, and then it comes back on me so strong. I am still not comfortable with my body, and I don't think I ever will be. It still feels like somebody else's...somebody pulled a switch-eroo in heaven or something, but this isn't me! Before you know it, I'm going to be way more worried about aging than fat! - Tannis

> Do I think this will ever not be an issue for me? Yeah, I guess. I hate to be morbid, but in death, I will not give a hoot what I look like! But that's what it will take to stop me from doing these things...to get me to stop. My body is my life's work, I guess. And one's life's work is over in death, not before. - Lucy

Lucy states that she will die before she stops pursuing body perfection. Her body is so removed from herself that it is described by her as her "life's work" - an entity entirely outside and separate from herself. Only in a social atmosphere of objectification and the divisive force of bio-power could one conceive of dying for beauty. The body has become the ultimate cause for these women - their raison d'etre. When the mind and body are experienced in unison, physicality is but one necessary element in the act of living. When the mind and body are experienced as divided, a woman perceives her physical self as a foreign, awkward object in need of constant attending.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## DISCUSSION: RESIST AND REVISION

My analysis of the thematic content indicates specific underlying social elements in the experience of weight preoccupation. The notion of a woman's personal and physical space being limited by cultural standards and institutional boundaries was well supported in the literature. These limits and boundaries were identified by all of the women with whom I spoke. The functioning of the gaze and its many forms - as well as its many effects - was experienced as a pervasive and judgemental component of social life for these women. The women in my study experienced their own sexuality as inextricably tied to their appearance. This was identified as a constraining and controlling factor in these women's lives. And finally, the separation of mind and body as a function of weight preoccupation was recognised as a very real impediment to beginning the healing process. These four thematic concepts highlight the similarities in the experience of weight preoccupation for the women in my study. They allow for a continued exploration into the socio-cultural structures and ideologies that encourage dangerous and endless body projects. These concepts may not lead immediately to identifiable areas of social change. They do, however, lend a unique perspective on the experience that, when viewed in conjunction with existing knowledge and research, offers the possibility of intersecting the relations of power described by Foucault.

The similarities I have highlighted are most certainly the most interesting and provocative ideas this research has produced. The differences between the women were more circumstantial than thematic. Age seemed to be the most salient factor in the differences between the women. The older women were much more able to analyze their experiences critically, had some perspective and hindsight on their experience, and were much less involved in serious, dangerous weight preoccupied

behaviour than their younger counterparts. While the older women suffered from anxiety and low self-esteem, the younger women suffered from self loathing and disgust. While the older women were still actively watching their weight and food intake, the younger women were heavily involved in crash diets, routine starvation, and drug abuse.

Differences in women of varying socio-economic status were not present as all 12 women interviewed were from middle to upper class backgrounds. Each woman verified her own family or personal income level, and all the women identified themselves as being middle to upper class. Clearly, this represents a biased sample. This is based, however, on a methodological decision to address weight preoccupation in the population in which it statistically occurs the most often (Hacker et al., 1986).

Difference in class was not addressed then, and, in retrospect, this was an unfortunate choice. In my excitement at the prospect of exploring the experience of weight preoccupation outside the usual framework of medicine or traditional sociology, I chose to solicit participation from what was, statistically speaking, a sure thing. I was not as concerned with a representative sample as I was with a guaranteed response to my call for voluntary participation. I justified this decision by pointing to the medical research that identifies a specific population as experiencing weight preoccupation most often, and by stating the importance of identifying what is common to women who encounter body image issues. In my effort to highlight the shared nature of the experience of weight preoccupation, difference of any kind was overlooked.

After doing the research in this way, I believe it would have been both valuable and interesting to address the experience of weight preoccupation for women of different classes, races, and sexual orientations. I could have addressed for some of the differences between us by going to communities of women outside of the University setting. The University sample pool is probably the most over studied population in the

social sciences. The white middle class experience has been all too often the focus of social research. I do not intend to add insult to injury and suggest that my study findings are generalizable to all or any groups of women, or women in general. However, the themes that I have identified raise interesting and important questions about how we understand the experience of weight preoccupation, and what we focus on when we consider preventions and interventions. So, despite the lack of analysis of diversity in both experience and background, it is the common themes that best lend themselves to a discussion of how things might be changed.

Throughout my analysis of the thematic content of the research, I have alluded to several key issues that require further discussion. These are issues relating to points of individual resistance and social change that arose in conversations with the women in my study. Many of the women had developed personal coping strategies in order to resist the oppression of weight preoccupation and proceed with their lives. Many had also identified specific socio-cultural elements of society that could be re-visioned in order to redefine the body-beautiful message that young women receive. Within the theoretical framework of feminist poststructuralism and Foucault, a resistance to power and a re-visioning of femininity could conceivably produce real social change.

It is true, however, that to date this has not occurred. For a long time now, feminists of all brands have been saying that we must get rid of rigid gender roles and change the social construction of gender. The suggestion to change rigid gender roles is usually met with a cry to make education, social policy and law gender blind (Lindsey, 1994). This hardly goes far enough in a society that cannot begin to digest the poststructural tenet that gender is neither binary in nature nor subject to categorization and definition (Ollenberg and Moore, 1992). The suggestion to address changes at the level of the social construction of gender is usually met with notions of equality in gender value and reconstructed imagery that validates "both" genders (Lindsey, 1994).

Again, this rests on the assumption that there are 2 and only 2 genders. The imagery is one of a scale off balance that needs simply to be put level.

According to the basic tenets of poststructuralist feminism, such categorization is both misleading and unproductive. One of the most important contributions of poststructuralist feminism is that it gives

> insight into the problems of creating overarching definitions of experience, when faced with the cultural diversity of social categories (Ollenberg and Moore, 1992: p.25-26).

Resistance, revision - change of any kind cannot be effective if it is based on inaccurate categories of experience. The theoretical framework of this research addresses that issue. Within the theoretical framework of this research the notion of resistance and re-visioning are very specific, and, when applied to practice, can result in quite innovative and feasible programs and policy.

However, before proceeding further with a theoretical discussion, it is important to hear the methods of individual resistance some of the women had adopted as a means of countering the force of the body-beautiful mandate.

> Eventually, I just had to stop paying attention to all of it. I kept the television off, I stopped talking to my friends about it...I even moved out of the house for awhile...When you feel like you are always being told what to do, if you stop hearing it...your mind has a chance to clear and hear what you think you should do. - Anna

> I can't pick up a magazine or watch films anymore. All pop culture is forbidden! It encourages me to do these things...I hear about a diet, I try it. Same with pills, exercises, fat burning cream, etc. All the stuff on t.v. about cosmetic surgery got me going on that. The images alone were enough. I try to ignore it, and like myself day to day. I don't look in mirrors, and I don't like getting photographed...I want to see me from my inside out, not any other way, you know? - Sheila

> Reading. Reading, and talking to people...like you, and with my friends and my profs at Women's Studies...they always remind me..."hey (name), you're beautiful because you're you and you're bright and loving and that has lasting appeal." I heard that so many of them experience the same thing too. But they had learned that everyone ages, and has accidents, and have babies...they taught me that life etches a kind of

> beauty that is beyond the nubile nymph look...The perfect body apparently does not guarantee any kind of Hollywood life of love forever or anything. I believe now that I was suffering needlessly...thinking that only a beautiful woman gets those things, you know? The brass ring and all that. - Jeananne
>
> I don't know what it is, but as I get older, I care less and less. When my body becomes an issue, it's just as stupid and awful and painful as before. But, it doesn't happen as often, it doesn't last as long, and it doesn't control my decisions and choices anymore... You might think that's my marriage, but you have to remember that I was really bad for 2 whole years while I was married. - Sarah

These women identify a number of interesting points of resistance. A rejection of popular imagery is one - where not ingesting the endless pageantry of ideal bodies presented actually reduces their effect. A kind of non-participation is another - to decline to participate in the diet/fashion industry as both a viewer and a consumer. It is a conscientious objection of specific elements of culture designed to undermine women's confidence and choices.

Another significant point of resistance is the conscious effort to return to oneself as the source of both strength and judgement. To slow down, withdraw, and hear one's own voice again is clearly a survival technique for a woman suffering from a barrage of imagery (television, magazines), opinion (friends and family), and technology (diets, pills and surgery). Education and information are also identified as at least a road to resistance. As Jeananne said, learning about her experience and that it is a shared one began the healing process. Through the introduction of alternative sources of information, she began to question what she had previously believed to be true - that in order to be a woman of beauty, she had to suffer and work for the perfect body.

Finally, some resistance seems to come about as a function of age. I do not know whether this is due to maturity, a change in priorities, or a true change in perspective and personal ideology. Do we come to accept ourselves - despite our cultural mandate to be at odds with ourselves - through time and experience alone?

Perhaps the mandate to be unhappy with our lives is meant to last only through our younger years. As I discussed earlier, the differences between the women were not adequately addressed, and some valuable information was not more closely examined as a result. This remains a most important question in understanding the genesis and resolution of weight preoccupation, and is worthy of further investigation at some later date.

There is strong theoretical support for the notion of resistance. Foucault's concept of power includes the presence of resistance - it is his contention that one cannot exist without the other. Power is a relation, and "resistance is perpetual and unpredictable, and hegemony precarious" (Bordo, 1993: p.262). Power is not held over one by another - power is not a possession, it is a process.

> Power is not conceived as a property or possession of a dominant class, state, or sovereign but as a strategy; the effects of domination associated with power arise not from an appropriation or deployment by a subject but from `manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functioning'; and a relation of power does not constitute an obligation or prohibition imposed upon the `powerless,' rather it invests them, is transmitted by and through them...Foucault argued that `where there is power, there is resistance' and that the plurality of resistance should not be reduced to a single locus of revolution or rebellion (Smart,1985: p.77).

When one resists the effects of power, it tends to shift. Power is made up of techniques and strategies deployed at various times by various people. It is not absolute control absolutely. According to Foucault, power never sits still for long, if at all. Accepting this conceptualization, one must also accept the presence of constant resistance, to erode the effects of power. Power itself does not erode as it is not an object to wield or squander. However, the effects of power can be mitigated by the actions and tactics of individuals and groups.

> Where there is power, there is resistance. What Foucault meant by this is that resistance is present everywhere power is exercised, that the network of power relations is paralleled by a multiplicity of forms of resistance ... In other words both power nnand resistance are synonymous with sociality;

> their respective forms may change, but a society without relations of power and therefore forms of resistance is in Foucault's view inconceivable (Smart, 1985: p.132-133).

Women, then, can resist the power deployed against us through the promulgation of the beauty myth. We can do this at the many levels that it occurs - the intra-personal, the interpersonal, and the societal. If we are positioned within relations of power rather than governed by its wielding, we have an opportunity to re-construct those relations.

Turning an individual female back may not dismantle the entire beauty industry, but it will help that one woman through and beyond the experience of weight preoccupation. Speaking our experiences to one another and jointly resisting the manoeuvres made against us will further heal our damaged psyches and tired bodies. At the societal level, our consumer power, our demands for changes in education and standards of socialization, and our collective rejection of the ideal as the real will significantly impact society economically, politically, and socially.

It is not my purpose here to make sweeping promises of radical social change. Nor is it my expectation that these strategies of resistance will be desired or appreciated by all women. These are techniques of resistance that have been identified by the women who participated in my study. They are suggesting that some kinds of resistance have worked for them, and can possibly make a difference for our whole culture of beauty. It is from this perspective that we can best address the specific forms of power exercised in society and attempt to contest them.

What I am addressing here is the possibility of a "personal counterculture of meaningful images of beauty" (Wolf, 1990: p.278). Making images of beauty in our culture that are more real, more variable, more inclusive and more attainable offers the chance to `re-view' female beauty in a way that does not encourage an atmosphere of pain and compulsion surrounding our bodies.

> While we cannot directly affect the images, we can drain them of their power. We can turn away from them, look directly at one another, and find alternative images of beauty in a female subculture; seek out the plays, music, films that illuminate women in three dimensions; find the biographies of women, the women's history, the heroines that in each generation are submerged from view; fill in the terrible "beautiful" blanks. We can lift ourselves and other women out of the myth - but only if we are willing to seek out and support and really look at the alternatives (Wolf, 1990: p.277).

Also central to Foucault's notion of power is the intersection of power and knowledge. Knowledge literally informs power. If we are to resist the effects of power, we must have the necessary information in our armoury. As Jeananne indicated, the effects of education, and the dissemination of alternative information gave her a beginning point of resistance. Clearly, not everybody has equal access to power/knowledge. This is a large part of the problem. It is at this point that a call for collective action is relevant. We do not want to watch our friends, our mothers, our daughters and sisters suffer with weight preoccupation any longer. We do not want it consuming our own lives any longer either. If this is our goal, intersecting the current relations of power with the knowledge necessary to shift that power is what must be done. It is the power/knowledge imperative that holds the real promise of change. The importance of such a connection cannot be overstated.

> The unified though elusive functioning of Power/Knowledge, the theme that binds Foucault's studies and underwrites the disciplines, demands that intervention and resistance should strive to forge connections between such knowledge and practice (Hewitt, 1991: p.244).

The generation and dissemination, then, of counter-images of beauty can act as the knowledge necessary to intersect the effects of power.

Beyond the coping strategies these women adopted, they also had thoughts and opinions on how to address the issue of weight preoccupation for greater society. All the suggestions came down to this: revision femininity in such a way as to remove the focus of identity from the body specifically and appearance in general.

> Really early...like, grade school even...girls should be encouraged to be full bodied people. I mean, they should be encouraged to play physical and active, not just passively watching the boys, you know? Being a girl to them shouldn't mean giving up sports and dirt and running and screaming. Their looks don't have to become so bloody important...maybe teachers can start by rewarding young girls for things other than matching outfits and nice drawings. - Sarah
>
> I think it all boils down to what it actually means to be a woman...We all seem to have gotten the message that being a woman means being unnaturally obsessed with our bodies and clothes. Being a woman is really so much more than that...and we know that. But we have no support for that knowledge - no credibility. That's what has to change...an acceptance of the complete experience of female life, you know? Babies, aging, gravity...like you were saying...a commitment to teach our children, boys and girls, the value beyond surface appearance. - Anna
>
> I want the world to accept that I am a desirable, exciting, interesting woman because I am so full of stuff...thoughts, dreams, sensuality, opinions and insecurities...I want to be able to live with these parts of myself and have others appreciate me for that. That goes to education at home and school...the whole arena of school sports, media and information in general...We need models of these women - women who succeed despite the mandate to fail! - Jeananne
>
> I remember being ready to go on a date in...like, 5 minutes after he got there. And he said to me..."you couldn't have done all your female things yet!?" My female things...he said that. And it made me think that this was the expectation, you know? I was to take the time it took to get gorgeous, and all that entails...to be true to my female...things! - Laura
>
> Can I be feminine without being beautiful? I can, but only in a vacuum! My culture says no. Or at least it says that I have to at least try. Not to try...now that is the greatest social sin of all. Time to re-think things, I think! - Katherine

Katherine calls for a re-thinking. Hesse-Biber (1991) calls it re-visioning. She suggests a re-visioning of femininity in both social practice and discourse. There is no one and true femininity to uncover, and that is what a re-visioning seeks to state. It is not so much a need to re-construct femininity as it is a need to relinquish the whole notion of specific characteristics representing The Feminine. We do not require a new kind of feminine dogma to apply ourselves to. We require the freedom to re-think femininity as a more fluid, diverse, and ever-changing quality of character.

"Resisting practices" and "re-visioning femininity" are phrases that catch our attention and seem to hold some promise of change. When one considers, however, the experience of negative body image, and all that means for women, one begins to understand the length and difficulty of the road ahead. Negative body-image resides in personal psyche, culture, politics, and socialization. It is a problem of epic proportion, stemming from every major social institution and discipline in our society. As Hutchinson indicates:

> Negative body image in women is a phenomenon that has its roots in many soils. It is a physical phenomenon created out of bodily experiences and in turn impacting the well-being of the physical organism itself. It is a psychological phenomenon woven out of the threads of personal history, expressed as a distortion of the imagination, and changeable through the agency of that same part of the psyche. It is a cultural phenomenon in a culture that perpetuates the myth that there is one way for a woman to look, and that socializes into its female members a drive to conform to these standards. It is a political phenomenon embodying a form of political oppression whereby women waste enormous amounts of energy and human potential locked in a struggle with their bodies, potential that could better be used in developing other aspects of their being. Lastly, it is a philosophical-spiritual phenomenon endorsed and reinforced by much religious training and the Cartesian duality that splits the self off from the body creating of it a target, a symbol of the enemy (1992: p.67).

There is no panacea. There is no quick fix for the weight preoccupied woman. What there is, however, is a possibility to begin the process of rearranging relations of power through resistance and information. When a woman stands against a system that denies her right to define herself without limits, personally or as a part of a collective, she stands for revised power relations and re-constructed knowledge. The women I spoke with echoed this sentiment to various degrees.

> What men and women both need to hear, I think, is that men can be soft and vulnerable and women can be dirty and rough. Our roles are so rigid, and it really is making us all ill if you think about it...Men are dying of heart disease trying to contain their emotions and damaging their bodies. Women are dying of starvation and cosmetic surgery trying to fit this false ideal...I don't know. Let's bust out of these clothes, try on someone else's, and find our own! - Sarah

> There is a sense of entitlement that men have...that they are entitled to a knock out on their arm, no matter how unappealing they are! Wrong! Nobody should be an ornament...so we need to teach our boys that girls are smart and strong as well as pretty and soft, cause we are, biologically, the fairer sex! I guess we also need to teach our girls that their brains are as important as their bodies, and that the condition of their spirit is as essential as the condition of their muscles. Kind of re-do, and un-do, what's been done so far. - Anna
>
> I think we should try this...I saw this once comparing what people say about homosexuals. Say all these things...show all these things that women are subject to all the time, but make it men. Like, how they describe what a woman is wearing in an article about her recent scientific discovery?! Do that in an article about some business tycoon. See what kind of response you get. Turn it around so men and women can see all this stuff for the theatre that it is, as opposed to the hard truth it's presented as. - Lena
>
> We need to see ourselves differently. What will that take? Everything we've got, probably! If my daughter can't find herself in the images and information that's offered as reality, she will have this problem too...trying to fit into those pictures instead of making her own. That's why we need to have images and information that consider variation and difference. I want that for my children, when I have them! - Maria
>
> I just want to be able to be feminine, and comfortable with that, without having to act like a plastic, obsessed, unstable, competitive distrusting caricature of a woman! - Katherine

What Katherine suggests here is precisely what feminist poststructuralism identifies as the necessary seeds of change. Subjectivity is constructed through discourse. Presently, various discourses construct female subjectivity exactly this way - plastic, obsessed, etc. Interjecting new meanings may seem like a small trickle to calm a blazing fire, but it is precisely these small resistances and reformulations that offer the greatest possibility of social change. Understanding the genesis of gendered subjectivity, and what need this construction may serve in the greater social order of present history, can lead to a re-constructed subjectivity. As Weedon explains:

> Poststructuralist feminism requires attention to historical specificity in the production, for women, of subject positions and modes of femininity and their place in the overall network of social power relations. In this the meaning of biological sexual difference is never finally fixed. It is a site of contest over meaning and the exercise of patriarchal power. This

> discursive contest, in which women can resist particular meanings and power relations, is subject to historical change. An understanding of how discourses of biological sexual differences are mobilized, in a particular society, at a particular moment, is the first stage in intervening in order to initiate change (1987: p.135).

Clearly, there is theoretical support - through the work of both Foucault and poststructuralist feminism - for the possibility of social change within the realm of micro-practises and individual action. This is not to say that as a collective of women we should not continue to work for greater social change. This is to say that while we work together for these changes, there is real hope for the women experiencing weight preoccupation and all its hardships right now. Intersecting the relations of power with knowledge is a viable direction for immediate change. Intersecting relations of power is really about interjecting perspective. So much of what we claim to know and believe to be true is reified, mystified constructions that no longer give us any pause for thought. If the power/knowledge relationship can be intersected, and new meanings interjected, relations of power change. In light of competing truths, the "one and true" can not exist. Interjecting perspective begins with looking at something in a different way. The unique theoretical framework I utilized in my work offers such a perspective.

Herein lies the strength of my work - the theoretical framework. By combining the cultural analysis of Michel Foucault and the notion of constructed subjectivity in feminist poststructuralism, a new perspective has been created. Foucault, for all his brilliance, is completely gender blind in his work. Foucault's concepts of panopticism, bio-power, hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, the examination, and docile bodies become a powerful lens on culture when coupled with the gender focus of feminist poststructuralism. At no point did I feel roped in by the theoretical framework. I was never in a position to remain within the limits of my theory, or make my data fit my chosen framework. On the contrary. I felt that this framework allowed me to push the

envelope of perspective, and look at the issue of weight preoccupation in a whole new way.

At this point, there needs to be some discussion on the implications for practice that this research holds. Beyond practising resistance, and working for greater social change through re-visioned gender, does this research offer any seeds of change? Feminists have long been saying that we need to loosen our rigid gender roles and change the social construction of gender. Does this research reiterate that, or does it open up new possibilities? It is my assertion that this research does indeed offer new ways of thinking that can lead to new ways of being.

Based on Butler's claim that gender is constituted through action, we can see how a change in a given course of action will result in a re-constituted gender identity. In the mid-seventies, there was a revolutionary notion brought forth in the counselling field - self-talk. To speak to and about oneself positively was said to bring about a real change in feelings and assessment of oneself. There is similar potential for change to be facilitated by action. For example, if the Women's Health Clinic were to adopt "positive-action" as a part of their weight preoccupation counselling, they would be helping women to act as complete and confident individuals. If Butler is right, and gender is constituted through our actions, it would be no small thing to act beyond and above the prescribed behaviour for the gender called woman. What is not considered "lady-like", or what is considered "tom-boy" behaviour may well hold a key piece to the puzzle of restructuring our identities. While this may appear trite at first glance, consider the success self-talk has enjoyed in the past 2 decades.

I would also recommend a massive re-education of medical practitioners. They have become party to the perpetuation of weight preoccupation in 2 ways. First, they have subsumed weight preoccupied behaviour under the rubric of medicine, and have been very territorial about any efforts to examine and question their specific

practices. Second, they have addressed only the physical symptomatology of weight preoccupation and eating disorders. Yes, that is their primary focus - physical well-being. However, take laying claim to body image disorders as disease categories and add it to being totally unwilling to take a multidisciplinary approach to the development of treatment modalities. The sole focus on the body then becomes problematic for this reason: weight preoccupation and eating disorders are not conditions that originate, thrive, and advance in the body alone.

Through this thesis I have shown that there are many socio-cultural elements that factor in the genesis and experience of weight preoccupation. These need to be known and understood by the medical practice. By all means, put an 82 pound woman on a re-feeding program. That is understood as an essential tactic designed to sustain life. These programs, however, should not be standard practice. Not all women require a re-feeding program. Nor do they require a pill to cure what ails them. Nor do they need to discuss ad nauseam what it was their mothers did that made them this way - the main tenet of the anorexegenic model. Nor do they need to be told that their problem stems from a refusal to maintain weight standards (DSM 3R, 1987). What women experiencing weight preoccupation do need is a holistic approach to a complex problem.

A practical implication in my research, then, is to give medical practitioners the eye-opener they seem to need. I would recommend all medical students sit in on this lecture and take notes. Take a partner approach to patients - do not foster the societal gaze of authority by defining a woman's experience for her and giving her a packaged cure. Help a patient define her problem and design her solution. Recognize that the pressures to conform to the body beautiful abound. Body projects are not acts of vanity or calls for attention. They are efforts to fit into the tiny space society has allotted women and gain recognition on the main criteria used to judge us.

Do not insist that an adolescent girl remain within strict height-weight boundaries. Adolescence is a time of growth and discovery, as well as wanting desperately to be like everybody else. Calling constant attention to added weight at a time when breasts, hips and thighs are becoming full form is a recipe for insecurity and discomfort with the natural growing process. Those parts of us which are sexual need not be defined by us as merely added weight. That diminishes our sexuality and leads to a kind of self-loathing that follows us into the bedroom for years. Do not encourage us to see our bodies as medicine does - as parts and pieces of a whole. There is a role for medical practitioners to play in fostering a sense of wholeness so lacking from the weight preoccupied experience. People need to feel integrated - a synthesized self is a complete, comfortable self. We should not be expected to separate our selves from our bodies the way surgeons do. We should be encouraged to focus on our health and our happiness, not our so-called ills and flawed figures.

Much of what constitutes my wish-list education for medicine is relevant to other disciplines as well. Medicine carries the greatest blame for me because they claim to have the necessary knowledge to understand and treat weight preoccupation, when clearly they do not. There are other social institutions, however, that could also use the lessons of my research to better their services. Educators across the board need to know that young girls need the same space as boys in the playground, they need to be recognized and lauded for more than a pretty outfit, they need to be encouraged to be physical and get dirty, they need to be encouraged to feel good about themselves for what makes them different, and they need to learn about being whole -loving what is good about themselves and forgiving the bad as readily as they do their friends and their families. They do not need to be labelled some gender slur like `tomboy' or `princess' based on the exhibition of rowdy play as opposed to quiet, passive play. Young girls require what all children require - to feel free to follow what catches their

heart and be supported in their efforts to explore and create who they might want to be. Which brings me to another point on education. Young boys need to be actively educated in the value and strength of the opposite sex. They need to be taught that looks are not everything, the teacher likes and appreciates all kinds of children, and that girls grow to be wonderful and important women who will one day be their friend and are always their equal. Educators need to begin teaching what it is to be human, not what it is to be a girl as opposed to a boy.

Sports coaches, whether in school or not, need to re-think what happens to female athletes at around 9 years of age. Of the 12 women I spoke to, all had received weight warnings in their chosen sport between the ages of 9 and 13. All had also ended their involvement with their sport at around the same time. My own experience occurred at the age of 12. What is happening here is that at the onset of puberty, as our bodies takes on more weight and shape, we are being disqualified from participation in sports. Our space is almost suddenly lessened just as we are beginning to take more. We gaze at our bodies as someone else might for perhaps the first time - flawed, wrong, inappropriate. We begin to see our bodies as an obstacle to our success, a challenge to our will-power - an adversary. Clearly, notions of winning, participation, and proper form need to be reviewed by those sports clubs that deal with young girls.

The media has long been the feminist flogging post for many of women's ills. While media is rarely the sole cause of a problem, it is often a contributing factor. This is the case with weight preoccupation as well. Image makers contribute to women's dissatisfaction with themselves by telling us all the things we need to stay on top of, watch out for, and hold on to. Choosing the top models really means choosing the desired look. These choices have been made in complete disregard for the majority of women in North America who cannot be that desired woman without great sacrifice

and effort. I would love to package a small lecture series that would address one small media item at a time and try to whittle away at the lies the image makers are spreading. It would be a great idea to track the subtle and not-so subtle shots at our self-esteem and then publish them for all to see. Publishing material that is woman-positive would also erode media's effect. Perhaps most important, having critical and analytical discussions with one another about the barrage of media imagery would serve as a reality-check that could counter-balance what we are being told is the prime imperative.

Those kinds of discussions are vital if we are to create an alternative view of femininity that is amenable to personal difference and realistic goal-setting. Which brings me to another practical implication of my research: grassroots gatherings. Foucault's power/knowledge intersection requires varying information and perspective to create a shift in balance. Many of the women I spoke with in my research, and countless women in my life, have been exposed to other ideas and experiences that gives them a new perspective and renewed hope for change. I want women to talk to one another. I want women to pass each other books and bring in speakers and hammer out some difficult notions together in order to reformulate femininity into something more humane that what presently exists. We do not need to sit and wait for educators or doctors or coaches or parents or friends or media or religion or government to do it for us. I firmly believe that I changed the lives of 12 women when I did this research and opened them up to new ideas and possibilities. They certainly changed mine. This is the kind of cycle of information that is most effective in debunking, de-constructing, and recasting what we know to be true, important, and authentic.

Finally, in terms of the practical implications of my research, the ideas presented here add to an already existing body of knowledge. They do not just compliment, they

add, they question, and they push beyond currently acceptable notions about gender. As a function of having utilized feminist poststructuralism, gender as process is an idea that has been put "out there," to act as an impetus for further investigation, revised perspective, and the development of programs more amenable to effecting change than what presently exists. It gives a leg-up to reformulating gender in general, and femininity specifically. It is not my expertise to develop programs and practices based on such reformulations. It is, however, my considered opinion that re-visioned gender identity will go a long way to formulating practice and policy that consider the diversity of women's experiences as well as the shared position of women in our society.

I am unable to avoid this kind of terminology, despite the earlier discussion on essentialist traps, respecting diversity, and recognizing the constructed nature of gender categories. I do not intend to bring to mind reified stereotypes of "woman" or "women's experience." There are times, however, where for the sake of both intellectual growth and practical argument, such categories can be invoked without causing great harm. I have identified my biases and my assumptions. I have agreed to the tenuous nature of such terminology and am aware of the dangers of doing so. I am also aware of the usefulness of categories when trying to explicate or ameliorate a particular event or problem. The use of categories (generalizations) does not preclude the production of valid and useful research. It is a matter of kinds of knowledges, not which is the right one. As Tong asserts:

> Postmodern feminists regard this whole enterprise as yet another installation of "phallocentric" thought. It is typical "male thinking" to seek the one, true feminist store of reality. For postmodernists, such a synthesis is neither feasible nor desirable. It is not feasible because women's experiences differ...It is not desirable because the One and the True are philosophical myths that have been used to club into submission the differences that, in point of empirical fact, best describe the human condition (1989: p.7).

The production of different knowledge, then, is an acceptable practice within the guidelines of feminist poststructuralism. I wanted to conduct research on an experience that occurs overwhelmingly to women without addressing women as an essential category. I wanted to conduct research that could address a shared experience without homogenizing the experiences of women. I wanted to be able to call an experience shared by specific others in order to understand it better, and to ameliorate it. This was the aim of my research, and I was unable to conduct such an endeavour without relying on some shared notion of what weight preoccupation is, who is affected by it, and what is common to those who experience the problem. This kind of research effort is, in itself, an important contribution to a growing theoretical body of work.

This brings me to my final discussion of my research: implications for further research. Studying any issue at length is a bit of a double edged sword - while an issue becomes more clear as it is researched, it also seems to raise more questions than provide answers. Such is the case with my own work. After an extensive period of researching and reviewing the experience of weight preoccupation, I feel as though I have a greater need than ever before to pursue this issue.

There are many questions that would be well worth further research at a later date. One of the most significant questions remaining has to do with diversity of experience. There are two parts to this question. First: if the development of weight preoccupation is contingent upon underlying social factors that permeate and affect all women's lives, why do all women not experience it? How and why do some women resist? And second: why is weight preoccupation experienced predominantly by white, middle class women? Is it a function of differential reporting and access to services, or is it a real difference in number of women affected? While my research did not adequately address this question, it is most certainly worthy of further investigation,

especially given the current debate on the diversity of women's experiences and the value of addressing women as a group.

I also think it would be worthwhile to go beyond the experience of white, middle class women to see if in fact there is some degree of universality to the focus on the body for women of various cultures, races, and classes. This would better clarify the underlying causes of weight preoccupation by identifying specific cultural elements that exist within pockets of society that may or may not encourage body projects.

Another question that presented itself through the research process was the life events that theoretically should mitigate the experience of weight preoccupation, but seemingly did not. Specifically, the experience of pregnancy and aging did not alter in the least these women's commitment to body perfection, despite the obvious toll on the physical self. They were life events to be feared and staved off, not welcomed relief or natural courses of events. I personally found this most curious, and would like to pursue it further at some point.

Finally, I would suggest a continued application of Foucault in combination with feminist poststructuralism in researching social life. The significance of such a framework cannot be overstated. Throughout my research process, I thought of many issues that would benefit from such an analysis. Specifically, the experience of pregnancy and other natural female life events seemed to present themselves over and over again as a subject in need of further research. This particular framework would highlight elements of the experience not yet focused on - like the sanctioning gaze, the allotment of feminine space, and the construction of subjectivity to support the established social order.

The use of Foucault in combination with feminist poststructuralism offers a fresh perspective on old issues, and raises new issues not yet addressed. This kind of research can lead to new directions in the study of society and culture. It can also wed with

existing knowledge as a compliment - an addition to the stocks of what we already know. If we are truly committed to the notion of social change, and are willing to do the work necessary to make comprehensible and accessible a whole new way of looking at things, this framework is indeed the necessary perspective within existing relations of power that is required. It is not a panacea - no one calls "come the revolution." This is a critical part of an evolution of knowledge that continues to restructure the way we see our lives and understand our experiences. As this work contributes a small part to a greater whole, the evolution revolves again. And power shifts. Uncomfortably, and ever so slightly.

APPENDIX 1: Newspaper Advertisement

Master's student (Sociology) seeks participants in a study of women and weight preoccupation. Women interested in this research and willing to be interviewed about their experience with weight preoccupation and body image should please contact Sharon at . Please leave a message if necessary. Confidentiality is assured. (Deadline for participation: January 31, 1992.)

APPENDIX 2: Consent Form

## A STUDY OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH - AND UNDERSTANDING OF - WEIGHT PREOCCUPATION

My research focuses on the prevalence of weight preoccupation and eating disorders as experienced by North American women today. Studies have shown that 80-90% of North American women dislike their bodies, 80% have dieted by the age of 18, 70% are currently on a diet, and 66% have at one time or another experimented with anorexic/bulimic behaviour. Within ten years, diagnosed cases of anorexia and bulimia have increased by approximately 600%, despite increased efforts to intervene medically. While medical knowledge has furthered our understanding of how eating disorders effect our bodies, there has been little attention paid to how weight preoccupation effects our lives. Further exploration is also required in order to understand why it is that women so commonly experience some level of weight preoccupation. What I propose, then, is to address the long ignored socio-cultural factors in the development of weight preoccupation, and examine how women subjectively define their experience.

In conducting this research, I will be studying a sample of women who have been solicited through advertisement to participate. You have volunteered to be interviewed about your experience with weight preoccupation. The interview will consist of questions concerning your attitudes and perceptions regarding issues of body image. As well, I will be asking for some personal information such as age, marital status, and the like.

All information gathered through the interview will be completely confidential. The interview will be audiotaped for later transcription, so that I can analyze the data more completely. You are free to refuse to answer any of the questions you are asked in this research. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time. You may request to review the transcription of the interview in order to ensure that the intent of your words are captured, and to afford you the opportunity to add information, should you so choose.

I am certain that the information gathered in this study will help meet the needs of women who deal daily with issues of body image. The research results will add to an already growing body of work that addresses the prevalence of weight preoccupation in North American women today. Your participation is invaluable, and appreciated.

A STUDY OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH -
AND UNDERSTANDING OF - WEIGHT PREOCCUPATION

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in the study about women's experiences with and understanding of weight preoccupation.

I have read the attached information sheet on this study. I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, my interview will be audiotaped, and later transcribed. I am free to refuse to answer any questions I consider too personal or objectionable. I understand that my identity will not be revealed at any time or to anyone. I have the right to review the transcribed document of my interview to ensure that my meaning was captured, and to add anything I may have thought of after the interview took place.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary. I also understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time without any form of repercussion.

(Date)(Signature in ink)

(Date)(Witness)

APPENDIX 3: Interview Guideline

## INTERVIEW GUIDELINE:GENERAL THEMES

1. DEMOGRAPHICS

Before we begin discussing why you're here today, could you tell me a little bit about your background?
PROBES: age, romantic involvements, rural/urban background, family composition, career?

2. DEFINITION/PERCEPTION

What brought you here today to speak with me? How did you find out about this research?
Could you tell me what weight preoccupation means to you?
PROBES
What would an ideal body be like for you?
How does weight preoccupation effect you?
What would having your ideal version of your body do for you?
What does your body have to do with the way you feel? How has your body, an object of necessity and purpose, become an emotional issue for you?
How do you know what a good body is - where do you get your information?

3. FITNESS/DIET

What is it that you do in terms of diet and fitness? What are your fitness and diet habits?
PROBES
Could you describe how you try to work on your body?
Can you tell me what is at stake here - why is this so important to you?
Do you think you could accept your body without perfection -why/why not?

4. SEXUALITY/ATTRACTION

Could you tell me how you see the body related to attraction?
PROBES
What is it that makes a body attractive?
What do you find attractive?
Are you attractive to others?
Are issues of attraction related to issues of sexuality for you?
Do you think issues sexuality and attractiveness are related to your happiness? If so, how?

5. INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS

Does being preoccupied with your weight and body effect your relationships with partners, friends and family? If so, how?
PROBES

What kind of advice or support do you get from the people you consider to be important in your life?
Are you ever punished or rewarded for your preoccupation by your friends and family? If so, how?
Do you ever feel that you receive mixed messages from your friends and family - that they are pleased with you when you look a certain way, but displeased at the way you go about getting that look?
Do you ever feel sabotaged in your efforts to achieve a certain appearance? Are your friends or family jealous, spiteful, or scornful of your efforts?
How important to you are the opinions of your friends and family?
Whose opinion is the most important to you?

6. CULTURAL DYNAMICS

Where do you think your idea of the desirable body came from?
How did you come to see this kind of body as the best kind?
Where did you learn solutions to your body problems?
How did you learn weight preoccupied behaviour?
How committed are you to achieving the ideal body? What would you be willing to do to have it?
Could you describe what an attractive/desirable woman looks like? - Could you describe what an unattractive/undesirable woman looks like? what makes them attractive/desirable or unattractive/undesirable?
What are some of your coping strategies?
What would you like to see happen for society in general in terms of addressing weight preoccupation?

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