Alice through the Contemporary Looking Glass:

A Foucauldian Feminist Study of Older Women's Experiences of their Self-Transformation through Bodily Practices in a Commercial Weight-loss Organisation

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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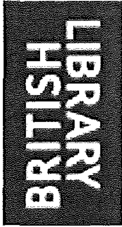

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ABSTRACT

Deeply informed by both contemporary feminist theory and Michel Foucault's genealogical method and analytics of power work, this thesis is concerned with older women's experiences of their body self-transformation by locating its practice within a particular context-a commercial weight management setting. Based on six months of participant-observation and biographical interviews with 36 older female clients belonging to a commercial weight-loss organisation this thesis reports the results that argues that commercial weight-loss organisations appropriate and debase the askeses-practices of care of the self that Foucault theorised, increasing older women's capacities at the same time as they encourage participation in the ever tightening webs of power.

The study found that Foucault's portrayal of the ways in which individuals are drawn into or pressurized to conform to expectations and normative constructs was demonstrated in the use of powerful and dominant discourses relating to aging and weight-loss dieting. Such discourses influenced older women's self-narratives and others expectations about their capabilities, behaviour and concerns. Here, there was an over-riding sense that the older women were discursively negated, and positioned as 'other', in relation to body management practices like weight-loss dieting, such that both the meanings that they attribute to their experiences of weight loss and the extent to which they could benefit from organisational resources, varied by their stage in the lifecourse. However, within these broader discursive categories I also found labyrinths of supportive discourses that were more enabling and attempted to reify these particular constructions for the older women. From this position and from the unfolding evidence I became convinced that older women as subjects of normalising disciplinary practices really are empowered at the same time that they are disempowered because other successes can follow their weight loss. Freedom is therefore not an impossibility for a normalised subject.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS page 7

CHAPTER ONE
Introduction page 8

The dieting culture page 9

Foucault's genealogical approach page 16

Why older women page 20

Research methodology and thesis structure page 26

CHAPTER TWO
The older female body that never was, but one day could be

Introduction page 33

Old bodies and the sociological imagination page 35

Representing old bodies: The looking glass self page 41

The medicalised body: Biomedicine and the truth stories about bodies' page 47

The disappearance of the old body: The body that never was page 52

Gender and the aging body page 54

Exploring a gender theoretical field where the older women are invisible page 55

Conclusion page 60

CHAPTER THREE
Bringing the body back into feminist aging studies

Introduction page 64

Bringing the body back page 66

Add Foucault to feminism and stir:Exploring the socially constructed body page 68

Aging by culture: Older women's bodies and agency page 74

The aging female body as an 'autobiographical project' page 78

Exploring the rising obesity rates page 85

Learning from Foucault when exploring the 'war on obesity' page 86

A question of blame page 92

Obesity is the responsibility of the individual: True or false? page 95

Food a communication page 97

Using food to construct personal identities page 100

Weight-loss and 'false consciousness' page 103

It's all about profit page 108

Using Foucault's early works on the production of 'docile subjects' in a commercial weight-loss organisational setting page 111

Questioning Foucault's notion of 'docile bodies' page 114

Exploring 'the active self' page 129

The Hypomnemata page 126

Why bother: dieting doesn't work page 131

Exploring Foucault's vanishing body page 133

Exploring the phenomenology of embodiment: The importance of Capturing the lived experiences of older women page 138

Conclusion page 144

CHAPTER FOUR
Methodology

Introduction page 148

An autobiographical beginning page 152

Using Foucault's toolbox page 154

Foucault and discourse analysis page 155

"I take care not to dictate how things should be" (Foucault, 1994:288) page 156

Searching for 'truths' page 160

Researcher subjectivity page 165

Add poststructural theory to feminism and stir page 168

Research design: An ethnographic approach page 171

Gaining access page 173

Welcome to the world of diet management organisations: The role of the Foucauldian ethnographer page 174

Playing the weight-loss game and trying to win page 176

The ethnographic interviewing of older women page 182

The use of interviews in discourse analysis page 185

Asking the right questions and following the ethical guidelines page 186

Keeping my head down: Concentrating on the analysis page 190

Conclusion page 195

CHAPTER FIVE
Research findings: 'docile bodies'

Introduction page 197

Biomedical discourses page 198

Social biography discourses page 206

Deficiency discourses page 211

Relational discourses page 216

Disciplinary discourses page 228

Supportive discourses page 236

Normalising discourses: Trying to maintain goal weight page 244

Conclusion page 251

Chapter six
From 'docile bodies' to the 'active self': The use of pleasure and care of the self

Introduction page 254

Self-Transformation: Building on your strength and addressing limitation page 256

Replacing negative discourses with positive discourses page 263

Points and syns: Your flexible friends page 268

A return to deficiency discourses page 275

Don't let all your hard work go to waist at Weight Watchers page 282

Conclusion page 285

Chapter seven
Conclusion

Addressing the tension using 'Foucault's toolbox' when explaining older women's weight loss practices in a Commercial weight loss organisation page 288

'Technologies of power': 'Docile bodies' page 289

'Technologies of the self': The use of pleasure and care of the self In a weight loss organisational setting page 295

Older women's experiences of body image, partner appraisal, and Failure and recidivism page 306

Gendered embodiment: Resisting the negative cultural meanings of Fatness page 315

To diet or not to diet page 318

Marrying Bourdieu's 'toolbox' with Foucault's 'toolkit page 325

Bourdieu's habitus, capital, and field page 326

Fighting it out in the research arena page 328

Weight loss and class conversion page 339

Final thought page 344

Appendix A: Demographic Profile page 346

Appendix B: Confirmation of Ethical Approval page 347

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet page 348

Appendix D: Participant Observation Guide page 350

Appendix E: Biographical Details of Research Participants page 351

Appendix F: Interview Guide page 352

Appendix G: Consent form page 354

Appendix H: Bibliography page 355

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Chapter One: Introduction

> "*I sometimes wish that I could turn back the clock and my body would look like it was when I was a much younger woman. I look in the mirror and wish I had the younger, sexier, thinner, and more beautiful body that I had in the past, and could just miraculously change back into...It's not that bad really as I know that we all have to age at some point and I do all the right things to stay as young and as active as possible...I regularly attend yoga classes and I have also recently joined Weight Watchers in order to get rid of this middle age spread and stay in shape... I enjoy going and I have found that eating better and doing a bit of exercise has made me feel better and look better*" (Alice aged 57 years).

The nuances contained within this short narrative reveal aspects of the complex relationship that exists between Alice's psycho-social identity and her perceived aging and overweight body. Alice's explanation of the relationship between her sense of self and her aging overweight body reveals several characteristics that are pertinent to exploring concerns about older bodies in order to foster a deeper understanding of gendered aging identity in postmodernity, an area still arguably underdeveloped within the sociology of age and aging (Biggs, 2005; Calasanti, 2004; Laz, 2003; Twigg, 2003; Tulle, 2008; Wilson, 2009). There is the suggestion of fluidity and indeterminacy; the centrality of image and style to the experience of the body and the idea of different versions of the self corresponding to different bodies. There is also recognition of the boundaries of embodiment, accompanied by the experience of the body as unsatisfactory and in need of modification, thus the control of Alice's aging body has been enhanced by the external constraining virtue of the corset, whereby self-transformation has involved active working through diet and exercise. What we witness here among women such as Alice with the necessary resources or access to public services such as a commercial weight-loss

organisation (mediated, in particular, by gender, class, health and actual or imagined fatness) is the uptake of different technologies of the body. For those older social actors who identify with 'weight problems' and actively seek to reshape their bodies, dieting is the most popular form of 'correction' (Bordo, 2003: 202), and such action hopefully represents a 'passport' to a better life and a more positive identity (Featherstone, 1991).

The dieting culture

The increasing significance and problematisation of weight has been well documented in recent accounts of the body, subjectivity and identity. Feminist social and cultural research in particular has focused on the problem of weight for women, outlining the logics of late capitalism to dieting and cosmetic surgery (Bartky, 1990; Bordo 1993, 2003), to 'obesity' (Throsby, 2009), and to a wider preoccupation with the healthy body (Sedgwick, 1994). Attention has also been drawn to celebrity culture and make-over television programmes which aim to solve, through styling and fashion, healthy eating and exercise and/or cosmetic surgery, the ways in which over and underweight bodies are presented (McRobbie 2004, Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer 2006; Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008), to the increase in and experience of obesity surgery (Throsby, 2008), and to the ways in which weight is associated with particular classed, 'raced' and gendered positions (Skeggs, 1997). Work in this area is clearly wide-ranging and is mostly concentrated around the imperative to achieve a body that is not fat (Bordo, 2003), and is more healthy (Sedgwick 1994). Indeed, it would be misleading to state that children or men would be exempt from this imperative[1] However, as feminists have long pointed out, the relationship

[1] Culturally at least, that is, the example of Change 4 Life (2009) seems to suggest that where men are involved in the concern with weight, this is focused around issues of health, rather than of appearance. Change 4 Life is a society wide movement that aims to prevent people from becoming overweight by encouraging them to eat better and exercise more. It is the marketing component of the Government's response to the rise in obesity.

between gender and bodily appearance is well established and it is women who are most involved in the concern around weight, and that dieting is, as Susan Bordo (2003: 202) suggests: "the most popular form of correction". Bordo and others point to the normalisation of dieting within everyday Western cultures, and Orbach (1993: xxiii) argues that: "[n]o-one is much disturbed by statistics which show that 80 per cent of women in countries like the... UK... are dieting at any given moment". Within this context and in a professional capacity slimming groups have emerged as part and parcel of the contemporary consumer culture that fosters the purchase of body related goods and services by emphasising the individual's responsibility for her health (Lupton, 1997b) and appearance (Featherstone, 1991). Here, women are instructed that slenderness is synonymous with health, self-control and beauty, while fatness implies low self-esteem, illness and self-indulgence (Myers & Biocca 1992; Oberg and Tornstam 1999). As a form of 'discursive constraint', these messages are central to: "establishing and perpetuating negative stereotypes of overweight people and shaping both their behaviour and how they think of themselves" (Ronai 1997: 125) and others. Weight Watchers International (founded in the USA in the early 1960s) has been based in the UK for almost 35 years and is perhaps the best known commercial weight-loss organisation. According to the history provided on the Weight Watchers UK website there are currently over 6000 weekly meetings held in the UK and the website states that: "[m]ore people in the UK- and all round the world-lose weight with Weight Watchers than any other weight loss organisation". As its main competitor Slimming World was established in Derbyshire in 1969 by Margaret Miles-Bramwell who has remained its chairman. The company holds groups led by its 3,000 self employed consultants and according to its official website (www.slimmingworld.com) has over the last 40 years "seen more than five million people attend their groups". The role of the weekly meetings is to provide a regular form of

monitoring and support for weight-loss, and the meetings are led by a trained leader who has previously lost weight and maintained it through attending either Weight Watchers or Slimming World[2]. During each session there are confidential weigh-ins, and a different topic such as making healthy food choices, and tips for eating out are addressed each week. The meetings are described on both websites as building on the success of the leader through sharing her experience and expertise, as providing a supportive environment, and through the private weigh-ins members are able to establish and maintain a commitment to both themselves and to the organisation.

Within feminist theory, weight-loss dieting practices have been viewed largely as an oppressive technology which colonizes women's bodies in a quite factual way, directly intervening in the body to mould it in accordance with the prevalent ideals of feminine beauty (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993; Hesse-Biber 1996; Wolf 1991). It has been argued by these authors that those women who diet for purely aesthetic reasons are regarded as victims of a patriarchal ideology in which the self-esteem of women is primarily dependent on their physical appearance. The burgeoning in the use of weight-loss dieting practices by women is seen to be symptomatic of the permanent sense of dissatisfaction that most women have with their physical appearance as a result of being relentlessly bombarded with images of perfection by the mass media (Bordo 1993; Wolf 1991). As such, the predominant response to such a technology by feminists has been one of rejection (Heyes 2006). In her study entitled *Foucault goes to Weight Watchers* Cressinda Heyes (2006: 126) suggests that these: "existing critical accounts of dieting [...] typically rely on the central explanatory concepts of either "false consciousness" or "docile bodies". Discussing the former explanatory concept of false consciousness, Heyes (2006: 128)

[2] These leaders have previously been a member and because of their success have been invited to make a career from their controlled weight-loss. The leaders are committed to maintaining their weight. However, both of the leraders that I encountered during data collection were extremely overweight.

draws on the work of Gaesser (2003) to provide examples of the ways in which; firstly, weight comes to be a 'stand-in for health' (2006: 128), second, that there is a standardised range within which each 'individual's weight must fall in order for her to be healthy'(2006: 128) and third, that 'a huge majority of diets will fail' (2006: 129)[3]. Heyes (2006: 129) therefore asks: "[c]an the widespread popularity of attempts to lose weight be understood only as the product of false consciousness-the result of systematically obscuring the truth about health, weight and recidivism?" In a more feminist variant a notion of false consciousness also rests upon the assumption that women diet: "because we have been ideologically duped by an oppressive set of beauty ideals: being thin will make us (hetero)sexually desirable, aesthetically pleasing to ourselves and others, and better able to build an image that is appropriately feminine" (Heyes, 2006: 127). While Heyes argues that her question 'can be partly explained through ignorance and misconceptions' (2006: 129), not least because companies such as Weight Watchers '*obscure*' (2006: 129) the labour of dieting through emphasising 'lifestyle change' for example, the false consciousness model is inadequate in its focus on 'false beliefs about weight loss, or thrall to an oppressive aesthetic' to the detriment of considering dieting as 'an activity' (2006: 127).

Focusing on dieting as a bodily and embodied practice, Heyes suggests, is precisely what occupies feminist work which engages with Foucault's work on 'docile bodies', of which Sandra Bartky (1990) and Susan Bordo (1993) are 'the best-known advocates'. The notion

[3] Research conducted by Hesse-Biber (1996) has shown that restrictive dieting – when practised alone or in groups rarely produces long-term weight loss. Sue Thompson (2007) argues that there is a 98% failure rate for the dieting industry in general, and Susie Orbach (1999) suggests that commercial slimming clubs such as Weight Watchers has a 97% recidivism rate. I made enquiries to both Weight Watchers and Slimming World with regards to obtaining statistics on their long-term success rates, but was told such information is not available. It appeared that these and other weight-loss organisations are not legally required to collect or make public this data.

of 'docile' bodies suggests that power is not that which is simply imposed on us, without us necessarily being aware of it as the false consciousness model implies but rather is: "a ubiquitous relation within which multiple local forms of domination, discipline, or denial of self-government can occur" (Heyes, 2006: 131). For example, In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977: 135-169) analyses the disciplinary practices that were developed in prisons, schools, and factories in the 18th century including minute regulations of bodily movements, obsessively detailed time schedules, and surveillance techniques and how these practices shape the bodies of prisoners, students and workers into 'docile bodies' (1977). In her highly influential essay entitled *Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power*, Bartky (1990: 65) criticizes Foucault for failing to notice that disciplinary practices are gendered and that, through such gendered discipline 'women's bodies are rendered more docile than the bodies of men' (1990 : 65). Drawing on and extending Foucault's account of disciplinary power, both Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) analyse the disciplinary practices that engender specifically feminine 'docile' bodies including dieting practices, and expand on Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon in order to show how women survey themselves, thus becoming, as Foucault (1977: 203) famously put it, 'the principle of [their] own subjection'. With respect to gendered disciplinary practices such as dieting, Bartky (1990:80) observes: "it is women themselves who practice this discipline on and against their own bodies", and "who, feeling fat, monitors everything [they] eat". Consequently, a woman has become: "just as surely as the inmate in the Panopticon, a self-policing subject, a self committed to relentless self-surveillance" (ibid). Here, self-discipline replaces torture as the paradigmatic method of social control, or what Bartky refers to as a form of 'obedience to patriarchy'. Indeed, Heyes (2006) refers to how weight-loss dieting is a practice reflected in language (i.e. weight watching) and suggests that when women are treated as objects they see themselves

as objects and tend to torture (self-survey) their bodies and desires to fit narrow instructions and specifications (i.e. the slim ideal). In effect Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) suggest that what these industries produce is not weight loss, let alone health; what they produce is self-loathing that makes women (and in many cases men too) willing and even eager to spend large sums of money and devote substantial amounts of time and energy in pursuit of a goal that is at best elusive. They captivate people, bring them suffering, and impoverish them in a sad but all too familiar spectrum of ways. On this view, at stake are not only false beliefs about weight loss, or thrall to an oppressive aesthetic. Dieting itself (not just weight loss as a projected outcome) is an activity that constructs the 'docile body'. Yet, while Heyes (2006) is also concerned about normalisation and the foreclosure of freedom that weight-loss dieting portends, and is clear and adamant that these practices are normalising, sometimes in the extreme, she insists that this is not the whole story.

Heyes (2006: 136) suggests that Bartky (1990) and Bordo's (1993) focus on dieting as the production of 'docile bodies' has led them to stress the 'repressive' moments in the construction of the slender body, contra the 'enabling' functions of the dieting process. If dieting is as bleak as Bartky and Bordo would have us believe, then why does the weight-loss industry continue to be a multimillion pound enterprise? Why are commercial diet programs, diet food products, diet drugs and now surgeries, and self-help books, services, or websites enjoying booming sales in all Western countries and expanding into new regions? Why would one subject themselves to such a regime? Clearly there are no 'obesity police' who go around arresting women suspected of having a body mass index (BMI) of 30 and above (Monaghan et al, 2010). Unlike those incarcerated, the dieter usually submits herself to the enforcer's authority voluntarily, as part of her effort to 'fit in' with a 'fatphobic culture' and can withdraw at any time without explicit penalty. Once

she has disabused herself of the false belief that dieting can lead to permanent slenderness, and having revealed the model of power upon which it depends, surely continuing to diet can be explained only as a kind of compulsion beyond feminist analysis? Clearly a rational component remains: the social rewards associated with slimness measured by education, income, employment, Dating, marriage, and divorce-are particularly profound for women (Gortmaker et al, 1993; Rodin 1992; Sargent and Blanchflower 1994), and it takes a tough mind to reconcile itself to the knowledge that the slim ideal is unattainable and bad for women (Gaesser, 2002) when so much points in the other direction. Indeed, Heyes stresses how Bartky (1990) and Bordo's (1993 2002) endless parsing of the 'docile bodies' analysis can elide the emotional, psychological, and practical functions of an organized weight-loss program. In other words, dieting is not a one off successful period of time but is rather a process that is returned to again and again. Acknowledging the multiple temporalities of dieting therefore involves an understanding of agency that is not (only) repressed but also enabled. Consequently, Heyes (2006) suggests that Bartky and Bordo's emphasis on Foucault's account of disciplinary practices might usefully be supplemented by Foucault's own concern, toward the end of his career, that he had emphasized technologies of power at the expense of technologies of the self (Foucault 1988:19). Technologies of the self, in Foucault's (1981: 367) terms:

> "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality"

Importantly for Heyes (2006: 126) technologies of the self involve discourses of self-care which 'feminists have long encouraged'. That is, 'the care of the self is ontologically prior'

and is: "equated with taking care of oneself in the face of the gendered exploitation that characterises many women's lives" (Heyes, 2006: 143). In other words Heyes suggests that weight-loss dieting needs to be understood from within the minutiae of its practices, its everyday tropes and demands, its compulsions and liberations; and in turn, these cannot be resisted solely through refusal. To understand dieting as enabling is also to understand that we have reason to embrace the increases in capacities it permits (i.e. a sense of self development, mastery, expertise, and skill) without acceding to the intensification of disciplinary power it currently requires. Foucault's genealogical work helps us to do that because it becomes possible to see occurrences of freedom and possibilities for imaginative alternatives even within very rigid regimes of gender normalisation portrayed by Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993). In other words Heyes (2006) suggests that dieting can and must be conceived as an expansive process of self-transformation as well as a disciplinary and regulatory process[4].The chapter will therefore turn to briefly introduce Foucault's genealogical approach.

Foucault's genealogical approach

The Foucauldian approach to the body is characterised first, by a substantive preoccupation with the body and those institutions which govern the body and, second, by an epistemological view of the body as produced by and existing in discourse (Shilling 2003). Discourse is the most important concept in Foucault's work and is centrally concerned with, although irreducible to language (ibid). Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) suggest discourses can be seen as sets of deep principles incorporating specific grids of meaning which underpin, generate and establish relations between all that can be seen,

[4] Here, Heyes (2006:138) is keen to point out that the enabling dimensions of dieting do not necessarily increase freedom, although they are often interpreted by a liberal political tradition simply as an increase in autonomy, but intensify power relations.

thought and said. As described above the self is passively positioned in certain discourses, but at the same time is active in positioning in other discourses. Moreover, discourses are not fixed, but change over time as the social institutions which produce them change (Foucault 1980 a). The importance of the body to Foucault (1980 a: 152) is such that he described his work as constituting a: "history of bodies" and the manner in which what is most material and most vital in them has been invested". Central to this history of the present is a concern with mapping out the relations that exist between the 'body and the effects of power on it' (Foucault 1980 a: 58). Here, power is not a possession, but is constituted through multiple, and constantly shifting discourses. Foucault (1980 a: 98) describes power as:

> "Never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as commodity or a piece of wealth. Power is exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation"

Power is embedded in discourses due to their ability to produce subjects and objects in certain ways: a female dieter, for instance, may be rendered powerless (by internalising the dominant normalising discourse that promotes the slim ideal) in one instance, while being positioned (or possibly positioning herself) as powerful via the more enabling discourse (their subscription to the view that other successes can follow weight-loss). This helps to explain the ways in which an individual's power position appears to shift depending on the interactive environment. The idea that we are positioned but also position ourselves and one another in discourse has been interpreted as positive and encouraging by some feminists. For instance, Davies (1997) argues that the analysis of normalising gender discourse will provide us with a new understanding of the way in which power is

constituted, and the ways in which we are positioned within that discourse. Indeed, this raises the possibility of our creating *new* gender discourses, and thus reconstituting ourselves through discourse. poststructuralism can offer feminist researchers a framework for understanding the ways in which normalising power produces, as Foucault (1987, 1988) tells us; capacities as well as timidity and obedience. Thus, according to Heyes (2006) the subjects of normalising disciplinary practices really are empowered at the same time that they are disempowered. They become subjects, and agents, within these practices, and the failures they may well lament are also moments of excess in relation to the norms and rules that feminist critics of those practices might find lamentable.

As described above the bodies described by Foucault (1980a) are produced but their own powers of production, where they have any, are limited to those invested by discourse. As such the body is according to Shilling (2003: 71) "dissolved as a casual phenomenon into the determining power of discourse, and it becomes increasingly difficult to conceive of the body as a material component of social action". In other words Shilling suggests that by viewing the body as significant purely in terms of society (however defined) Foucault is insufficiently concerned with lived experience. As Turner (1984: 245) notes, despite all his references to the use of pleasure and desire, and care of the self in volumes two and three of *The History of Sexuality* (1987, 1988), he ignores the phenomenology of embodiment and states that the:

> "Immediacy of personal sensuous experience of embodiment which is involved in the notion of my body receives scant attention. My authority, possession, and occupation of a personalized body through sensuous experience are minimized in favour of an emphasis on the regulatory controls which are exercised from the outside".

Indeed the important point made here according to Dews (1987) cited in Shilling (2003: 71) is that this neglect has serious implications for Foucault's analysis as: "without some theory which makes the corporeal more than a tabula rosa, it is impossible to reckon the costs imposed by an infinitesimal power over the active body". In essence the body projected by Foucault is affected by discourse, thus we get little sense of the body reacting back and affecting the discourse (Shilling, 2003). Consequently, even when Foucault (1980a) makes the occasional reference to the body being able to put up resistances to power and dominant discourses as described above, he cannot say what it is about the body that resists. As a result of this neglect of the materiality of the body, this study recognises that there is a tendency to discount the risks, suffering, and impoverishment involved in the practice of weight-loss dieting. Taking on board these points this study will not deny the materiality of the body, but the study will assert that bodies cannot be known without recourse to discourse and social context.

In addition it has also been argued by Francis (2000: 22-23), amongst others that there appears to be two fundamental conflicts between feminist and poststructuralist theory which make them 'uncomfortable bedfellows'. The first is the clash between modernist (feminist) and poststructuralist positions; and the second is the poststructuralist aim of deconstruction compared to the feminist need for a system to explain the socioeconomic reality of gender difference. The main crux of the argument centres on the notion that moral and emancipatory concerns are dismissed by poststructuralists as modernist truth narratives which should themselves be deconstructed rather than developed (ibid). Poststructuralist theory cannot reconstruct; only deconstruct, therefore Francis (2000) argues that it cannot be used in any developmental sense by feminism to provoke emancipatory aims. However, it has been recognised by Davis (1997) amongst others that

poststructuralist theory can provide a useful analytical tool for research which seeks to examine, disrupt or deconstruct discourses. The challenge, then, is not to embrace post-modernist and poststructuralist approaches wholesale as Marks-Maran (1998) argues, but rather to develop a new theoretical framework which can acknowledge the complexity of human interaction and power relations while also furthering feminist emancipatory aims.

Following the analysis laid out above by Heyes (2006), and being aware of both the positive and limitations of utilising Foucault's work this Foucauldian feminist study will also supplement Foucault's (1977) early works on the production of 'docile subjects' with Foucault's (1987,1988) later work on the 'active self'. However, while this thesis aims to further develop these conceptual ideas its approach is rather different. The focus will be on the experiences of older women who for various reasons have tended to be ignored in academic literature on female embodiment (Arber et al. 2003; Daniluck 1998; Faircloth 2003; Gimlin, 2007; Hurd Clarke 2002; Poole and Feldman 1999; Woodward 1999). Consequently, most studies of weight management among females have focused on adolescents (Field et al. 1999; Nitcher and Vuckovic 1994) and young adults (Lee 1993). Some have linked the lack of scholarly interest in older women's corporeality to broader constructions of aging that define older females as sexually ineligible and socially invisible (Arber and Ginn 1991; Bernard and Meade 1993; Calasanti and Slevin 2001). The chapter will therefore turn to briefly explore some of these constructions in order to underpin the need for this type of study to focus predominantly on older women.

Why older women?

Ageism and the impact of ageist stereotypes, both positive and negative, have been widely discussed in the literature (Sontag 1972; Arber and Ginn 1991; Wearing 1995). It has been argued by Arber and Ginn (1991:1) that ageism is: "primarily a woman's issue", and that

“stereotypes of elderly women are particularly negative and demeaning”, especially on an older woman’s evaluation and experience of her body (Rice, 1989). According to Allaz et al (1998) cultural understandings of aging and old age play a role in women’s beliefs about appearance and body size, although the specific effects of aging on women’s body satisfaction remain unclear. Some authors such as Chrisler and Ghiz (1993) have argued that the weight gain (middle age spread) that normally accompanies aging means that older women are even more likely than younger women to be dissatisfied with their bodies. The slowly accumulating scholarship also suggests, however, that aging may actually increase women’s ability to accept their weight and reduce their guilt about eating (Oberg & Tornstam 1999). Here, it has been suggested that while many older women want to lose weight, their weight goals are often more realistic than younger women (Allaz et al, 1998). Compared to younger women Hurd Clarke (2002) argues that they are more accepting of a wider range of body shapes and less likely to undergo cosmetic surgery procedures to reduce body size, such as liposuction and ‘tummy tucks’ (Throsby, 2008). Indeed, such findings may reflect cohort effects, but nonetheless have guided researchers to argue that old age provides a degree of detachment (Apter 1996; Daniluk 1998) from the oppressive set of beauty imperatives briefly described above by Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993, 2003). When exploring incidences of detachment from the slim ideal research conducted by Tunaley et al (1999: 756) showed that some older women viewed weight-gain as a consequence of the: “inevitable physical decline and deterioration bound up with stereotypes of old age, rather than as a marker of personal failure”. Although their participants revealed that they were not entirely satisfied with their body size, their beliefs about physical changes over time reduced self-criticism and feelings of guilt. In addition it was also found that they also resisted the pressure from family members to lose weight by asserting that in old age they no longer had the responsibilities of earlier life and deserved

to enjoy themselves (ibid). Tunalay et al (1999) therefore concluded that because (otherwise negative) discourses of aging allow older women to see body size as beyond their control, they effectively absolve them of culpability for being overweight.

This thesis suggests that the preliminary scholarship outlined above indicates that there are conceptual and empirical reasons to further explore older women's experiences of body self-transformation through weight-loss practices in a commercial slimming club. Here, it is important to mention that the balance of this thesis is weighted more towards its conceptual underpinnings in order to review the academic debates surrounding these practices and explicating the objections that many feminist social critics have made to them. For example, through a critical conceptual analysis this study aims to show that the problem is not discipline per se. As described above discipline does in fact produce new capacities of a variety of sorts, capacities for pleasure as well as pain, capacities that might open all sorts of new possibilities for the exercise of freedom. The problem lies, rather, with the goal of these particular disciplines or, perhaps more specifically, the fact that they tend to have a single, rigid goal, that of conformity to an ideal bodily appearance and comportment (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993 2003; Wolf 1991). This conceptual analysis will demonstrate how feminists have identified this goal and how they describe the penalties associated with failure to attain it as oppressive, and to an extent this study wholeheartedly agrees. But the analysis cannot simply stop there. The study aims to critically and sympathetically explore the accounts of the older women who take up these techniques and technologies and use them in their own projects of body self-transformation. This entailed taking up the practice of weight loss dieting myself by enrolling for a six-month stint in both Weight Watchers and Slimming World in order to carefully work through these concepts/regimes and discourses to deconstruct or open up the 'text' or social practices to

different readings to explore the unanticipated possibility, and present empirical findings that test out these conceptual discussions. Here, the central issue is not whether these various techniques for altering the female human body are repressive or, on the contrary, self-expressive; the central issue is not whether feminists should endorse these practices or condemn them and have them outlawed. In this study a detached moral judgment is displaced, and a different kind of ethical discourse comes to the fore. This study is concerned about normalisation and the foreclosure of freedom that weight-loss dieting portends, and the study is clear and adamant that these practices are normalising, sometimes in the extreme. Yet, this study will resist the feminist temptation to see women, recidivist dieters, as mere dupes (Smith, 1990), or victims of the normalising sexist ideologies and institutions that they at times recite and inhabit (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993). The empirical evidence aims to reveal how older women are actively engaging in weight loss dieting, knowledgeable of its drawbacks as well as its benefits. While they are aware of the problematic aspects associated with the dieting culture, nevertheless the research aims to illuminate how older women's practices of self-transformation are not inevitably oppressive.

In order to achieve these aims the research will firstly, engage with Foucault's technologies of power ('docile bodies') in order to recognize the desire for body/self transformation that regimes of 'normalisation' have produced and cultivated, and the capacities for sustained self-discipline and self-reflection that the older women caught up in those regimes are developing. Secondly, the study will identify if and how older women are positioned differently in relation to self-body management practices like dieting and identify how this affects the meanings that they attribute to weight loss. Thirdly, the research engages with Foucault's technology of the self in order to explore the emotional,

psychological, and practical functions of an organised weight-loss programme and identify if and how older women are able to gain a sense of self-development, mastery, expertise, and skill that weight-loss dieting may offer (Rose, 1996). Finally, as stated above the research engages with older women's lived experiences of their bodies in the more traditional sense of 'muscles, nerves, genes, and blood" (Moore, 1997: 1) in order to bring materiality back into the terms of analysis of subjectivity. In doing so the study will connect with the absent 'other' body lurking behind social constructions because this appears to be a more promising basis upon which to illuminate what is positive about social constructionist views of the body (Frank, 1991).

By interpreting Foucault's accounts of power and subjectivity and addressing his limitations with regards to lived experiences this feminist sociological research will demonstrate; how weight-loss dieting needs to be understood as enabling which means the research must embrace the increases in capacities it permits without acceding to the intensification of disciplinary power it currently requires. By revealing the power of this discourse, especially as cultivated by commercial weight-loss programs, the study will equip feminists with a better understanding of the perennial appeal of a self-disciplining practice that almost always fails its ostensible goals. The thesis will therefore make a valuable contribution to the debates on aging and the body and will be useful for informing the wider public debate on aging and 'obesity' policy, decision making, intergenerational relations, and the role of both older women and commercial weight-loss organisations in contemporary society.

A full and robust review of the relevant peer-reviewed journals conducted at the time of writing for this thesis (May, 2012) including *The Body and Society, The Journal of Aging and Identity, The Journal of Aging Studies, Ageing and Society* confirmed the following

facts. Firstly, how the classical and modern traditions of the sociology of aging have had little to tribute in understanding the messages raised above since they are largely disembodied traditions that rely on evidence from the rational reflexive mind expressed through the spoken and written word. In the mainstream classical and modern traditions there are no spatial and temporal concepts that allow analysis of such phenomena, much less sociology of the body.

The second has come from within feminism itself. For example, Twigg (2004) suggests that while feminist writers have been highly influential in the development of literature on the body, interrogating areas around reproduction, self-fashioning, bodily exclusion, denigration and desire, they were initially reluctant to engage with the aging body. Consequently, despite the fact that research on older women's bodily experiences have shown that like younger women they are also concerned about weight (Hurd Clarke, 2000), and that gender differences exist throughout the life span (Pilner et al, 1990), most studies of weight-management among females have focused on adolescents and young adults (Field et al. 1999; Lee, 1993; Nitcher and Vuckovic 1994).

Thirdly, while feminists such as Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) have conceptually utilised Foucault's technologies of power to emphasise the disciplinary practices that engender specifically feminine 'docile bodies' through weight-loss dieting practices, little sociological attention has been paid to Foucault's latter work on technologies of the self, and this area has received almost no feminist attention at all (McNay, 1992, 1994; Heyes, 2006). According to Heyes (2006, 2007) many scholars have seen a radical break in Foucault's work from the genealogies of power networks in the mid-1970s, whereby he turns his attention away from the vast networks of biopower that produce subjectivity as

subjection and toward the lives of free individuals and their life-shaping ethical choices. Some commentators such have seen this shift as a radical departure, a retreat, or a betrayal (ibid). However, Heyes (2006, 2007) contends that there is no discontinuity here at all. On the contrary, Heyes argues that Foucault's account of subjectivity always included the possibility of resistance and uncertainty of outcome. Power networks are always unstable, as Foucault maintains, and subjects are almost always in a position to alter those networks to some degree by failing or refusing to repeat the patterns that define them. Foucault does not implicitly reject his work on biopower, then; his later work constitutes an effort to find ways in which subjects within regimes of power engage in self-transformative disciplines (ibid).

The conceptual and empirical work conducted with older women for this thesis therefore goes some way to fill a much needed gap in the current sociological corpus which has been recognised as needing to be filled for some time (McNay, 1992).

Research methodology and thesis structure

The multivocality of language and interpretive repertoire, or discourse, that constructs representations of the social world and ourselves as we age as varied, changing, and sometimes contradictory, has revealed diversity of meaning, challenging the assumption of a single underlying form or structure (Dunlap, 1997). With the advent of post-modern and post-structuralist views and the concomitant acknowledgement of how people can behave in multiple and contradictory ways (Foucault, 1983), there developed a need for methods of enquiry that offered less structure, ones that made allowances for the complex nature of everyday life (Dunlap, 1997). With this in mind, a social constructionist methodology has been adopted for the purpose of this study, in order to engage with and reflect the

subjective nature of experience and reveal the social discourses at work that reify particular ways of being. Taking on board these ideas I adopted an ethnographic research methodology in order to identify the social fields and institutions in which gendered aging and the need for diet management are socially constructed. Ethnographers have long recognised the value of using a range of informational resources when researching social life, including participant observation in the weight management's settings, and in-depth biographical interviews. Feminist interpretations of Foucauldian discourse analysis were employed in order to review the hupomnemata (i.e. their literature and online materials) of these organizations, field notes and biographical narratives expressed by the older women in this study. It was the intention that through the process of analysis internalised social norms constructing aging, gender, and slimness, as well as the dominant and alternative discourses taken up and utilised would also be identified. Here, it must be noted that less attention will be paid to performative language, that is, what people do with language, choosing rather to explore how social life is constructed through discourse: the productive qualities. This involves investigating the implications of discursive resources that are made available on establishing parameters and creating subject positions, as well as the exercising of power through the perpetuation of dominant discourses and institutional practices (Katz, 1996).

The study's feminist orientation and emphasis on accessing meaning and giving voice to personal experiences, lends itself to the use of a qualitative approach (Krekula, 2007). It must be noted that a critical oversight of those adopting a quantitative approach to analysis is how they take what is a profoundly qualitative issue, that is, the nature of meaning, and view it as fixed and self contained (Elliott, 2005). As demonstrated in the opening of this chapter meaning is derived from the nuances of words and phrases used by Alice as they

are used in different contexts, including the many different politically sensitive social worlds, subcultures and languages in which older women like Alice find themselves situated. These shared systems of meaning are drawn upon to communicate, and any choice of analytic method needs to reflect the context in which the meaning was formed as well as how the researcher, as interpreter, mediates the process (Dunlap, 1997). Positioned within a post-modern/post-structuralist, social constructionist epistemology, discourse analysts (including myself) view human experience, including perceptions, as mediated historically, culturally and linguistically (Smart, 1985). Rather than providing a particular view of the world or theoretical perspective, discourse analysts adopt the position that there is no one true view or interpretation (Butler, 1990; Moi, 1987). Interpretations are accepted as subjective, conditioned by the social milieu and dominant discourses of the time (Dunlap, 1997). As a methodology, discourse analysis therefore requires a reorganisation of thought around the constructive and functional nature of discourse, and its role in social life. This approach fits in well with feminist views that seek to expose the constructed nature of how individuals are positioned (Krekula, 2007). With this in mind, the challenge of doing discourse analysis is to develop a methodology that maintains a non-essentialist, non-positivist approach which can acknowledge the complexity of human interaction and power relations while also furthering emancipatory aims.

This thesis consists of seven interrelated chapters. After the introduction provided in this chapter, chapter two aims to set the scene for exploring the ways in which modernist constructions of old age did not foreground the body. In doing so it highlights how the modern body was a medical body, and questions how the biological aging body acquires meaning, and also how the meaningful body itself, in its turn, influences and limits such signifying processes and social efforts as to change the body. This is done by focusing

upon the different negative and positive representations of the female body that have taken place in modernity. In particular, the notion of corporeality within the biomedical model and the naturalisation of the aging body are analysed.

Against the background provided in chapter two, chapter three utilises Foucault's genealogical method and analytics of power to trace the aging body in one particular social location, gender. Here, the chapter firstly points to the social construction of the body and focuses upon how the female body is aged by culture (Gullette, 1997). Secondly, the chapter will progress to explore the literature surrounding the social construction of obesity and food as a social practice and communication in order to underpin how commercial weight-loss organisations appropriate and debase the askeses-the practices of pleasure and self care that Foucault theorized, increasing older member's capacities at the same time as they encourage the participation in ever tightening webs of power. The chapter will interrogate how commercial slimming groups such as Weight Watchers and Slimming World's claim to promote self-knowledge and cultivate new capacities and pleasures, foster self care in the face of gendered exploitation, and encourage wisdom and flexibility. In doing so the chapter will identify how the hypomnemata of these organisations use ascetic language to conceal their implication on 'normalisation'. In addition, the chapter will also highlight the importance of incorporating a view of the body as a corporeal phenomenon.

This leads into chapter four, which provides a reflective account of how I adopted an ethnographic research methodology and the challenges that I faced when using feminist interpretations of Foucauldian discourse analysis as a research methodology, which emphasised the enmeshment of the researcher's subjective self in the research. This

discussion is particularly important as in a struggle to deconstruct personal 'truths', I had to repeatedly question and check my multiple subjective positions and life narratives against feminist concepts within literature and research participants. This chapter engages with how I spent six months participating in the research arena (in both Weight Watchers and Slimming World clubs) and how the overall experience of participating convinced me of the need for nuanced microanalysis of the 'politics of the ordinary: 'the plethora of everyday practices that form our habitus and that are held in place by hundreds of tiny instantiations (Bartky, 1990; Bordo 1993). Like Heyes (2006) before me I also wanted to produce sociological writing that starts from a common but fraught standpoint that of the simultaneously critical and engaged feminist. I hoped to explore how we as normalised beings keep ourselves open to ever more development and yet do not make ourselves susceptible at the same time to the narrowing forces of regimes like weight-loss dieting? How can I speak from my normalised position as a dieter simultaneously with my critical position as a diet resister? This entailed discussing how sensitivity towards my power over the interpretation of the data became an object of discourse analysis in its own right, and how my reflexive engagement strengthened the analysis through broadening my own discursively defined views and by exposing how subjective experiences interacted with research. This links into the next two analysis chapters that aim to speak from that contradictory position, from very deep inside the disciplinary practice of dieting, to reveal and thence to dispel the picture of self-knowledge and self-transformation that it cultivates (Heyes, 2006).

Chapters five and six present my research findings. In these two chapters I have embedded my empirical data within the context provided in the introduction chapter, and chapters two and three and four. What is presented in these two chapters is a careful analysis of the

way the organisations tactics embodied the paradox Foucault highlighted so well: that 'normalising' disciplinary practices also enable older women to obtain new skills and capacities. Chapter Five engages with Foucault's 'technology of power' in order to explore how the disciplinary practices of weight loss (controlling ones diet) involves the self-construction of a 'docile body' through attention to the minutest detail. Here, the chapter identifies how older women as willing participants in a disciplinary technology measure and scrutinize themselves far more precisely and conscientiously than those who must be educated into more reluctant self-monitoring behaviours. The organized diet program is thus a particularly extreme version of panoptic culture, which is why it attracts this kind of Foucauldian feminist attention. In doing so, the specific effects of aging on women's body satisfaction will become clearer.

This links into chapter six which demonstrates how the work of Foucauldian feminists on dieting would be more complete if it mirrored the phases of Foucault's own work, showing how not only 'technologies of power' but also 'technologies of the self' are engaged in a complex interplay. The chapter therefore engages with Foucault's 'technologies of the self' (the use of pleasure and care of the self) in order to analyse how the process of dieting cultivates and expands the older female dieter's capacities for self-transformation. The chapter identifies how these capacities are often recycled back into disciplinary practices; yet have a resonance and potential that could exceed the regime of normalisation that generated them. Observing this process, this Foucauldian study hopes to show that a commercial enterprise has co-opted working on oneself in ways feminists need to understand in order to resist. In addition, as mentioned above the study will not deny the materiality of the body, but it does assert that bodies cannot be known without recourse to discourse and social context.

Chapter seven provides an indepth discussion surrounding the many tensions that run through the thesis in order to enhance, clarify and strengthen the overall argument It reflects upon this Foucauldian studies strengths and weaknesses in relation to the empirical findings, discusses the overall contribution to the feminist sociological study of older women's experiences of self-transformation and considers how these bodily practices are played out in a weight-management arena, and presents a clearer map of how this journey unfolds as a particular strength and intervention of the thesis.

ChapterTwo: the older female body that never was, but one day could be

Introduction

> "My hair. My eyesight. My eyebrows and eyelashes. My gallbladder problem. My weight. My energy level. My legs. My wrinkles. My hearing. My stiff joints. My arthritis" (Laz, 2003:503)

The above quote by Cheryl Laz illustrates the extent to which older people; particularly women refer to their bodies when asked about the experience of old age. Of course, these are not the only topics of conversation; participants within her study also described their families and friends, their jobs and colleagues, their communities and their hobbies and interests. But the frequency with which the older women focus on bodies, body parts, and physical abilities and activities is striking (ibid). Older women's bodies are problematic: they can cause us pain, devalue our social and cultural status and in the end remind us of our finality (Tulle-Winton, 2002). Although, sociology is supposed to be a discipline concerned with living, breathing human beings, at first glance, sociological writing (prior to the last twenty five years) has rarely acknowledged the significance of the aging female human body in explanations of the emergence of modernity (Freund, 1988).

This chapter aims to explore the ways in which old age has been embodied in the modern period- that is since the emergence in the late eighteenth century of the modern understanding of old age. Here, embodiment refers to the ways in which bodily or corporeal processes are intertwined with and shaped by social processes (Woodward, 1995). The argument that this chapter will follow is that old age has been primarily understood in relation to its corporeality- its bodily manifestations in a framework that has

given primacy to the biomedical dimension of corporeality, and in the process, has excluded the social dimension of being old (Tulle-Winton 2002; Twigg, 2004). This, it will be argued has given rise to negative constructions of old age that have facilitated and also justified the demotion of older people (in this case older women) and their bodies to the margins of social life and also, remarkably, of sociology (Turner, 1996). In other words older women and their bodies have been perceived as being different, as 'other' (the residual category) and otherness, in its various manifestations has constituted them as being old (Pickering, 2001).

The chapter will be structured as follows: Firstly, in order to set the scene the chapter will explore, in general terms, the failure of sociology and the sociology of age and aging to challenge received information about old bodies and the way they influence the experience of old age. The chapter will therefore illuminate the marginalisation of older women in sociology in the dissemination of the dominant discourse of old age and the limited forms of embodiment that are characteristic of this discourse. The main focus here will be to connect modernist conceptions of old age with the production of unwanted bodies. The second part of the chapter aims to illustrate these processes by exploring the ways in which old age and its bodies are represented. The restricted and restrictive nature of these representations and their relationship with a set of narratives that forefront loss of attractiveness and malfunction will underpin, the third part of this chapter which looks at the formation of the dominant discourse of old age as it relates to its embodiment. As a point of departure for this section the medicalisation of old age, the professionalisation of the problems of old age and the theorising of old age (from the 1940s until the late 1970s and early 1980s) will be very briefly described. This brings us to the final section when the chapter will focus on the aging body in one particular social location, gender and points us

towards the social construction of the body. Here, particular interest is directed towards the gendered body and how it is intertwined with science and politics. In doing so this will provide a structural background for chapter three that explores the calls to bring the body back into the feminist sociology of age and aging. However, for now the chapter will begin by exploring old female bodies in order to underpin the background that have made older women's lives intelligible and how it projected as a taken for granted picture of the world.

Old female bodies and the sociological imagination

In the past twenty five years or so we have witnessed a surge of interest in the body and this has produced different ways of imagining bodies (Davis, 1995). The extent to which old age has benefited from this trend is worthy of interest (Tulle-Winton, 2002). For Chris Phillipson (1998) this is a pertinent concern given the lack of interest shown by sociology in old age and what it is like to become and actually experience being old. Indeed, at first it may not seem that obvious why a sociologist should be interested in the human body. After all, sociology is a social science that is interested in rational actors (Weber), collective conscience (Durkheim) and the social structure (Marx). According to the structural functionalist Talcott Parsons (1937) the epistemological foundations of modern sociology are entrenched in a rejection of nineteenth century positivism, especially biologism which was built on the premise that human behaviour could be explained causally in terms of human biology. Sociology extracted itself from the physical sciences as a model of social theory by presenting itself according to Max Weber (1978) as an interpretive science of the meaning of social action and interaction. Such interaction according to Turner (2008: 34) occurred "between entities which were designated as 'the self 'or 'the social actor 'or 'the social agent". Here, the interaction of behaviour is bodies,

whereas the interaction between social actors involves meaning and choice and this is the proper object of sociology (ibid). Turner (1992: 34) therefore asserts that:

> "As a consequence of this interest in the rational and non-rational nature of social action, sociological theory has effectively neglected the importance of the human body in understanding social action, and social interaction. The nature of human embodiment has, with some important exceptions, not been important in either social research or social theory... [T]he body has been curiously missing or absent from sociological thought".

Like other disciplines emerging in the nineteenth century, the historical and conceptual development of sociology has in a large part been premised on the Cartesian legacy, which for Turner (1984) claims an ontological distinction between the mind and body and privileges the former over the latter. According to May (1996) the core to this Cartesian dualism is a systematic belief in the dominance of logical reason over illogical nature and, as such, Enlightenment philosophy [5] presumes that the rational self has an inner relationship with the mind and an outer relationship with the body. Descartes argued that, if we stop and reflect on ourselves, we cannot reduce our sense of who we are (our identity) to our bodies or to parts of our bodies. If our bodies were to be damaged or altered in some way our sense of who we are would not disappear (ibid). For example, the dualist philosophy is reinforced by Leder's (1990: 26) idea of the disappearing or '*absent*' body, which remains for much of the time in the 'corporeal background', because the active mind/sense of self only becomes conscious of the body when parts of the body become dysfunctional and re-appear. Here, the body is envisaged as not part of who we

[5] 'The Enlightenment' refers to the movement initiated in the European Renaissance period which incorporated a belief in scientific progress, rationality and humanism in a faith that human history is one of progress and improvement (Francis 2000).

are, but as part of nature, as an object of control, thus such a dualism in this example, could be either functional in terms of facilitating the individual to take control of their body, or restrictive, when it highlights the individual's lack of control of the body (ibid). For example, Debra Gimlin (2002) uses cosmetic surgery to emphasise this point and argues that in many instances, cosmetic surgery provides a tool for self-expression because it alleviates intrusive bodily self awareness. That is, cosmetic surgery is sometimes used to make the body less problematically central to consciousness, thereby allowing individuals a greater degree of volition in focusing on the body or beyond it. Here, this understanding of the self has three aspects. First the mind and body are thought to be distinct from each other and, second, body is subordinate to mind, where the former resembles a machine or object in which the self is located. Third, the mind is considered a source of thought through which the self is produced via cognitive rationalization and through which we view the world as external to us (Howson, 2004).

In a Cartesian view of the world, though vision is privileged as the sense that connects the self to the physical and material environment in which the self is located, bodily sensation is not seen to influence or contaminate perception (ibid). For May (1996), this distain for the body entails a distain for anything relating to it, such as the emotions, feelings and subjectivity, thus the experience is only real when deeply embedded within the consciousness and thus firmly detached from the corporeal. This philosophical dualism between the mind and body, between an isolated self and a world external to the self, forms the basis of Western epistemology and has informed the development of scientific rationality (Howson, 2004). This is especially marked in the example, of the emergence and consolidation of modern medicine, which succeeded in claiming the human body as an object amenable to scientific observation (Freund, 1988). Here, the modern body is a

medical body and is defined in purely biological terms. It is pre-social and has no history. It is an essence, a timeless material thing. It has no cultural meaning and cannot think, feel or relate to others (Tulle-Winton, 2002). For Csordos (1994: 6) such a body is:

> "Typically assumed to be a fixed, material thing subject to the empirical rules of biological science, existing prior to the mutability and flux of cultural change and diversity and characterized by unchangeable inner necessities".

Similarly, the autonomy of sociology was initially dependent on this distinction, thus the rational actor, was disembodied in the sense that rational thought was located in a mind already disconnected from the body (Howson, 2004). This meant that the body was neither perceived as a source of personal knowledge, nor deemed relevant to the production of sociological knowledge (Turner, 1984). In addition the body's association with nature and, concomitantly with femininity further distanced it from sociological analysis (Sydie, 1987). For example, one of the ways in which women's bodies were given meaning and their selves made nervous from the turn of the eighteenth century onwards was by the process of hysteria which according to Foucault (1981: 104) involved the female body was: analysed-qualified and disqualified-as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality; whereby it was integrated into the sphere of medical practices, by reason of pathology intrinsic to it". Consequently, a critique of a Cartesian approach to the mind/body relationship has been central to a feminist challenge to Western metaphysics, the foundation of which is the equivalence of the mind with the masculine and the privileging of the mind over the body-the devalued realm associated with the feminine (Bordo, 1986; Braidotti, 1994; Butler, 1990; Flax, 1992; Hekman, 1990; Nicholson, 1990). It is this founding system of binaries which has served to negate the feminine and locate women outside the realm of the subject. As a consequence, the feminine (and the female body)

have historically been constituted as that which must be defined, directed and controlled through the application of disembodied, objective, masculine knowledge (Twigg, 2002, 2004). Susan Bordo (1993:5) notes how: "the body is the negative term, and if woman is body, then women are that negativity". The chapter will return to explore the implications of this binary later as the chapter progresses, in order to challenge the taken for granted 'naturalness' of the body: a body which has served as a justification for 'natural' difference between the sexes and, thereby, the naturalization of a system of structured gender inequality. However, for now the point to be made here is that the body in old age was outside of the social (neither a source of personal knowledge, or deemed relevant to the production of sociological knowledge because it was an essentially biological process from which cultural irrelevance could be inferred) (Tulle-Winton, 2002). And yet, old age and age generally, encompasses at least three interrelated dimensions chronological, physiological, and social (Arber and Ginn, 1995). Of these three dimensions Arber and Ginn argue at least two are particularly relevant; physiological age, itself a construct that has its roots in the reappropriation of corporeality and the aging process by biomedicine, and social age.

According to Cole (1992) there has long been a tendency, in matters of aging and old age, to reduce the social dimension of aging to a derived set of life 'stages' or segments which are socially constructed as opposed to inevitable and are said to determine the experience of old age. Thus a specific period of life such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, middle age, and old age is influenced by the structural entities of a given society (Cole, 1992). According to Achenbaum (1978: 2) "[people] at the end of the life-cycle continuum have constantly been described as 'old'. Old age is an age old phenomenon". Here, Neugarten (1974) marked the distinction between what is now referred to as the third and fourth ages and referred to the people in these stages of later

adult development as 'the young-old' and the 'old-old'. The young-old are like middle aged persons (55-75) who generally have good health and remain as active as they wish to be. For example, Laslett (1989) suggests how the third age is a time when one could spend their retirement participating in a growing range of leisure activities. Here, Laslett found the third age to be a time for engaging in enriching activities and achieving self-fulfilment. However, the old-old (75+) tend to be widowed and more likely living dependently (Neugarten, 1974). Consequently, the concept of old age, with its attending miseries (a concept that will be discussed shortly) was only pushed into the life course by this misconceptualisation (Powell, 2006).

According to Bury (1982) the most expert commentaries about old age have emanated from the early sociological underpinnings of old age which have tended to restrict matters of aging to policy and management as opposed to illuminating the processes that lead to the production of what is called an old age. In other words Tulle-Winton (2002) argues sociological neglect reflects the following two interrelated and self referential processes. First, t he conflation of the bodies of old people with the lived experience of being old and, second, the construction of the corporeality of old age as no more than a biological process in its terminal stages. Consequently, according to Oberg (2003) the bodies of older people, although not really missing from the discourse in old age are only made known to us in a specific framework of interpretation, from which experience is inferred: the medicalised body and malfunctioning body. This restriction is nowhere more evident than in the ways older people, particularly older women have been represented in the contemporary period, especially in the visual arts such as photography (Blaikie & Hepworth 1997; Featherstone and Hepworth, 1998; Featherstone and Wernick, 1995). The chapter will therefore turn to explore how, as a form of discursive constraint these representations of what it is to be old

have been central to establishing and perpetuating negative stereotypes of older women and how these have shaped both their behaviour and how they think of themselves.

Representing old bodies: the Looking Glass Self

> "If we accept that old people are surrounded by a society that assigns them false images and that they are therefore trapped in a labyrinth of distorting mirrors, then the question arises of what self-conception they can possible project" (Hazan, 1994: 33).

Despite the diversity in the characteristics and experiences of older individuals, old age is frequently assumed to be a homogeneous and uniformly negative life stage. Images and expectations of aging and aged individuals have failed to keep pace with increased longevity, improved health, and changing social norms. According to Wearing (1995: 263) negative stereotypical images of older adults have therefore served to constrain and define: "behaviours deemed to be appropriate for elderly people". In a society that values attractiveness, productivity, youth and activity Wearing (1995: 267) notes how later life is often:

> "...characterized as a period beset with psychological, social, financial and physical problems and the aged are frequently caricatured (sic) as isolated, withdrawn, lacking energy and initiative; as frail, disease prone, poor and sexually uninterested".

Hennessy (1989: 40) contends that since old age is: "equated with illness and dependency...it defies the cultural ideals of youth, activity and independence, which are seen as characteristic of the 'normal' human condition". Underlying ageist stereotypes is our society's obsession with youth whereby: "we are judged not on the basis of how old

we are but on how young we are not" (Secunda, 1984: 2). Some theorists contend that the basis of ageism is society's fear and denial of death. Becker (1973: ix) argues that:

> "The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny of man (sic)".

Terrified of the surety of death, human beings deny its inevitability and strive to distance themselves from anything and anyone that reminds them of the fragility of life and the indignities of dying. In addition to warehousing the infirm in nursing homes (Twigg, 2004) and obsessively seeking after youth, human beings socially construct an 'other' or 'stranger' (Simmel, 1950) who is old and from whom they differentiate and distance themselves. Kosberg (1982: 133) states that ageism: "allows the younger generations to see older people as different from themselves... [and to] cease to identify with their elders as human beings". However, Luken (1987: 184) points out that the stigma associated with old age: "is not simply a matter of how old one is; rather, it is a matter of how one is perceived to be old in specific situations".

By failing to capture the lived realities of many older adults, Wearing (1995) suggests that ageist stereotypes fall into three broad categories, namely, those of decline, body image, and loss. Since old age is equated with deterioration, older individuals are often assumed to be dependent, sick, frail, and incompetent. Here, it has been argued that ageism has a stronger impact on women than on men (Sontag, 1978; Rice 1989), particularly on an older woman's evaluation and experience of her body. These authors argue that gender is central to the analysis since the cultural judgements discussed above concerning aging undermines women's traditional source of power. Male power by contrast resides in

money, status, social dominance, so that early signs of aging such as gray hair are read as marks of maturity and authority. Many older women report becoming socially invisible, no longer the focus of male attention, sidelined in the power stakes, and finding no reflection of their situations in the cultural imagery of advertising or the media. As Woodward (1999) comments, the older female body is both invisible in that it is no longer seen-and hypervisible in that it is all that is seen. Indeed, when examining our society's preoccupation with physical beauty, particularly that of women, Goodman (1994: 376) states that:

> "...[t]he cultural message about how women should look and act is endlessly disseminated on covers of women's magazines sold at supermarket check-out counters, in the news media, on TV, in films and in advertising, all of which endorse a value system that preaches bodily perfection and deny women the right to age".

Goodman continues to note how the emphasis on youthfulness and weight has become a 'national obsession' as women 'ruthlessly' compare themselves to and strive to achieve and maintain the physical attractiveness of our cultural icons of beauty. The relationship between the visual representation of self, and the society in which self is visually represented, received and reinforced, has been classically placed on the sociological map by Erving Goffman (1959, 1961, 1963, 1976), from the late 1950s onwards. Goffman in the *Presentation of Everyday Life* (1959) drew on the work of Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934) and utilised Cooley's concept of '*The Looking Glass Self*' to demonstrate the various ways in which the self is presented and maintained in social encounters. Here, visual information and appearance of the body was important for Cooley (1902), and he suggested that the self- idea developed in the following three key stages. Firstly, the self idea emerges in relation to how we imagine we appear to others, second, in relation to how

we imagine others judge our appearance, and, third, through the self freeing produced by our imagination of these judgements (Howson, 2004). Coherent self-presentation is sustained by a relation to what Goffman (1959) terms as virtual social identity and actual social identity. Here, the first concept expresses normative expectations of whom and what a person ought to be given in a social context or encounter. The latter refers to the social, cultural, and physical attributes actually possessed by a person. Goffman argues that we see ourselves as others do and share an understanding of the expectations associated with a particular role or encounter. Indeed, our view of ourselves is to a large extent governed by the desire to present ourselves according to the expectations of the context in which we are situated (Howson, 2004). Here, the physical appearance of the body is central to the relation between the virtual and social identity because 'the looking glass body' that one can see in the mirror (Hepworth, 2000) is mediated by what one imagines is society's perception of them (Goffman, 1959). According to Mike Hepworth (2000: 46):

> "Looking into a mirror is an interactive process through which connections are made between the personal subjective self of the viewer and the external world of other people. Because we have no direct access to the eternal reality of the body, even with the existence of aids such as mirrors and a wide range of technical apparatus..., the act of human perception is always mediated symbolically from meaning. When we look into a mirror we are therefore engaged in the act of the imagination whereby the self is constructed symbolically as a portrait or picture".

In his later work Goffman (1976: 8) was concerned with 'gender displays', with depictions and presentations of gendered identity. His metaphors draw on fine art and the ways in which gender is illustrated are fundamental to his enquiry, and argues:

> "What the human nature of males and females really consists of, then, is a capacity to learn to provide and to read depictions of masculinity and femininity and a willingness to adhere to a schedule for presenting these pictures".

For Goffman these pictures can perhaps also be understood as meanings from which humans are able to construct and interpret meanings and to incorporate these meanings into their gendered (ibid) and aging presentations (Tulle, 2008). For example, Featherstone and Hepworth (1989), Featherstone and Wernick (1995) and Blaikie and Hepworth (1997) have highlighted the salience of this cultural iconography and discuss how visual representations of old people provide us with images of what it is like to be old. Here, these images serve as models against which we can assess whether we are old or not, and how masculine or feminine we are, or how fat or thin we appear to be. As mentioned earlier stereotypical images of older adults have served to constrain and define "behaviours deemed to be appropriate for elderly people" and since old age is equated with illness and dependency it defies the cultural ideals of youth, slimness activity and independence, which are seen as characteristic of the 'normal' human, condition (Wearing, 1995).

Indeed, there are very few graphic representations of old bodies and the few that do exist have tended to shock and attract revulsion (Tulle-Winton, 2002), in the ways expressed by Goffman (1963). For example Tulle-Winton (2002) illustrates these points by describing the reactions of a group of undergraduate nurses when shown a display of photographs taken by Donigan Cumming (1996) of the Canadian journalist and actress Nettie Harris. Donigan took the photographs of Nettie with her full consent with permission to reveal them to various audiences over a ten year period from when she was in her 70s until her death aged 81. The photographs were taken in the woman's apartment where they played with a set of conventions of representations of young female bodies. They conveyed in

several layers a complex of moods and feelings not usually associated with the bodies of old women. In effect they barely repressed sexuality and voluptuousness and also rejected the traditional canons of feminine beauty, the aesthetic quality of old bodies, her own and those of others, who sometimes sit alongside her in portraits (Tulle-Winton, 2002). Tulle-Winton went onto suggest that the emaciation of her body was frankly represented, usually in stark surroundings of a white tiled bathroom, juxtaposed with representations of her half naked or fully clothed body to evoke sexuality and at other times dishevelled by the disorder of domestic life. Cumming (1996) displayed no evocation of graceful aging, of positive aging, nor for that matter, any suggestion of a possible dependency on carers. There was also no attempt made to disguise her agedness, but rather the effect was to project agedness in all its complexities in familiar surroundings, and its nakedness. Tulle-Winton (2002) went on to describe how the students found the photographs almost acceptable because Hettie still had a slim body, thus had a good figure for her age, therefore they were worth showing. However, most of the undergraduate student nurses found them to be disturbing because they displayed the body of an old woman in unconventional and ambiguous ways (ibid). In essence Tulle-Winton (2002) has illustrated concerns around the normalisation and foreclosure of freedom that aging portends. In support of such arguments Bytheway and Johnson (1998) assert that we need a well-constituted image of what old looks like before we could possibly recognize the signs in our own images. However, as described in this chapter the reluctance to countenance bleak representations of old female bodies is consonant with the dominant discourse in old age (ie the biomedical discourse of aging as decline), thus the chapter will continue to delineate this discourse by relying upon a range of male and female sociologists of age and aging who have sought their inspiration from the Foucauldian toolkit.

The medicalized body: Biomedicine and the truth stories about bodies

So far this chapter has established that the picture of the modern body that holds us captive is a medicalised body, that has been subjected to the medical gaze (Foucault, 1963), and owes its birthright to the Cartesian legacy (Seymour, 1998). Katz (1996) and Cole (1997) argue that the same can be said for the old body and by utilising genealogy they go on to describe a range of processes through which the bodily afflictions experienced by some people, and particularly older women were made legible to modern sensibilities and modern problematisations (Tulle-Winton, 2002). For example, Katz (1996) used the major theories of Foucault (1977) to show the extent to which institutional medicine objectifies the 'sick' body, once it has been medicalised. According to Foucault the body is not natural but created and reproduced through discourse, thus as mentioned previously we can only know the world and engage in social action through specific discourses. As Smart (1985) explains the Foucauldian concept of discourse allows us first to identify the social fields and institutions in which aging and old age are connected. For example, Cousins and Hussain (1984: 146) demonstrate how Foucault maps out how medical power became a disciplinary strategy which extended "control over minutiae of the conditions of life and conduct" of individual bodies. Armstrong (1983) went on to describe how the medical profession became an institution in which the advice and expertise of professionals was geared to articulating 'truths' about bodies. Medical domination through observation and scientific discourses objectified 'sick' bodies as "diagnoses began to be made of normality and abnormality and of the appropriate procedures to achieve the norm" (Smart, 1985: 43). As Frank (1990: 135-6) notes:

> "Medicine does occupy a paramount place among those institutions and practices by which the body is conceptualized, represented and responded to. At present our

capacity to experience the body directly, or theorize it indirectly, is inextricably medicalized".

Here, Katz (1996) identified how clinical medicine became the dominant framework within which the old body assumed its modern complexion. The old body was documented as a distinct and coherent biological entity with shape and volume signifying the passage of time (ibid). According to Katz (1996) far from being a minor form of reappropriation of old age; medicalisation was the key modality of its embodiment. Medicine decontextualised the bodies of older people and reinterpreted them as a biological organism with its own properties and laws and with the perceptual indicators thus produced and gave rise to the formation of a new discourse on old age. In effect medicine plainly produced the old body as an object of expertise and also experiential reference (Tulle-Winton, 2002). Katz (1996) went on to identify three dimensions in which the old body was encapsulated when it was reappropriated by medicine. The first related to the old body as a system of signification, a voluminous body that gave itself up as a visible manifestation of disease and loss of strength, enclosed in a "specific and specified anatomical grid" (Tulle-Winton, 2002: 72). The second for Katz (1996) related to its distinctiveness, the old body was characterized by distinct pathological qualities from the younger adult male body, namely degenerative diseases. Linguistically, the old body was senile where senility had come to mean the incidence of disease in later life. The third dimension was that of its relationship with death as the body was the precursor of death (ibid). Here, according to Canguilhem (1998) clinical medicine produced a body that was either 'normal' (disease free) or pathological (diseased). For Katz (1996) this distinction did not apply well to the old body whose normal state was located in its pathological occurrences and attributes, involved in an unalterable and intrinsic process of decay, deterioration, and disability. For older people there was no question of the Cartesian

dualism and of the maintenance, let alone construction, of a new sense of the self outside of the body (Katz, 1996). Bodily decay and decrepitude was causally related to decline in all other faculties and constituted people as old and as the 'other' (Pickering, 2001). In other words the old body was subject constituting and provided its own justification for expectations of appropriate behaviour (Katz, 1996). For example, Hazan (1994) suggests some of the more common manifestations of this attitude are: that the old dress in drab clothing which are devoid of any sexuality, thus are asexual; they have an inability to learn-to store and process information; that they are senile; are incapable of initiative and sound judgement of their own needs; are given the image of being powerless, dependent, disturbing and threatening; they dwell on and draw their life meaning from the past, thus the present is deemed to hold no real interest to them (ibid). Finally Gubrium and Holstein (2002: 17) note that perhaps the most extreme and ubiquitous stereotype is one of older people as depressed, unhappy, and pervaded with a sense of failure, disintegration, and pointlessless. Indeed, Calasanti and Slevin (2006) argued that until the 1990s, sexuality and old age was primarily understood as contradictory, oppositional or incompatible. With the dominant framing of later life as 'Asexual' they suggest popular cultural portrayals of sexuality active or engaged older people were generally confined to the humorous greetings cards in which the 'joke' played on notions of older people was that they were not sexually desirable, not sexually desirous and not sexually capable (ibid). This absence of portrayals of later life sexuality was also exemplified in television, advertising and film (Woodward, 1999). Here, Woodward described how representations of older peoples sexuality were 'essentially taboo' for mainstream culture, thus possessing the notion of unwatchability of images of older peoples naked bodies when applying them to a scene of sexuality. Of course it would be easy to refute the alleged universality of this and other stereotypes, but the point to be made here is that stereotypes are useful for camouflaging

the social arrangements which we impose upon older people in Western societies (Hazan 1994). Thus, Gubrium and Holstein (2000: 18) state: *"The unspoken assumptions, upon which scientific theories of aging are constructed, become doubly dangerous, being mindfully or inadvertently employed to determine the fate of fellow human beings"*. Indeed, the menopause is a good example, of how bodily decay and decrepitude was causally related to decline in all other faculties and constituted women as old and not as being sexually desirable (Woodward, 1999). Therefore, both historically and contemporaneously, the identities of older women and old age have been constructed through expert discourses of 'decay' and 'deterioration' and the medical 'gaze helps to intensify regulation over older women in order to normalise and provide assessment and treatment for such notions (Foucault, 1977; Greer, 1991; Katz, 1996). According to Cousins and Hussain (1984: 151) medical discourse, under the guise of science, was part of a disciplinary project orientated to:

> "create a model individual, conducting his life according to the precepts of health, and creating a medicalized society in order to bring conditions of life and conduct in line with requirements of health".

As Katz (1996) noted earlier the way in which bio-medicine has interacted with older people is a subtle aspect of control and power. Katz continues to note that for medical professions, this legitimises the search within the individual for signs, for example, that she requires intense forms of surveillance and ultimately the processes of medicalization. This permeates an intervention into aging lives because practices of surveillance befit older people because of the medical discourse permeation of 'it's your age' (ibid). Surveillance of older people enabled bio-medicine to show concern for their health and

acquire knowledge about their condition. For Foucault (1982: 212) it therefore constructs them as objects of power and knowledge and:

> "This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise and which others have to recognise in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects".

The process of observation objectifies the older women as "diagnoses began to be made of normality and abnormality and of the appropriate procedures to achieve... to the norm" (Smart, 1985: 93). In this way studying and examining the body and mind of older women was and is intrinsic to the development of power relationships between health professions and older women as users. For Rabinow (1984: 204) the probing technique was at the centre of procedures that: "constitute the individual as effect and object of power, as effect and object of knowledge. It is the examination which ... assures the great disciplinary functions of distribution and classification". Foucault (1977) argued that the probing technique combines panopticism and normalisation and "establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them" (Foucault 1984: 184). In this case older women who enter into a natural process such as the menopause would be established as a case and may be described, judged, measured, and compared with others, in her very individuality. This individual may also have to be trained or corrected, classified, normalised, excluded (ibid). So far this chapter has explored how biomedicine has taken an active role in the regulation and government of old age and of the old body (Katz, 1996). As a biomedical entity, with its own internal models of (mal) function, the old body was by definition associated with loss and was thus experienced as loss (Tulle-Winton 2002). It is therefore essential to explore and discuss the discursive space in which

the corporeality of old age as loss has been addressed within the sociology of age and aging discourse. Here, within the period of the 1940s until the late 1970s and early 1980s the old body is held as being "invariably inactive, lonely, either at home or in residential care, a victim of its biological decrements" (Tulle-Winton, 2002: 75). The chapter will therefore turn to explore the disappearance of the old female body.

The disappearance of the old female body: the body that never was

> "Old age is shamefully seen like head lice in children and venereal disease in their older siblings" (Stott, 1981: 3).

The above quotation by Stott illustrates how old age from the 1970s through to the 1980s has been perceived as a social problem and this perspective is exemplified through the narratives used by policy makers, mass media, and sociologists of age and aging on all sides of Western society. Hence, the narrative of aging into old age still begins with and ends with the problematisation of economic, social, and physical decline, whereby the aging body is the bottom line, subject to 'decay' (Stott, 1981). As this chapter has demonstrated through a Foucauldian framework insofar as there is a history of aging, there is also a history of efforts to control, supervise, and regulate older people (Powell & Biggs, 2000). We can see how the master narrative of natural decline of aging bodies hides the location of complex intersections of negative ideas that comprise an aging culture, thus old age is seen as a write-off (Tulle-Winton, 2002). For some researchers it is therefore disappointing that the positive images of old age are not promoted with such enthusiasm (Blaikie, 1999; Gilleard & Higgs, 2000, 2001). Instead, the rise and consolidation of theories and philosophies of old age can be traced to the concern about the consequences of demographic change and the potential shortage of younger workers in the early post-war years in the United Kingdom and United States. During this period the subject matter of

the sociology of age and aging was shaped by significant external forces: first, by government intervention to achieve outcomes in social and health policy and second, by a political and economic environment which viewed an aging population as creating a social problem for society (Phillipson, 1998). This has generated the attention of modernist orthodoxies spanning functionalist, Marxist, and feminist ideas (Lynott & Lynott, 1996). Indeed, feminist ideas will be discussed at length very shortly, but the point to be made here is that these modernist orthodoxies particularly in its more radical or humanistic versions, have struggled to assert the social rather than the physiological basis for understanding old age, against a culture in which biomedical accounts occupy a privileged and dominant position. For example, the political economy approach (Estes & Binney, 1989; Phillipson, 1982), which has been highly influential in British and North American sociology, emphasizes the ways in which old age is the product of social structural factors such as retirement and pensions rather than determined by physiology. From this perspective, attempting to emphasise the body can seem a retrogressive step, one that takes us back into the territory of biological determinism and the narrative of decline. Furthermore, within western culture, to emphasise the body can be to reduce or lessen an individual; and there has been a long history of misogynistic discourse in which women are denigrated by reducing them to their bodily characteristics. Dwelling on the body in relation to old women is thus seen as doubly deplorable. Consequently, because of the reluctance of sociologists interested in age and aging to deal directly with the body, they have tended to hand over the subject matter to the health scientists and clinicians (Phillipson, 1998). As a result the body in its material form has been taken for granted, absented or forgotten in sociological literature, until the body begins to mechanically break down. Thus the role of the body in sociology has for some time focused on the failing body and the political response to that aging body (ibid). However, this has now begun to

change (Faircloth, 2003; Gilleard & Higgs, 2000; Oberg, 1996; Tulle-Winton, 2000). In addition both the Marxist and functionalist accounts of the aging process have also been accused of being gender blind (Arber & Ginn, 1991, 1994). The chapter will now continue to argue that lived bodies play not only a crucial part in the identity formation of older people via medical discourses but also, of equal importance, in the social constructions and representations of the body between older men and women. While the naturalisation of the body has been pointed out and contested its 'objective' stance via the appropriation of social constructivist insights, gender is a key identity variable identified and evaluated a dividing practice between men and women. Gender, is therefore, important and significant for the further feminist sociological study of aging, identity, and embodiment.

Gender and the aging body

According to Gittens (1997) the sociology of age and aging has paid insufficient attention to the ways in which gendered bodies have always enjoyed varying degrees of absence or presence in old age-in the guise of 'female corporeality' and 'male embodiment'. In terms of the United Kingdom demographic profiles (See Appendix A) there are predominantly more older women than older men (Arber & Ginn, 1991) which are substantiated by official statistics. Older women outnumber older men as death rates are higher among men than among women[6]. Women also have unequal access to community care services which is differentiated by issues of 'race' and disability (Morris, 1998). Older women's visibility as service users of community care services has been highlighted by much research in

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[6] There were 77 men in the UK aged 50 and over for every 100 women of the same age group in 1951. The sex ratio increased to 85 men per 100 women in 2010. Projections indicate that the sex ratio will further increase by 2031, when there are expected to be 90 men per 100 women over age 50. The greater number of women than men is most pronounced among the very old, as women tend to live longer than men. In 2010 there were 40 men per 100 women for those aged 85 and over. This compares with 45 men per 100 women in 1951, but is projected to rise to 65 per 100 by 2031(Office for National Statistics, 2010).

feminist sociology where it was ascertained that older women have higher rates of chronic illnesses than men, and their bodies outlast those of men (Arber & Ginn, 1995). Sociologists of age and aging need to acknowledge that knowledge is gendered and is male. The woman's presence has been absent in sociology (Krekula, 2007) because the body has been excluded from the social (Turner, 1996). It is male bodies that animate the social; they appear for a fleeting moment, only to disappear immediately, in the space between 'corporeality' and 'sociality'. As discussed earlier when exploring the Cartesian dualism, on the one hand, we have masculinity which is defined in relation to the mind and the 'logos', while the feminine is defined in relation to the body and its procreative functions, an essentialist construction, par excellence. As Adrienne Rich (1976: 184) reminds us, women have had to deconstruct the patriarchal stereotype which links the female body with its procreative function and states: "I am really asking whether women cannot begin, at last, to think through the body, to connect what has been so cruelly disorganized". With this incisive sentence, Rich stresses that women have to overcome the damning dichotomy between soul and body, in order to re-appropriate their bodies and to create a female subject, in which the two entities are complementary. The chapter will therefore turn to trace a gender theoretical field where older women are rendered invisible for academic investigation (Tunaley et al, 1999). In doing so this will underpin how the negative constructions of aging position women differently in relation to body-management practices like dieting and will link into the discussions in the next chapter.

Exploring a gender theoretical field where the older women are invisible

> "As the category of 'old woman' is composed of two positions, age and gender, one might expect that research on older women and on constructions of old age together with gender, are pursued in both these fields" (Krekula, 2007: 155).

Within the gender theoretical sphere, older women have tended to be left out, and age and ageing are seldom addressed. Whereas, within the sociology of age and aging older women have frequently been the objects of research, to such an extent that the discipline has been characterized as 'feminized' (Krekula, 2007). As described in this chapter modernism is a term used to describe the belief in human improvement and endeavour through science and rationality born of the Enlightenment, which maintained cultural hegemony in the west until the latter part of this century (it has been argued that we are now in a 'postmodern' era and this area will be discussed shortly). The point to be made here is that modernist projects reflect these endeavours for the improvement of humans, though of course, views of what constitutes improvement have always been subjective (Francis, 2000). Feminism is an inherently modernist theory for the following three reasons. First, it supposes a founding subject ('woman', and the shared position of women because of their sex). Second, feminism is based on the 'truth narrative' that patriarchy oppresses women, and the moral assumption that such oppression is wrong, and that we should work to end this oppression. Hence feminism is an enlightenment project, born of the humanist, enlightenment idea that the world can be made a better place through human endeavour (Soper, 1990). This also supposes a continuous, and potentially socially improving, history; a third modernist tenet (Francis, 2000).

Here, as a starting point the word 'woman' was considered necessary to emphasise similarity in order to create a strong political subject. Consequently, instead of illuminating the differences among women, women's experiences were held up as uniform and regarded in relation to men as another homogeneous group (Krekula, 2007). As a result studies on older people tend to examine women and men separately, use gender as a variable in the analysis, or ascribe gender as an aspect that only concerns women (Arber &

Ginn, 1995; Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; McMullin, 1995). A central critique of 'adding gender' to existing theories or research, is that this use of gender as a variable gives an emphasis on difference, which assumes an ideal referent, and will likely result in older men being the ideal to which older women are compared (McMullin, 1995). When old women are studied within this 'adding approach', their experiences of phenomena such as retirement are interpreted in relation to assumptions based on men. For example, although some recent studies have a particular focus on retired women, the history of research in this field has primarily been the study of retired men, or studying the phenomenon mostly from men's perspective, and subsequently adding women as a new target group for study, or adding their 'different experiences'. Even though it clearly gives valuable empirical data concerning groups previously overlooked in sociological research, such as women, this approach neither starts from women's own experiences, nor from the perspective of gender regarded as a social process and organizing principle that creates women's and men's experiences. It reproduces differences between women and men, and ascribes women the position of 'the other' (de Beauvoir, 2002; Hughes, 1995; McMullin, 1995; Pickering, 2001). Consequently, women have, accordingly, been marginalized and made invisible in early and even in much of the present mainstream gender work (Krekula, 2007).

More recently, many authors in the gender field such as Butler (1990, 1993), West and Fenstermaker (1995) and West and Zimmerman (1987) have criticized the homogeneous view of a collective female identity and the focus has been directed, instead, onto the differences among women. Here, these authors have emphasized that women do not share experiences that are independent of positions like ethnicity, class, age and sexuality. We do not 'do gender' as an isolated process, it has been claimed: when we are 'doing gender' we simultaneously 'do' ethnicity, class, age, sexuality, ability, etc. (Butler, 1990). For

Butler the words, gender cannot be understood without including its intersections with these other positions. However, despite the fact that many have shown how women in gender theory has been constructed by whiteness, middle class and heterosexuality (Carby, 1982; Collins, 1998; Haraway, 1991; Mirza, 1997), little interest has been paid to the presumptions of age in these theories. Sociologists have claimed that research on older women and on dimensions of aging has been neglected in the central gender debate (e.g. Arber and Ginn, 1991, 1995; Browne, 1998; Calasanti, 2004; Krekula, 2003, 2007; McDonald and Rich, 1985; McMullin, 1995; Ray, 2003; Reinharz, 1997; Roseneil, 1995; Twigg, 2004; Woodward, 1995). Therefore, while the construction of ethnicity, or class (Arber et al 2003) with gender is in focus in the contemporary mainstream gender field, the intersection of age and gender remains out of focus (Arber & Ginn, 1991). Gender theoretical texts often include a long list of structural categories, what Butler (1990: 143) calls the 'feminist et cetera', whose function is to show the absence of a homogeneous collective identity. Although age is sometimes included in these lists, the potential age bias has neither been problematised nor elucidated. It would appear, therefore, that there are two parallel discourses of age: on the one hand, hints of an age bias in gender discussions; on the other, a theoretical silence about aspects of age, how an age bias is maintained and the consequences of such an age bias (Krekula, 2007). As a consequence the woman is often seen as being the young working woman, thus is in her productive age cycle whereas the older woman becomes a deviant, a burden and the 'other' (Krekula, 2003). In essence the old woman becomes a problematic object in feminist sociology, thus their position has not been sufficiently problematised (Arber & Ginn, 1991, 1995; Krekula, 2007). Less attention has been paid to their position as subjects in theories, which is partly related to the conceptualisation of gender. While contemporary gender theories stress gender as a construction (Butler, 1998; MacKinnon, 1998; West and Zimmerman, 1987), and recent

research by sociologists emphasises how the interaction of age and gender needs to encompass other social positions including race, class and ethnicity (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Ginn & Arber, 1995; McMullin, 1995), this approach has not received widespread attention in the feminist sociological field (Krekula, 2007). Consequently, older women have predominantly been studied from a misery perspective, stressing women's ageing as a problem or a double jeopardy.

The hypothesis of double jeopardy which was introduced in social gerontology by Dowd and Bengtson (1978), builds on the assumption that prejudices and discriminations against a minority group are worse when combined with prejudices against another disadvantaged group. The interplay between age and gender has frequently been characterized as a double jeopardy. Here, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter the combination of sexism and ageism supposedly makes women's ageing more problematic than men's. Instead of being scrutinized, this assumption has often been taken for granted as a point of departure, which has influenced the themes and issues that are brought into focus. By focusing on age and gender as a double jeopardy, the identity of older women has frequently been described as stigmatized (Hochschild 1978; Matthews, 1979; Paoletti, 1998). As described earlier in this chapter there are double standards for women's and men's aging which affords them different experiences of aging. Here, biological aging places at risk the ability to control the body, and thus deprives it of its civilised normality (Sontag, 1978). Alongside being deprived of its civilized normality, the older female body is also deprived of cultural capital (Tulle, 2008). For example, the permanent sense of dissatisfaction that most women have with their physical appearance is a result of being relentlessly bombarded with images of perfection by the mass media (Bordo, 1993). As the proliferation of images of bodies which valorise youth, beauty, slimness, perfect body

shapes and physical competence in contemporary culture is problematic for older women whose bodies, not conforming to these images, consequently become devalued (Featherstone et al 1991; Shilling, 2003; Turner 1996; Tulle 2008). Aging female bodies, and their association with loss, contravene the cultural obligation and potential to be beautiful (Sontag, 1978). The sexualization of bodies (Öberg, 2003; Öberg and Tornstam, 1999) also plays a part in the devaluation of older bodies and of a range of qualities which, arguably, older people might once have claimed for themselves, such as experience and maturity. Consequently, the negative constructions of aging (i.e. that define older females as sexually ineligible and socially invisible) have not only served to marginalise older women, but also marked them as unworthy subjects for academic investigation (Tunaley et al, 1999).

Conclusion

As demonstrated the classical and modern traditions of the sociology of aging have had little to contribute in understanding older women's social and self identity because they have been largely disembodied traditions which rely on evidence from the reflexive mind expressed through the spoken and written word. In the mainstream classical and modern conditions there are no temporal concepts to allow for an analysis of such phenomena, much less a sociology of the body. Here, it has therefore been argued that female aging has been an area where Enlightenment-based knowledge has shown itself to be particularly weak and the chapter has highlighted how the prejudices against older women, fortified by deep seated fear of death, and a loathing of its precursors, has dramatically distorted the modern gaze. Feminism has focused on the ways women's bodies were controlled and dominated within patriarchal societies. A series of social institutions, medicine, the law, and family were therefore implicated in the control of women through the control of their

bodies (Sontag, 1991; Twigg, 2000). Although these are enduring structural social divisions and they impinge upon how bodies are regulated and also are important for the social analysis of identity, unfortunately modernist theories are also far too totalized in the production of knowledge about bodies in contemporary culture (Longino & Powell, in press). Consequently, up until the last twenty five years or so the opportunities to engage with embodiment outside the restrictive medical and functional dimensions have been lacking (Williams and Bendelow, 1998). The chapter has highlighted how the modern body was a medical body, and has discussed how biological aging places at risk older women's ability to control the body, and its appearance, and thus deprives it of its civilised normality, as well as its cultural capital (Tulle, 2008). At the level of discourse, the centrality of the body in aging is reinforced by the bio-medical model which as detailed is understood to have four components. First, the mind and body are essentially different and medicine is restricted to considerations related to the body. Second, the body can be understood as analogous to a machine. Third, Medical answers are thought to be more reliable when they are founded on the basic sciences. Finally, biophysical answers are preferred to all others (Murphy & Longino, 1995). This model is reductionistic and by focusing almost entirely on the body, it ignores the person that animates the body, and the lifeworld that contextualizes the person. The chapter has revealed how the biomedical model has dominated the perceptions of old age as decline and loss, at the level of experience the sense of self bodily aging is theorized as a threat to both social and self identity (Öberg, 2003; Öberg and Tornstam, 1999).

Ontologically, human relations are far more diverse than modernist theories give credit. Foucault (1980) argues that the self is not a fixed coherent personality as presented in humanist and positivist theory: instead it is positioned and positions in 'discourse'.

Foucault denies unitary theoretical constructs and the search for internal consistency and argues the need for a de-centred approach to both individual identity and the social formations. Thus any given individual, and any particular society, can contain, multiple, shifting and often self-contradictory identities. Added to this there is no way of judging the value of one of those identities over others because there are so many ways of being (McNay, 1992). As discussed in chapter one and illustrated in this chapter in Foucauldian theory, power is not a possession, but is constituted through multiple, and constantly shifting discourses. Power is embedded in discourses due to their ability to produce subjects and objects in certain ways. This helps to explain the ways in which an individual's power position appears to shift depending on the interactive environment. By formulating an argument that power is not fixed or a possession this chapter has illustrated the limitations this has had on modernist (feminist) positions which claim to speak on behalf of the subordinated. When the issue of social identity in later life is analysed Foucault's (1977) contention seems powerful in articulating that there has been a growth in the localities of power and knowledge that seek to inscribe physical and social bodies with discourses of normality and self-government. In the search for a stable identity not dominated by both professional and cultural discourses of power, older women must challenge the homogeneity of the social category of elderly as an embodiment of the 'times up medical narrative' and 'achieve' it through what Giddens (1991) calls 'ontological reflexivity'. Accordingly, the self-identity needs to be consciously constructed and maintained. The aging female self has a new pathway to follow, stepping outside dominant discourses of medical and patriarchal reason, to include a process of safety, self-exploration, self-struggle and self-discovery, it is anything but given. The next chapter will therefore demonstrate how postmodernism/poststructuralism can offer sociologists a framework for exploring how older women who identify with 'weight problems' actively

seek to modify their bodies in order to achieve a 'passport' to a better life (Featherstone, 1991), and expose whether they are positioned differently in relation to body-management practices like dieting (Hetherington and Burnett, 1994).

Chapter Three: Bringing the body back into feminist aging studies

Introduction

> "A return to the body initiates a new search for identity. The body appears as a secret domain, to which only the individual holds the key, and to which he or she can return to seek self-definition unfettered by the rules and expectations of society. Nowadays the social attribution of identity invades all areas traditionally protected by the barrier of private space" (Giddens, 1991: 218).

Chapter two of this thesis has set the scene for constructions of old age that did not foreground the body. The aim of this chapter is to redress the neglect of a theoretical understanding of the body, describe the shift towards bringing the body back into the sociology of age and aging, and evaluate the potential for resisting negative constructions of female aging based on naturally declining bodies. The chapter will therefore draw upon postmodern/postsructural theory and feminist insights to explore the intersection of the body, gender, and age, pursuing this through the following three areas. The first concerns the subjective experience of aging and the significance of the body in this. Here, feminist writers have begun to extend the earlier classic analysis of how the personal is political to the experiences of old age, exploring the interaction between the ways in which to use Gullette's (1997) suggestion that we are aged by culture and the role of the body in this.

The second, part will connect with the relevant literature relating to the significance of the body as an identity project in late modern/postmodern consumer culture (Featherstone, 1991; Shilling, 2003), in order to provide some appreciation of how the project may be taken up by older women in a weight-loss diet culture. Crucially, the chapter will critically engage with the growing concerns of the 'obesity crisis' and illuminate how these

concerns are set against the backdrop of authoritative claims that most people are 'excessively' heavy and are ultimately failing in their duties as responsible citizens or 'good' bodies (Lupton, 1997a). In doing so, the chapter will progress to briefly explore the idea of food as a social practice and as communication, before progressing to the third section which engages with the two theoretical underpinnings of Foucault's: the docile versus the active self. In the first case Foucault's technologies of power will be explored to provide an understanding of how dieting is understood by feminists as a disciplinary practice that serves to construct 'docile bodies' (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993). In the second case the chapter will construct an argument to suggest that the work of Foucauldian feminists on dieting would be more complete if it supplemented Foucault's docile account with Foucault's later work on technologies of the self (the use of pleasure and care of the self) to explore how weight loss dieting cultivates and expands older women' capacities for weight loss dieting practices.

In recognising that Foucault's body is a vanishing body (i.e. the body is dissolved as a casual phenomenon into the determining power of discourse), the final part of the chapter will conceive of the body as a material component for social action. The chapter will therefore engage with phenomenology in order to illuminate an understanding of the relationship between states of individual consciousness and social life. As an approach within the sociology of age and aging the chapter will discuss how phenomenology seeks to reveal how human aging awareness is implicated in the production of social action, social situations and social worlds. Phenomenology asks of us to note the misleading substantiality of social products and to avoid the pitfalls of reification. In doing so the chapter will reveal how it is inadequate for sociologists to view older women as objects. Older women are 'subjects' with sentient experience, thus phenomenology focuses on the

investigation of social products as humanly meaningful acts. The 'meaning contexts' applied by the sociologist explicates the points of view of older actors. It also expresses their lifeworld and their lived experiences. Phenomenology strives to reveal how actors construe themselves, all the while recognizing that they themselves are actors construing their subjects and themselves. However, for now the chapter will begin by bringing the body back into the sociology of age and aging.

Bringing the body back

Much new writing around the body and age has emerged within the humanities and cultural studies, strongly influenced by postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives (Andersson, 2002; Katz, 1996; Twigg, 2004; Walker, 1999; Woodward, 1999). In relation to the term 'modernism', the terms 'postmodernism' and 'poststructuralism', which often appear to be used synonymously, should be explained. According to Powell and Longino (2002) postmodernism is a notoriously difficult concept to define, but can be identified by the following themes. First, there is distrust in the concept of absolute and objective truth. Truth is viewed as contextual, situational, conditional, and most of all, interpretive. Second, emphasis is placed on fragmentation rather than universalism, which moves away from the general and encompassing toward the particular. Third, local power is preferred over the centralized power of the nation state, and the decentralization, or democratization of power, is a pervasive theme of postmodern narratives. Fourth, reality is simulated but is otherwise not a very meaningful concept; reality conceived as a general and universal truth is profoundly doubted. Fifth, we are seeing the rise of consumer culture that tends to place power in the hands of the consumers, but can also manipulate consumers through marketing ploys. Finally, diversity is emphasized and valued above commonality based on homogeneity (ibid). In essence for these authors it has been argued that a postmodern

analysis of UK culture is no longer a fringe perspective. It promotes strategies of empowerment, individualism and diversity; and it is critical of strategies that devalue individuals because of any characteristic (including age), that control access to knowledge, and that assault identity. Poststructuralism on the other hand is derived from the structuralist movement in literary criticism. Structuralists argued that all human narratives are based on similar known storylines. A universal order is constructed by language notions of ourselves as autonomous individuals are simply discourses within which human lives are positioned. Structuralists attempted to devise a scientific system in order to analyse the structure of language, suggesting that the researcher could 'stand outside' language. Poststructuralists take issue with this position, arguing that one cannot objectify the language which one is immersed in, and that language can be interpreted in many different ways, so dominant storylines or claims to truth can be 'deconstructed' and dismantled (Francis, 2000). As such, it is part of the wider Cultural Turn. This literature drives forward the earlier agenda of social constructionism, but in a much more radical way, showing how the body itself is social constituted. Essentializing discourses in relation to the body need to be replaced by ones that recognize its nature as a social text, something that is both formed and given meaning within culture. The aging body is thus not natural, is not prediscursive, but fashioned within and by culture (Twigg, 2004). In chapter two the body was seen in purely biological terms. It is pre-social and has no history. It is an essence, a timeless, material thing. It has no cultural meaning and cannot think, feel or relate to others (Hughes, 2002). Here, the pervasive references older women make to their bodies (as illustrated in the opening quote in chapter two) might be interpreted as evidence of the essential biological basis for age and aging and of the validity of a naturalistic perspective or, in Turner's (1992) terms, a 'foundationalist' view. As demonstrated in chapter two when exploring modernity, there would seem to be little room for the polar

opposite of this perspective: an 'anti-foundationalist' (Turner, 1992: 48) or strong social constructionist view, which emphasizes the body as shaped, constrained, even invented by society:

> "[A]nti-foundationalist perspectives conceptualize the body as a discourse about the nature of social relations, or comprehend the body as a system of symbols, or seek to understand how bodily practices are metaphors for larger social structures, or they understand the body as a social construction of power and knowledge in society, or perceive the body as an effect of social discourse".

The aging body is thus not natural, is not pre-discursive, but fashioned within and by culture. In effect what the cultural critics have done is recover this important territory for the sociology of age and aging from the medical domain (Twigg, 2004). The binaries reflected in this opening paragraph such as essentialism,constructivism, nature,culture, foundationalism, antifoundationalism, body, mind provide a continuing problematic for sociologists. Nonetheless, the dominant goal among scholars currently articulating a sociological perspective on the body (Prout, 2000, Shilling, 1993; Turner, 1992; Williams & Bendelow, 1998) is to overcome these dualities and integrate 'materialist' and 'constructionist' views (Frank, 1991). However, before continuing to explore how older bodies are aged by culture it is necessary to firstly discuss how feminists have utilised the Foucauldian account of social constructionism as a conceptual framework that emphasises the cultural and historical aspects of phenomena widely thought to be exclusively natural.

Add Foucault to feminism and stir: Exploring the socially constructed body

> "The theories Foucault devised are not intended as permanent structures, enduring in virtue of their universal truth. They are temporary scaffoldings erected for a specific

purpose, which Foucault is happy to abandon to whoever might find them useful" (Gutting, 1994: 16).

According to Diamond and Quinby (1988) poststructuralism and contemporary feminism have emerged as two of the most influential political and cultural movements of the late twentieth century. The recent alliance between them has been marked by an especially lively engagement with the work of Foucault. Although Foucault makes few references to women or to the issue of gender in his writings, his treatment of the relations between power, the body and sexuality has stimulated extensive feminist interest for the following specific purposes. Firstly, Foucault's analyses of the productive dimensions of disciplinary powers which are exercised outside the narrowly defined political domain overlap with the feminist task of exploring the micropolitics of personal life and exposing the mechanics of patriarchal power at the most personal levels of women's experience (Diamond and Quinby, 1988). Secondly, Foucault's treatment of power and its relation to the body and sexuality has provided feminist social theorists with some useful conceptual tools for the analysis of the social construction of gender and sexuality and contributed to the critique of essentialism within feminism (Butler, 1998; Fraser, 1989; Grosz, 1994; McNay, 1992). Finally, Foucault's identification of the body as the principal target of power has been used by feminists to analyze contemporary forms of social control over women's bodies and minds (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Sawicki, 1998; Spitzack, 1987; Twigg, 2004). This chapter will draw on the work of Foucault in order to "erect a scaffold for the specific purpose" (Gutting, 1994: 16) of exploring the differential ways in which female bodies are "regulated understood and constructed" (Nettleton, 1995: 233) in old age and through weight-loss dieting practices in a commercial slimming club. Foucault's (1980, 1977) analysis of the discursive body has provided an important resource for sociologists interested in exploring the body as a socially constructed phenomenon. In contrast to the

naturalistic approaches explored in the previous chapter, Foucault does not view bodies as naturally different entities whose biological constitution determines and limits permanently the capabilities of human subjects. Instead bodies are highly malleable phenomena which can be invested with various changing forms of power (Shilling, 2003). As touched upon above this approach has proved especially popular with feminist scholars who have used Foucault's work to argue against the notion that the natural body is the basis on which individual identities and social inequalities are built and to support the argument that gendered identities are fractured, shifting, and unstable (McNay, 1992). In other words Foucault (1980, 1977) shares the feminist criticism of the scientific discourses of the Enlightenment, which as described in chapter two as taking a 'rational' approach to the world, implying a possible analytical objectivity, and a separating off of the reasoning mind (constructed as male), from the emotions and body (constructed as female). Such dualisms delineate and constitute power differences, as aspects associated with the Enlightenment and with masculinity (for example, rationality and science) are constructed in society as positive and more worthy than aspects associated with femininity (nature, emotion). This, in turn, has meant that activities constructed as rational and scientific (medicine) have traditionally been accorded greater status than those constructed as emotional and 'natural' (nursing). However, Foucault reveals scientific discourses of the Enlightenment to be socially constructed power narratives, an argument also made by many feminists (Harding 1984, 1991; Ramazanoglu 1993).

As briefly described in chapters one and two for Foucault, the body is not just given meaning by discourse; it is wholly constituted by discourse. In effect as Turner (1992) describes above the body vanishes as a biological entity and becomes instead a socially constructed product which is infinitely malleable and highly unstable. As Shilling (2003:

65) notes: "the influence of Foucault's work is such that it is now justifiable to talk of a Foucauldian approach to the body". As detailed in chapter one when constructing a framework for this thesis to attach itself to, the Foucaldian approach to the body is characterised, first as a substantive preoccupation with the body and, second, by the epistemological view of the body as produced by and existing in discourse (Shilling, 2003). In the works of his middle years *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* Foucault traces the emergence of some of the practices, concepts, forms of knowledge, social institutions and techniques of government which have contributed to shaping modern European culture. He calls the method of historical analysis he employs 'genealogical' (Diamond and Quinby, 1988). Genealogy is a form of critical history in the sense that it attempts a diagnosis of: "the present time, and of what we are, in this very moment in order to question...what is postulated as self-evident...to dissipate what is familiar and accepted" (Foucault 1988: 265). What distinguishes genealogical analysis from traditional historiography according to Foucault (1980: 149) is that it is:

> "A form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc. without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout history"

Rather than assuming that the movement of history can be explained by the intentions and aims of individual actors, genealogy investigates the complex and shifting network of relations between power, knowledge and the body which produce historically specific forms of subjectivity (Diamond and Quinby, 1988). Foucault (1984: 50) links his genealogical studies to a modality of social critique which he describes as a:

> “Critical ontology of the present. In a late paper, he explains that an ontology of the present involves 'an analysis of the historical limits that are imposed on us' in order to create the space for 'an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them”.

Thus, genealogy is a form of social critique has been useful because it seeks to determine the possibilities for social change and ethical transformation of ourselves (Diamond and Quinby, 1988, Heyes, 2007). Central to this history is a concern for mapping the relations that exist between the ‘body and the effects of power on it’ (Foucault 1980: 58). Expanding on the points made about power as discussed in chapters one and two, Foucault (1978: 93) analyses modern power as a mobile and constantly shifting set of force relations that emerge from every social interaction and thus provides thus pervade the social body. As he puts it himself: “power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault 1977: 26). Foucault (1978) therefore endeavours to offer a ‘micro-physics’ of modern power, and analysis that focuses not on the concentration of power at the hands of the sovereign or the state, but instead on how power flows through the capillaries of the social body. Foucault criticises previous analyses of power (primarily Marxist and Freudian) for assuming that power is fundamentally repressive, a belief her termed as the ‘repressive hypotheses’. Although Foucault does not deny that power sometimes functions repressively (as demonstrated in the ‘docile bodies’ account), he maintains that it is primarily productive and states that: “power produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (Foucault 1977: 194). It also produces subjects and notes that: “the individual is not the vis-a-vis of power; it is I believe, one of its prime effects” (Foucault 1980: 98). In essence according to Foucault, modern power subjects individuals, in both senses of the term: it simultaneously creates them as subjects by subjecting them to power. Foucault’s account of his subjection and his account of power more generally have been very fruitful, but also

very controversial, for feminists interested in analysing forms of domination (Diamond and Quinby, 1988).

As demonstrated in chapter one when introducing the aims of this study, it has come as no surprise that many feminists have drawn on Foucault's analysis of power. Indeed, Foucault's analysis of power has arguably been the most influential discussion of the topic over the last two decades, and even those theorists of power who are highly critical of his work acknowledge his influence. Moreover, Diamond and Quinby (1988) note how Foucault's focus on the local and capillary nature of modern power clearly resonates with feminist efforts to redefine the scope and bounds of political efforts that are summed up by the much used slogan suggesting that 'the personal is political' (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993, 2003; Butler 1990, 1993, 1997; Diamond and Quinby 1988; Fraser 1989; Heyes 2006; McNay 1992; McWhorter 1999; Sawicki 1991; Young 1990). This chapter will concentrate on highlighting a few central issues from this rich and diverse body of Foucauldian feminist scholarship.

In the case of this feminist project as demonstrated above a social constructionist approach lends itself well because they undermine the taken for granted naturalness of the body-a body which has served as a justification for 'natural' difference between the sexes and, thereby, the naturalization of a system of structured gender inequality (Budgeon, 2003)? In addition, deconstructing these dualisms will also effectively lead to an understanding of how representations work to naturalise that which is socially constructed and deeply political (ibid). Budgeon (2003) continues to suggest how this critical perspective has been applied to representations of the female body to show that the body that we experience and conceptualise is always mediated by constructs, associations and images which work to

enjoin a particular relation between the self and the body. Feminist critiques such as the one posed by Bordo (1993: 17) have argued that the impact of the cultural upon the material is such that:

> "... [for] women, associated with the body and largely confined to a life centred on the body (both 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".

Yet, if culture is gripping women's bodies then how tight is this grip and what does this mean for women's agency (Budgeon, 2003)? The chapter will therefore turn to explore the arguments put forward by Margaret Gullette (1988, 1997, and 2003) in order to position the argument that we are aged by culture rather than our bodies, and assess how tightly gripped these fingers of normality actually are.

Aging by culture: Older women, bodies, and agency

Since the publication of her first book in 1988, Margaret Gullette has been a vigorous exponent of the view that the imaginative novels we read about aging are an important cultural resource for making sense of the biological processes of growing older. Through the emphasis they choose to give to positive or to negative aspects of aging and old age, authors can encourage and support the ageist tendencies in western culture, or alternatively can celebrate creativity and renewal in later life and, in so doing, make a potentially age liberating contribution to the diminishment of prejudice against older people (Hepworth, 2005). In her latest book entitled *Aged by Culture*, (2004) Gullette follows flawlessly from her previous major books in its engagement with the widespread tendency in western culture to see the essential 'truth' of women's aging as a period of personal, social and

biological decline into death (Gullette 1988, 1997)[7]. Although this truth is apparently biomedical, its origin should not be traced back to the physical science of aging but to a tendency in western culture (including fiction, film, theatre and journalism) to interpret the various bodily changes that accompany chronological ageing as signs of a falling away from the ideal conditions of youth (Gullette, 2004). As discussed in chapter's one and two modern cultural categories, are essentially reducible to two: youth and age, hierarchically arranged, so that we are not judged by how old we are, but how young we are not (Woodward, 1991). As Furman (1999) shows in her account of older women and beauty shop culture, the old within dominant culture are a disruption to the visual field. Like the disabled or abnormal, they are evaluated in terms of derogation, as being less than. A range of negative meanings is read off from the aged body, which is then itself in turn taken to be the source of the problems of old age.

For Gullette (2004) interpreted in this way, middle age or, to use the more contemporary description 'midlife' becomes the point at which decline is perceived to begin; it is therefore hardly surprising that people are becoming increasingly conscious of midlife as a problematic life course stage, one characterised by increased anxiety over the prospect of diminishing looks, skills and social significance. In this sense, ageism has made it possible for society to invent the 'midlife crisis' because it only makes sense when later life is regarded as a period of loss and reduced life chances (ibid). Indeed, the key question for Gullette in Aged by Culture (2004) has been: why is it so hard for all of us to resist the

[7] In her classic account *Declining to Decline* (1997) Gulette argues that we are aged by culture rather than by our bodies. Culture is saturated with concepts of age and aging. Dominant culture teaches us to feel bad about aging and to start this early, reading our bodies anxiously for signs of decay and decline. We breathe in this toxicity daily. Narratives of decline have replaced all other forms of meaning and interpretation of the body in later years, so that other more humanistic or plural readings become impossible.

master narrative of decline? According to Hepworth (2005: 786) Gullette's sociologically informed analysis finds that:

> "The representation of decline is as an 'age-ideology', a kind of master narrative that is a persistent theme in many cultural products, including imaginative and feminist sociological writing. In her view 'decline' is a dominant ideology in the Marxist sense of producing alienation from the reality of aging, and it should be conceptualised as a construct. The dominant decline ideology shapes the European-American lifecourse in several pernicious ways, not least in encouraging older people to look for negative signs of ageing in their body rather than in their social context. As we grow older, she argues, we become more and more concerned with various body parts rather than with the cultural meanings assigned to those parts. The paradoxical result is that we internalise decline at the same time as we also look for positive aspects of ageing. Decline and progressive attitudes towards growing older are thus in a precarious state of cultural balance - and decline is at present winning".

Consequently, for Gullette (2004: 133) we should look less to the parts of our bodies and more towards the prevailing ideas and beliefs about aging for the source of our personal and social problems with growing older. The belief in decline is associated with negative age-stereotypes and the stigmatisation of ageing and old age. This is because the use of the concept '*decline*' has a collectivising effect: the "singular body-mind which each of us experiences as unique becomes just one among others". We blame the body for letting us down rather than the social forces that 'structure feelings of decline and that link age to the body in knotted chains of signifiers'[8]. In effect Hepworth (2005) suggests Gullette shows that our subjective experiences of aging and negative attitudes towards older people are

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[8]As it is understood today, the notion of the signifier is attributed to Ferdinand de Saussure, founder of linguistics and semiology and author of the influential *Course of General Linguistics* (1907/1960). For Saussure, the linguistic sign was a mental entity with two aspects: the signified (the "concept") and the signifier (the mental impression of the sound).

shaped by stories of aging that develop from the interplay between fictional and non-fictional accounts, as in novels, journalism and feminist sociology of aging. Hepworth continues to note how her first intention is to show both that old age is not a fixed bodily state but the product of a collection of cultural accounts, and that this information is organised in potential age narratives of a largely undesired future at one's older ages. Having alerted us to the pervasive nature of ageism, and so as not to leave readers in what Hepworth (2005: 786) calls a 'pessimistic limbo', Gullette's (2004: 17) her second intention is to demonstrate that the conventional narrative of 'time passing means inevitable decline' is not the only story to be told about the experience of growing older. There are, she argues, many other possible story forms. Decline may be deeply entrenched in common experience but there is considerable scope for an alternative 'progress narrative', which can be constructed from: "stories in which the implicit meanings of ageing run from survival, resilience, recovery and development, all the way up to collective resistance to decline forces" (2004: 17).

So far the chapter has demonstrated that older women are clearly concerned about their changed physical appearance and how to come to terms with the changing conditions of their identity and lived bodies. As detailed in chapter two and through the work of Gullette (1997, 2003) we can see how consumer culture promotes this concern and then exploits it; consumer culture is preoccupied with perfect bodies as presented by the glamorous images of advertising (Bordo, 1993). Consumer culture's emphasis on youthfulness and the body beautiful increasingly marginalizes the identity of older people in later life. Such images, therefore, do not help old people to see themselves as able actors within the world (ibid). One may feel oneself to be a different age than one looks, as though one is wearing a mask. Featherstone and Hepworth (1993) maintain that old age

can be a mask that conceals the essential identity of the person beneath. A person's appearance may change with age and one's identity may not. It is thus possible to be surprised by one's own image. As a counterpoint to the notion of the mask of old age, Biggs (1999) argues that people derive their sense of self-identity in old age from the achievements of the past and what remains to be accomplished in the future, rather than from a set of stereotypical images of old age. Unless they are ill, older women do not necessarily feel old because aging is an embodied and meaningful process. Here, Turner (1995) emphasises several key processes which work upon and within the body across time and space. The body has to be contexualized within its polymorphous state of positions within and between numbers of different discourses: the biological and the social, the collective and the individual and that of structure and agency. In the search for a stable identity not dominated by both professional and cultural discourses of power, older women must 'achieve' it through 'ontological reflexivity' (Giddens, 1991). As a point of departure for this section the chapter will therefore turn to briefly discuss Gidden's (1991) idea that the body is intrinsic to the reflexive project of self-identity. In doing so the chapter will demonstrate how the notion of biography is central for understanding older women's meanings and experiences of mind and body relevant to the lifecourse.

The aging female body as an 'autobiographical project'

Numerous sociologists have argued that the body is fundamental to identity within high modernity (Frank, 1991; Turner, 1991). This 'tightening relationship' of body and self (Shilling, 2003: 6) is associated with a range of phenomena, including the prevalence of health education messages portraying well-being as a personal responsibility (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1980), the centrality of appearance to a highly visual consumer culture (Featherstone, 1991) and the emergence of many new styles of body modification (Pitts,

2003). Here, Shilling (2003: 4–5) conceptualizes the body as a 'project' that is 'worked at and accomplished' as part of the construction of self-identity. The concept of a 'body as project' draws upon Giddens' (1991) discussion of the reflexive self of high modernity, an era that has witnessed a decline in the grand narratives of religion and politics that once provided meaning for people's lives. As detailed in chapter two we can see that the classical and modern traditions of sociology have little to tribute in understanding the body as a project since they are largely disembodied traditions which rely on evidence from the rational reflexive mind expressed through the spoken or written word. Consequently, in the mainstream classical and modern traditions there are no spatial and temporal concepts to allow analysis for such phenomena, much less sociology of the body. As discussed above at the beginning of this chapter post-sructuralism and post-modernism provide the theoretical means to deconstruct the massive changes in identities and ways of living later life that are taking place in the Western world. As Biggs (2005: 118) notes:

> "It is difficult, both globally and locally, not to be aware that the identities offered to older adults are becoming more diverse. A tendency to redescribe aging as a time of activity, social engagement, and productivity rather than of decline and dependency has influenced thinking, nationally, regionally, and globally. Stereotypes that may have held 20 years ago are becoming increasingly unstable and, like the statues of so many 20th-century dictators, are liable to imminent collapse".

According to Wilson (2009) in Western countries, today's older people are 'doing the new aging', that is to say living their daily lives in ways that older people did not live them in the past and constituting performative identities (Butler, 1999). However, for Biggs (2005) if a new world of aging is emerging, it is taking place in a climate of considerable cultural confusion. In essence Biggs (2005) has attempted to highlight how TV shows and magazines have reflected a changing yet dissociated attitude to contemporary encounters

with later life, fragmenting, as Gilleard and Higgs (2000) suggest, into multiple 'cultures of ageing'. Here, a common thread exists in an argument that contemporary identities are increasingly managed identities (Bauman, 1995; Giddens, 1991). In Giddens's theory of structuration the body is of central importance to his theorisation of the relationship between agency and social structures because the regularized control and reflexive monitoring of the body by the knowledgeable agent is a necessary condition for action (Budgeon, 2003). Because such changes have been accompanied by the increasing availability of technologies and techniques for rationalizing the body such as genetic engineering, reproductive technologies, plastic surgery and health and diet regimes, bodies not only become objects for human management and reconfiguration but are increasingly central to one's identity (ibid). Here, Gidden's (1991) goes as far as suggesting that our physical being has come to be understood as one of the last arenas that we are actually able to control. Like other aspects of identity the body is also the responsibility of the individual who may cultivate and actively restructure the corporeal through the pursuit of specific body regimes chosen from a diverse range of lifestyle options (Featherstone, 1991). The link made in Giddens' (1991) work between the self, the body and image is often identified as a central feature of the consumer culture said to be coterminous with High/postmodernity where experiences of the self and the body are mediated by the constant projection by the mass media of a proliferation of lifestyle images and options, all of which one may incorporate into one's own project (Budgeon, 2003). For those with sufficient resources, postmodern culture and advanced technology (techno-culture) will create an almost infinite range of possibilities for modifying the aging experience physically, psychosocially and culturally (Biggs, 2005). Interestingly, the somewhat hegonomic dominance of the bio-medical model goes beyond negative discourses pertaining to aging, and has sought to re-invent itself as the 'saviour' of biological aging

via the bio-technological advancements that foster re-construction of the 'body' to prevent, hide or halt the aging process (Biggs & Powell 2001). As Biggs and Powell (2001: 97) point out:

> "... established and emerging master narratives of biological decline on the one hand, and consumer agelessness on the other co-exist, talking to different populations and promoting contradictory, yet interrelated, narratives by which to age. They are contradictory in their relation to notions of autonomy and independence, and dependency on others, yet [they are] linked through the importance of techniques for maintenance, either via medicalized bodily control or through the adoption of 'golden-age' lifestyles".

As scientific and technological developments redefine and diminish the restraints of embodiment, the experience of aging will be shaped by freely chosen self-narratives and the freedom of the third age (55–75) will allow more opportunities (time and resources) for self-creativity in the construction of autobiographical narratives than any other time of life (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1991; Pitts, 2003). Gilleard and Higgs (2000) have gone as far to suggest that developments of new techniques such as botox injections, are driven by the commodification of cultural preferences originating in the'baby-boomer' generation (those born in the late 1940s). They suggest that this increasing uptake is likely to be particularly marked among women of this generation who grew up, unlike previous generations of women, "accustomed to cosmetics as an intrinsic part of their public persona' and to 'having their hair done' regularly" (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000: 68). In line with the postmodernist focus on consumption, they state that, if this cohort effect persists, "cosmetic surgery and related procedures will become part of everyday life, providing more and more people with the opportunity to mould their appearance to how they would like to be" (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000: 132). In other words they argue that aging in the

future will invite greater opportunities for self-expression, creative life styles, and psychological growth and for the radical reconstruction of identity, rather than a settling into memory and a search for biographical closure (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991).

Here, the notion of biography is central to understanding people's meanings and experiences of mind and body relevant to the lifecourse. As discussed in chapter two the lifecourse is a social construct that helps us to understand different classes of experience from early to later life (Cole 1992; Neurgarten 1974). As Biggs (1999) notes, individuals make their own biographical histories across the lifecourse and from the earliest age to old age, individuals create biographical narratives to create a sense of coherence and self-identity. As Cole and Neurgarten have noted the social worlds that individuals create are put together by categorised experiences. Categories take on an existence of their own for interpreting and constructing meaning. Both natural and social objects are interpretively constituted and as such are the evolving frameworks for making sense of experiences. The interior mental processes of individuals and their self-identities dynamically collide and interact with social forces to produce and reproduce the forms of experience (Biggs, 1999). Indeed, Biggs continues to note how this biographical work is a means of embracing this dynamic interplay of subjective and objective social processes. By tracing an individual's life career trajectory over the lifecourse, the concept of biography allows us to document the development of older women's unique configuration of personal powers, skills and emotional-cognitive capacities as they emerge out of the interplay of social involvements and constraints. This is because biography refers to the comparative development of variable powers between people, while tracing specific individual's experiential trajectories of across the lifecourse and the unique social configurations in which they are enmeshed (ibid). Indeed, the use of biography will be further discussed in the following

chapter, but for now the chapter will regain the discussion concerning Gidden's (1991) idea of the body as a 'project' in order to show how his analysis of the body and self is open to three main criticisms: "the conceptualization of the mind and body relationship as a binary; a privileging of mind over body; and blindness to the gendered nature of this binary" (Budgeon, 2003: 37).

According to Shilling and Mellor (1996: 2) the mind/body dualism places a significant limit on understanding: "how people's experiences of, and responses to, social structures are shaped by their sensory and sensual selves". As demonstrated in chapter two it was argued that this binary limits the possibility of a deeper consideration of how it is that the body is implicated in the formation of identity. Budgeon (2003: 37) argues that in Giddens's analysis people are" "essentially comprised as minds because reflexivity is privileged as the primary mode of engagement with the world". Through this engagement with the choices and options on offer, Budgeon (2003: 37) continues to suggest that: "the body becomes the material upon which the mind acts and, by effectively placing the body 'outside' the actor, the actor becomes fundamentally a thinking and choosing agent but not a feeling and being agent". This overemphasis on processes of reflexivity produces according to Shilling and Mellor (1996: 4), and Budgeon (2003: 37) a social actor: "whose mind takes over the body, a privileging that leads to a view of the social actor as disembodied" The individual is a reflexive self but not an embodied self, a disembodied consciousness (Turner, 1992). The second point made by Budgeon was that Gidden's (1991) can also be accused of not addressing the specificity of the relationship between the body and gender; acknowledge that the mind/body relation is inextricably gendered; or recognize that positing opportunities for freeing the body from the constraints of modernity has gendered implications. As demonstrated in chapter two and also in this

chapter women, according to Bordo (1993: 250) have always been more embodied than men because of the association of the feminine with the body, have long been aware of the form and appearance of their bodies and the extent to which they are responsible for creating that surface in accordance with cultural ideals and images: "whose content is far from arbitrary, but is instead suffused with the dominance of gendered, racial, class, and other cultural iconography". In other words while Gidden's (1991) efforts to transform the body may well be understood as part of an autobiographical project, various writers have warned against overemphasizing the individual's capacity for bodily self-narration and self-creation. As Pitts (2003: 34) contends: "self-invention is an ideology that informs body projects as much as it is a practice that constitutes them". In this sense, while the production of body and self may appear to be a uniquely individual endeavour; it is an endeavour that is located within a specific cultural and historical context and is both produced and limited by existing power relations. Furthermore, at the same time that various groups may be more or less able to cultivate the body as a means of self-expression, material conditions produce different bodily dispositions (ibid). Such arguments would suggest, then, that while individuals may understand the body as a project, social differences make some people both more inclined and better equipped to invest in the physical markers of identity.

As discussed above Foucault denies unitary constructs and the search for internal consistency and argues for the need to adopt a de-centred approach to both individual identity and social formations. Thus, according to McNay (1992) Foucault argues that any given individual and any particular society can contain multiple, shifting, and often self-contradictory identities. There are as Foucault (1983) argues 'many ways of being' and for McNay (1992) it is this recognition of the 'many ways of being' that renders Foucault

more useful than Gidden's (1991) in understanding older women's recreation of the self through weight-loss dieting practices. The next section of this chapter aims to explore how the older female uses her body to recreate herself (as a work of art) through weight-loss dieting and will trace Foucault's early works on the production of docile subjects and his later writing on the active self as elaborated in volumes two and three of *The History of Sexuality* (the use of pleasure and care of the self). However, as a point of departure the chapter will firstly begin by briefly introducing the up and coming debates in and around the perceived 'obesity crisis' that we are now witnessing in the UK. In particular this section of the chapter aims to explore the enterprising act of socially constructing 'fatness', or 'overweight' and 'obesity', as an individual and collective problem. Here, the chapter recognises that this process is complex and hence will draw liberally on an eclectic range of scholarship to illuminate how fatness can be made into a correctable health problem. In doing so, this will underpin the following sections of this chapter.

Exploring the rising obesity rates

According to The World Health Organisation (WHO, 1998) we are reportedly witnessing an 'obesity epidemic', with most adults and growing numbers of children in developed nations clinically defined as overweight or obese (Foresight, 2007, House of Commons Health Committee, 2004; National Audit Office, 2001). In response Monaghan et al (2010: 38) have identified how a confluence of interest groups is alerting the public to this putative crisis, expounding reasons for it and prescribing various solutions to address it. The main focus of their article was to direct the reader towards the fact that rather than accepting the obesity epidemic as a taken-for granted trend we should (in this case in the Foucauldian tradition) seek to identify and typify those who actively hold the power to define and socially construct female fatness as a correctable health problem. Following the

guidance of these authors and other authors such as Campos (2004), Gard and Wright (2005), Murray (2008), and Oliver (2006), the chapter will pull together a range of theoretical concepts and empirical material into a classificatory typology in order to begin to illuminate and critique the claims about an 'obesity epidemic' and uncover how various agents and agencies are supposed to go about remedying this in order to underpin the role of weight-loss dieting organisations.

The basic message that one starts with in this unfolding scholarship is that the 'war on obesity' cannot be and should not be taken at face value (Monaghan et al, 2010). For example, some contributors maintain that the science 'supporting' anti-obesity interventions is highly uncertain, if not wrong (Campos, 2004), and: "has more to do with preconceived moral and ideological beliefs about fatness than a sober assessment of existing evidence" (Gard and Wright, 2005: 3). This thesis will also follow this lead when challenging: "obesity discourse', that is, medicalized thought, talk and action that takes 'weight' as 'a primary determinant' of health, wellbeing and moral worth" (Evans et al., 2008: 13). The chapter will now turn to critically explore how 'weight' is seen as 'a primary determinant' of health, wellbeing and moral worth (Evans et al, 2008), and will draw upon the Foucauldian contribution to concerns surrounding the 'evil of fat'.

Learning from Foucault when exploring the 'war on obesity'

For many in the developed world it is an accepted 'truth' that we are almost all too fat and that losing weight will, with the exception of the anorexic, ill, or permanently thin individuals have positive health consequences (Heyes, 2006). The latest Health Survey for England (2011) (HSE) data shows us that nearly 1 in 4 adults, and over 1 in 10 children aged 2-10, are defined as obese. In 2007, the Government-commissioned *Foresight Report*

predicted that if no action was taken, 60 percent of men, 50 percent of women, and 25 percent of children would be obese by 2050. Here, social constructionist approaches to social problems are useful when exploring 'claims-making', and for observing who defines problems and the nature of their claims (Rubington and Weinberg, 2003). This focus has antecedents in Becker's (1963: 162) definition of deviance as 'publicly labelled wrongdoing'. He explains:

> 'Before any act can be viewed as deviant, and before any class of people can be labelled and treated as outsiders for committing the act, someone must have made the rule which defines the act as deviant".

Indeed, there is no one single identifiable individual who originally defined fatness as deviant, and there is a long history of anti-fat attitudes in the West (Stearns, 1997). Nevertheless Becker's work sensitises us to the importance of social labelling and reaction in the ongoing (re)creation of deviance and this thesis views his writing as a useful starting point for capturing the way that obesity has been actively constructed in recent years as a global medico-moral problem (WHO, 1998). As Becker (1963) suggests, the creation and maintenance of any deviant category is the result of enterprise, or purposeful endeavour by certain groups. And in his later work Becker (1967: 241) suggested that there are: "hierarchies of credibility where those at the top of status hierarchies have greater legitimacy and authority when imposing their definitions". Here, creators engage in an ostensibly scientifically neutral practice that is central to the social construction of 'the obesity epidemic' as a massive public health problem (Lupton, 1997b). This practice, formulated within scientific discourses such as epidemiology and public health, operates at a macro-social, even global, level (e.g. WHO, 1998) while drawing upon the everyday Western cultural fear of fatness (Campos, 2004). In other words creators actively define

and redefine the benchmarks of 'excess' weight, which leads to obesity being constructed as a 'chronic disease' that has reached 'crisis' proportions. Using Becker's (1963, 1967) terms, these rule entrepreneurs occupy high positions on 'hierarchies of credibility' and are afforded greater media access when acting as claims-makers. As Monaghan et al (2010) note these creators are involved primarily in the discovery stage of the so called epidemic, and are officially credited 'experts' who, as explained by Lupton (1997a : 10) are: "central to governmentality' and 'attempts [to] construct a privileged type of subject through the web of expert judgements surrounding the body". Lupton continues to argue these accredited experts have become concerned with 'the measuring of populations' (1997a: 10), whereby pathologising and normalising constructions are based upon retrospective evaluations and graphic representations of epidemiological data mainly generated from the 1980s onwards (Oliver, 2006). The chapter will therefore turn to draw on Foucault's (1980) work on public health in order to explore how these disciplinary practices have been defined by mechanisms for the measurement of the population.

Throughout the 20th century, on both sides of the Atlantic, specific actors and organizations have been instrumental in the creation of weight tables that gage a standardized range within which each individual must fall into order for her to be healthy. Standardized weight tables are artefacts of the post-war US Metropolitan Life Insurance Company that were never based on comprehensive statistical information (Gaesser, 2002). Obesity is statistically determined and diagnosed when a person's body mass index (BMI) exceeds 30. BMI is calculated by dividing weight in kilograms by height in meters squared. Despite a recognition of its limitations amongst experts (it does not actually measure body fat), the BMI has gained credence in the UK, and when a person's BMI is calculated as being high (over 25) they are often medically advised to embark on a weight-

loss diet in order to solve the health problems associated with weight gain such as type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol, and heart disease. According to Monaghan et al (2010) the obesity crisis has been linked to obesogenic environments and societal trends that encourage overeating and little physical activity. In response Petersen and Lupton (1996), and Lupton (1997a) have underscored the ways in which 'good citizens' are obliged to work on their bodies and health as a moral imperative. The implication of someone not 'choosing health' is to be positioned as irresponsible and irrational, somebody who unnecessarily risks their health and risks burdening others. Here the streamlined body is an index of self, health and moral worth and the government have urged individuals to change their lifestyle in order to tackle obesity. The White Paper *Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our Strategy for Public Health in England* (2011) sets out how the Government plans to motivate people to become 'good citizens' in order to improve public health. The Department of Health will publish a follow-on document setting out how obesity will be tackled in the new public health and NHS systems, along with the role that all partners can play. Further initiatives include screening programmes, ranging from the weighing of children in school and banning the advertising of junk food to children through to pharmaceutical and surgical interventions (House of Commons Health Committee, 2004; NAO, 2001; Ofcom, 2006). However, Foucauldian informed writings heavily critique obesity discourse. For example, a study conducted by Evans et al (2008) drew upon Foucauldian informed writings in order to critique obesity discourse, using data from schools and young women. Drawing from ideas such as bio-power which was discussed in chapter two and which reflected the governance and regulation of bodies Rich et al (2010) explained how obesity discourse has taken a form of what they term as 'surveillance assemblage'. For example, screening programmes firmly located with the community such as weighing children, and banning the advertising of junk food to children function to

identify, probe and monitor disease (in this case obesity) and its manifestation within the reaches of the community. In other words the government are taking strides to set up institutions not only to pathologise local populations but also as a form of social control with regards to diet. Following Nettleton (1995: 236) it is therefore possible to argue that 'as surveillance extended into the community the emphasis began to shift from those who were ill" (ie medically diagnosed as being obese) "to those who were potentially ill" (ie self survey/police themselves to prevent the threat of obesity). Here, Nettleton's (1995) genealogical study is useful for illuminating how health professionals operate within discourses that define acceptable standards of 'lifestyles' through a 'therapeutic gaze' which as Porter (1996: 68) claims "constitutes people as psycho-social beings and involves observation, interpretation and redefinition of their behaviour". Bringing Nettleton's (1995) dentistry study into the equation it is possible to see how professional practices attributed to tackling obesity can be used to elicit information and profiles about populations. For example, Evans et al (2008) have argued that the obesity issue could well start to elide into the well worn territory of the 'underclass' thesis whereby through the screening of children professionals can become involved in social control making judgements about homes and family behaviour attributed to diet and exercise. Such professional practices can therefore be seen as being involved in the social as well as health surveillance, and the creation of more specific moral panics around 'classed' demographics of fatness (location, social background), and concerns about childhood obesity (which has also become a vehicle for blaming working-class mothers). Evans et al continue to argue that it will therefore come as no sociological surprise that the biggest losers in this debacle will inevitably be people who are already socially marginalized, subordinated and least able to resist oppressive body norms, multiple entrepreneurial interests and practices that ostensibly give people the 'choice' of living better lives. To

further exemplify this point some people for reasons such as (increased body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, risky/ineffective weight-loss practices, stigma and size discrimination), are encouraged by professionals to undergo extreme surgical interventions which aim to limit the body's ability to consume and absorb food through the reduction of stomach capacity and/or intestinal length (Throsby, 2008). In 2008 Karen Throsby published *Happy Re-birthday: Weight Loss Surgery and the 'New Me"* in order to highlight the use of surgical interventions which are generally regarded as a treatment of last resort for those experiencing significant and intractable obesity, and one which carries significant risks.

From these studies we can therefore see how a matrix of interactions, measurements and interventionist approaches, such as technologies or normalising/regulating 'biopedagogies' (Wright, 2009) are employed by diverse agencies and individuals, in myriad sites, with latent and unintended consequences, such as: increased body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, risky/ineffective weight-loss practices, stigma and size discrimination. These occur despite the professed manifest functions and perhaps sincere intentions of agents and agencies seeking to improve schoolchildren's health, for example. For Evans et al. (2008: 13), such processes should not be seen as the product of "conspiracy on the part of science or expression of political mischief or health educators' malicious intent' but rather larger social historical processes". For example, the changes in conceptions of health in the 20th century, which has led to the regulation of populations as described in chapter two. The chapter will therefore turn to explore a question of blame for the 'obesity crises' in some detail in order to underpin Foucault's notion of power/knowledge.

A question of blame

As discussed above it is possible to see that people who transgress presentational bodily norms are 'cultural criminals', who are discredited not because they have broken a formal law, but because they have disregarded so flagrantly people's sense of what is aesthetically and stylistically natural, 'normal and acceptable' (Shilling, 2005). According to Saguy and Almeling (2005) the obesity epidemic may be conceptualized as a moral panic comprising sensationalist media claims that crystallize widespread fears and anxieties (e.g. pertaining to gender roles, the family, class, ethnicity). Using the idea of disproportionality, these authors observed that this panic comprised of over exaggerated media portrayals of obese people as 'folk devils' who putatively violate social norms and values. What they term 'fat panic' is a questionable social process, with their critical analysis challenging the usual reductionist concerns of biomedicine and epidemiology (ibid). However, Monaghan et al (2010) recognise that there are possible weaknesses with aspects of moral panic theory, and some critical weight studies that adopt the conspiratorial aspect of this concept rather too easily. For example, the influence of the media in determining social problems can equally be overemphasised, and neglectful of the diversity of audiences and audience reception, thereby playing down human agency and self-reflection. Additionally, more structural theories of 'law and order' moral panics-defined as state-managed responses to 'ideological crises' in late capitalism, which are directed at subordinate social groups (Hall et al, 1978) may need to be modified when applied to the obesity issue (Monaghan et al, 2010). While there are observable attempts to render fatness problematic in certain social groupings in the UK (ie obese mothers giving birth to big babies, regional and class diets, etc.), obesity epidemic claims are inclusive insofar as they attempt to constitute literally millions of people as to use Cohen's (2002 [1972]) phrase 'nameless folk devils'. As such, post-structuralist or Foucauldian scholarship remains useful here when exploring

health and the body, in order to recognise that stages of health epidemics are neither completely predetermined nor unidirectional. For instance, they can be amplified and moralised about prior to their 'discovery' by experts, and can also be rediscovered or even de-legitimised (Evans et al, 2008).

So far the above processes in this chapter have helped to build the idea that we are witnessing an 'obesity epidemic'. However, the ultimate arbiter of what constitutes a public health crisis comes from the political sphere (Evans, 2006). Government concern signals not only that there is 'official' sanctioning of a problem but also that explanation must be aired and rehearsed, and solutions and recommendations formulated (Monaghan et al, 2010). These authors continue to suggest that the government, act as a central bank of symbolic capital, that constructs weight/fat as a correctable health problem. As O'Farrell (2005) notes this is achieved through what Foucault describes as power/knowledge, whereby mechanisms of power produce different kinds of knowledge which collate information on people's activities and existence. Here, the government has drawn together what is known about the 'obesity epidemic' and have speculated about what should be done about it. Government practices are varied, though the commissioning of a taskforce and public report that seeks to 'take stock' of (later inventory stage), and hopefully help begin to 'tackle' (initial reaction stage), the issue is a standard response (House of Commons Health Committee, 2004). As already demonstrated school children are often selected for special attention, with subsequently enforced/administered suggestions that they should have their BMI periodically measured in order to attempt to remedy the possibility of becoming obese from an early age (Evans et al, 2008). Consequently various interest groups "clamour for a lucrative and legitimating slice of the government's cake amidst the broader commodification and inventory of health, bodies and weight"

(Monaghan et al, 2010: 54). These groups include the fast-food, diet and fitness industries alongside the scientific/medical community (ibid). For obvious reasons, there are many criticisms made with regards to these various interest groups, particularly from the neo-Marxian perspective that illuminate why individuals/organisations are able to profit at other people's expense (Scambler, 2009). We shall come back to explore the points made by Scambler with regards to the profiteering of the weight-loss industry and 'false consciousness' as the chapter progresses, but for now the point to be made here is that within the idiom of neoliberal governmentality, they must strike a balance between upholding 'hyper-consumption' within the capitalist economy with their need to work together with its citizens to produce a nation of healthy and disciplined bodies (Petersen and Lupton, 1996). An example of this legitimation problem can be found in the House of Commons Health Committee Report: *Obesity* (House of Commons Health Committee, 2004: 1, cited in Monaghan et al, 2010: 55), which begins:

> "With quite astonishing rapidity, an epidemic of obesity has swept over England. . . . Around two-thirds of the population are now overweight or obese. On present trends, obesity will soon surpass smoking as the greatest cause of premature loss of life. It will bring levels of sickness that will put enormous strains on the health service, perhaps even making a publicly funded health service unsustainable.

As Monaghan et al (2010: 56) point out while this passage "clearly legitimates the notion of an 'obesity epidemic' and its putative seriousness and scale, it also highlights its consequences for the UK's publicly funded health service". These authors have continued to analyse the report findings and have cited how it provides a more detailed 'evidence' (an inventory) of the scientific 'facts' behind obesity, and alleged health implications, while seeking to explore the competing explanations for its rise, as well as putting forward initial solutions and policy prescriptions. Interestingly, Monaghan et al (2010: 56)

continued to note that while obesity is constructed as a social issue, involving the food industry (i.e. the consumption of foods high in fat and sugar), they accept that there is a degree to which obesity is a personal responsibility of individuals[9]. In other words it is difficult for the government to intervene as they risk criticism for operating a 'nanny-state' (ibid). Consequently, the state should not impede business (i.e. fast-food corporations) and 'good citizens' should keep consuming food, albeit in a disciplined and responsible manner (Lupton, 1997a). In response the government as 'the experts' have amplified and moralised the urgency for public health to improve population nutritional status is of vital importance, given the central role that nutrition plays in health, and chronic disease and obesity prevention (Nishida et al, 2004). The chapter will therefore continue to explore obesity in light of it being blamed on the individual. In doing so, this will link into the next section of the chapter which explores food as a social process, and as communication.

Obesity is the responsibility of the individual: True or false?

According to Warin et al (2007: 98) in most current approaches "food, bodies and eating are disembodied and disengaged from the social contexts in which people live their lives". Crotty (1993: 109) argues that the act of swallowing: "divides nutrition's "two cultures", the post swallowing world of biology, physiology, biochemistry and pathology, and the pre-swallowing domain of behaviour, culture, society and experience". Here Crotty attempts to demonstrate how nutrition gives limited attention to the pre-swallowing, or the social nature of food and eating. Baranowski et al (1999) argue that nutrition, as a scientific discipline that studies nutrient requirements for the optimal functioning of the body, regards food and eating as the means by which nutrients are delivered to the

[9]Morgan Spurlock's (2004) film Supersize Me highlighted the significance of his weight gain and failing health on an all-McDonalds diet. Here, Spurlock shows how all of the complex economic, ethical, aesthetic, environmental, and health-related claims could be reduced to the number on the scale, which is in turn a synecdoche for a body's success or failure.

biological system. The various fields that address the application of nutrition science, such as public health nutrition, home economics and dietetics, are concerned with eating behaviour, but remain heavily preoccupied with its impact on nutrition. For example, nutrition counsellors aim to modify their clients' eating behaviours as a means for improving nutrient intakes. Similar to theoretical approaches that underlie nutrition counselling, dietary change interventions for populations have been founded on social-psychological theories for understanding individual dietary behaviour (ibid). In effect these theories are used to explain individual food choices and other dietary behaviours. According to Murcott (1995) in behavioural models the individual is seen as rationally deciding her fate in response to multiple influences acting upon her. Murcott continues to suggest that the most important limitation of studying eating strictly as a behaviour under the control of an individual, is that it seriously overstates the extent to which rational choice steers what people choose to eat, and underestimates the extent to which eating is embedded in the flow of day-to-day life. When Raymond Williams (1958: 4) identified culture as ordinary, he was illuminating the potentially transparent nature of those "everyday elements that form the very backbone of our existence". One example of this taken for granted culture of everyday life is food, which while consumed on a daily basis, as discussed is often considered as mere sustenance it is also more than just a means of survival. It permeates all other aspects of our lives from the most intimate to the most professional practices. It also is a key factor in how we view ourselves and others, thus it is at the centre of social and political issues, and is a mainstay of popular media (Cramer et al 2011). Indeed, to place food in a social context resonates with Bourdieu's (1979, 1984) study of food and social class whereby he argued that food and eating is much more than a process of bodily nourishment; it is an elaborate performance of gender, social class and identity. For Bourdieu (1977: 72) this performance is central to the habitus, a concept

which encompasses the implicit practices and routines that structure the logic of everyday life. As Deborah Lupton (1996b) notes when exploring the habitus of food and eating, any discussion of food and bodies in the context of families must incorporate an analysis of the meanings around motherhood and femininity, for in western societies, the purchase and preparation of food for the family is the major responsibility of women. In addition, Bordo's (1993) literature on the relationships between women, weight and food also alerts us to the gendered meanings and practices that women give to food and eating. For example, feminist writers have argued that many women's struggles with food and body size are complicated by the demands of marriage and motherhood (Charles and Kerr, 1988; DeVault 1991). That is, while women are expected to provide nutritious and appetising meals for their families, at the same time they feel obliged to forgo this food (Inness 2001). It can therefore be said that these taken-for-granted practices are learnt and embodied through the internalisation and reproduction of *habitus* (Lupton, 1996). In addition to discussing food in a social context the chapter will now turn to explore food as a means of communication.

Food as communication

In their recent book entitled *Food as Communication,Communication as Food* Cramer, Greene and Walters (2011) suggest that over the last few decades we have witnessed a huge rise in food focused consumption, media, and culture, such that there has been what they label as a food explosion. It appears as if food and the discourses surrounding it are everywhere from the TV chef Jamie Oliver's attempts to transform British school meals, to adverts about urban gardening, the purchasing of organic produce at local farmers markets, and TV programmes and documentaries that promote weight loss. In effect we are

witnessing a more heightened awareness of food's social significance within contemporary society and culture. In addition Roland Barthes (2008: 29) has written how food is also:

> "A system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior. Information about food must be gathered wherever it can be found: by direct observation in the economy, in techniques, usages and advertising; and by indirect observation in the mental life of a given society".

Broadly defined, communication is the process by which we understand the world and our attempts to convey that understanding to others through both verbal and nonverbal language. In this way, we can view food as a form of communication because it is a nonverbal means by which we share meanings with others (Cramer et al, 2011). Paralleling Roland Barthes, scholars such as Levis Strauss (1983) and Mary Douglas have declared that we can "view food as adhering to the same practices as language because food is a code that can be seen to express patterns about social relationships" (cited in Counihan and Van Esterik, 2008:44). Indeed, Spurlock (2009, cited in Cramer et al, 2011:10) argues that because of their ability to signify, mediate, contest, and represent nature and culture, foodways are deeply rhetorical and performative" According to Rothenbuhler (1998: 27) the primary reason that we should view food as a form of communication is because it is directly linked to both ritual and culture, where "ritual is defined as "the voluntary performance of appropriately patterned behaviour to symbolically effect or participate in the serious life". Nowhere can this be viewed more closely than in rituals involving food (ibid). Rothenbuhler continues to note that it is beyond mere sustenance that we centre our most important life events such as birthdays, weddings, funerals, christenings, and holidays on buying, preparing, cooking, and eating food. Within ritual contexts, food often acts symbolically by representing or standing in for expressions such as life, love, grief, or happiness. Even within our daily experiences, the ways that we eat and dine with others

can be categorized as ritualistic because they involve repetition, expected behaviours, and roles for both the participants and the food (ibid). Therefore, we can see that if food is used ritually, it also can be viewed as a form of culture even in its ordinary state. Once again following Williams (1958) work, if we view food as a common aspect of our daily lives, and we see culture as ordinary, then food is a means by which we create cultures. In *Food is Culture*, Massimo Montanari (2006) highlights this perspective by claiming that food is culture when it is produced, prepared, and eaten. In other words throughout every step of our encounters with food, we shape it in one way or another whether it is through selections of certain types of foods versus others, cooking processes, and/or the ways in which we consume it (ibid). Cramer et al (2011) also assert that through its absences and presences in everyday life, food ways highlight the moral, aesthetic, and ethical concerns of a given cultural setting. Here, food acts as a conveyor of culture because we use it as a means of communication (ibid). In his introductory work entitled *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society,* Carey (1992: 23) asserts that "communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed". If we take on board Carey's assertions then it is possible to argue that food is one of the most readily available symbols that we have at our disposal, which can be viewed from both the perspectives of communication and culture. In other words, the important thing to note here is that we often use food to communicate with others and as a means of demonstrating personal identity, group affiliation and disassociation, and other social categories, such as gender, 'race', age, and socioeconomic class (ibid). In this sense Counihan (1999:6) views food "as a product and mirror of the organization of society..., a prism that absorbs and reflects a host of cultural phenomena". The chapter will therefore turn to discuss more fully how food functions symbolically as a communicative practice by which we create, manage, and share meanings with others.

Using food to construct personal identities

According to Brillat-Savarin (2000) in *The Physiology of Taste* one of the most common ways that we utilize food is in the construction of our personal identities. In other words, we regularly define who we are according to both the foods that we eat and those that we refrain from consuming. For example, a person may identify as a vegan, a carnivore, an omnivore, or simply just as a fashionable foodie. Brillat-Savarin continues to argue that we also have a direct, visceral connection to food, and it is often linked to emotion and memory or serves as a source of comfort for some people. In addition, besides our individual connections to food, we also utilise it as a means of communicating our identities to others through the process of buying, preparation, and eating. This relationship is situational because we may use food or associated behaviours in different ways depending upon the social situations in which we find ourselves (ibid). For example, consider how a person might present his or her identity on a first date, a business luncheon, or at a family gathering. This person may purchase certain foods rather than others in order to reflect a class status or position of authority. Moreover, a person may also abstain from eating too much or may utilise formalised etiquette on the date and at the luncheon, whereas at the family gathering, she or he may not feel the need to prescribe to the rules of etiquette at all (Brillat-Savarin, 2000). According to Cramer et al (2007) as well as constituting our own identities, we use food as a means of identifying with others. Foods connect people, both physically and symbolically, when we sit down to dine together. In addition we also identify with others based upon the types of food that we eat such that we may feel a common bond with people who have similar eating habits to our own. For example, taking on board a previous example made, a person may identify herself as eating meat, being a vegetarian, or being on a certain type of diet, thus associating with people who share the same interests and/or views about food consumption (ibid).

The important point to be made here is that it is through our processes of sharing or discussing food that we can view it as a form of Foucauldian discourse. Many of our notions about food, and its relationship to the natural world are conveyed and learned through the sharing of narratives and stories (Counihan & Van Esterik, 2008). In this sense, we could argue that food serves as a socialising mechanism by which we come to understand our cultures, our societies, and the groups to which we belong/don't belong. While this feature occurs on a small scale, discourses about food are also prevalent within larger social structures such as government, media, and popular culture (ibid). According to Fiske (1997) cited in (Cramer et al, 2007) at times these discourses come into conflict with each other because they offer countless perspectives about food and issues related to it. As discourses, all of these dialogues about food, and its associated practices, operate as sites of struggle with significant social and political implications. It is important to note that while we consider politics as having an institutionalised centre that expounds power, our everyday practices also have political dimensions (ibid). In other words, we need to conceptualise politics as located beyond the realms of political campaigns and voting. As Cooks (2009: 108) argues in *You are What You (Don't) Eat? Food, Identity, and Resistance*:

> "For those of us interested in embracing our identities as political and in seeking openings in the tactical moments and performances of everyday life, eating and cooking offer important sites of preservation and imagination".

Cramer et al (2007) continue to note that political struggles also occur over how we make sense of our everyday experiences by using various discourses to describe them. Within contemporary society, much of the political work that occurs takes place in the practices of our daily lives such as discourses about our relationships with food. For example, in

Unhappy Meals, Pollan (2007: 38) argues that our relationship to food is simple because all we really need to do is "eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants and we will be healthy". What we see here is more or less a short answer to a supposedly complicated and confusing question of the fast food industry as being the root of all evil[10], and what we as humans should eat in order to be maximally healthy (ibid). So far this section of the chapter has shown how the public has been alerted to this reputed crisis and has briefly touched upon how scientists produce facts, while governments search for relevant policy prescriptions to address the problem of obesity. Connecting back to the sociology of the body, this is in a society where the body is often a 'passport' to the good life and the consequences of (assumed) bodily neglect is a lowering of one's acceptability as a person (Featherstone, 1991: 186). So far this chapter has indicated how weight is currently a prevalent area of investigation in academic work, government policies (the 'war on obesity' for example) and is most concentrated around an imperative to achieve a body which is healthy (Sedgwick, 1994) and not 'fat' (Bordo, 2003). Here, dieting as Bordo (2003: 202) suggests: "is the most popular form of correction". As briefly described in chapter one Bordo and others have pointed to the normalisation of dieting in everyday Western cultures, and statistics show that a staggering 80 per cent of women in the UK are dieting at any given moment (Orbach, 1993). Within this context, a number of commercial dieting organisations such as Weight Watchers and Slimming World operate in order to produce commodities that are cleverly marketed and sold to women as either solutions or preventative measures in order to remedy this bodily stigma or neglect. Here, these organisations conceptualised the goal of weight loss that they promoted in the following

[10] The prevalence of obesity and obesity related diseases has increased rapidly in the U.K. since the mid 1970s. At the same time, the number of fast food restaurants more than doubled over the same time period, while the number of other restaurants grew at a much slower pace. In the public debate over obesity it is often assumed that the widespread availability of fast food restaurants is an important determinant of the dramatic increases in obesity rates.

two ways: as a means of improving health, and as a strategy for increasing physical attractiveness. Such constructions are evident in both company's literature, which stress the benefits of 'a healthier way of living' and of 'a new shape'. The chapter will therefore turn to critically discuss these two conceptualisations. As detailed in chapter one Following Heyes (2006) the existing critical accounts of dieting typically rely on the central explanatory concepts of either 'false consciousness' or 'docile bodies'. This section of the chapter will therefore begin by discussing the former explanatory concept of false consciousness and will provide examples of the ways in which weight comes to be a stand-in for health and appearance. The chapter will then progress to discuss how feminists have utilised Foucault's notion of 'docile bodies'. In doing so the chapter will also further highlight the omission of older women from this academic literature on female embodiment.

Weight-loss and 'false consciousnesses

So far in this chapter it has been ascertained that there is a standardised range within which each individual's weight must fall in order for her to be healthy. This 'rationalized' approach is currently statistically determined through standardized weight tables and despite a recognition of their limits among experts (e.g. that BMI does not actually measure body fat), the BMI gained credence as an international weight comparison measure in the 1980s and 1990s when obesity began to be seen as a global epidemic (WHO, 1998). In effect according to the US National Institute of Health (1998) because of the BMI threshold over 30 million Americans suddenly became overweight without actually gaining any weight (Oliver, 2006: 22). In other words medicalised thought, talk and action took weight as: "a primary determinant of health, well being and moral worth" (Evans et al, 2008: 13). Building on these ideas Heyes (2006) argues that weight itself is a

stand-in for health, with the corollary false beliefs that losing weight automatically solves health problems and that gaining weight (or being heavier than a stipulated maximum all along) automatically creates them. This is well illustrated by the rise of popular 'talk shows', 'reality TV' and a plethora of 'self-improvement' programmes, with the media constituting a new site for medical 'morality tales (Monaghan et al, 2010). For example, one weight-loss TV show called *The Biggest Loser* describes slimming as being 'the rational choice' for people who are subordinated on embodied hierarchies, that is, 'deviant fatties' who reportedly became obese through gluttony and sloth. In another example, Giles (2003), explored narratives of obesity on an episode of the BBC talk show Kilroy entitled '*My Obesity is Ruining My Health*' and argues that, despite examples of resistance by some of its 'overweight' audience members (i.e. that, even those who are 'obese', body mass index over 30 can trace many health problems which may correlate with high weight, to such causative links as lack of exercise, a high sugar diet, and so on). Conversely, one can be fit, healthy, and heavy, yet, overall the programme format stressed individualist and self-inflicted accounts. A similar format is adopted in the self-improvement Channel 4 show *Supersize versus Superskinny* where an individual's 'poor diet and bad lifestyle' (to quote the programme's website) are closely scrutinised and moralised over (including displaying their weekly food intake in a large tube and examining their unhealthy and obese or underweight bodies. Here, these participants are presented with graphic illustrations of some of the health implications such as various cancers, high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol, associated with being over/underweight. The implication of someone not choosing health as indicated above is to be positioned as irresponsible and irrational, somebody who unnecessarily risks their health and risks burdening others (Lupton, 1997a). Following a regime of self-administered body work in the form of monitoring ones nutrition and exercise the new lighter or heavier body is

revealed in a flurry of emotional self congratulation and moral worth. So far this chapter has staged an argument around the corollary false beliefs that losing weight automatically solves health problems and that gaining weight (or being heavier than a stipulated maximum all along) automatically creates them. In addition to this argument Heyes (2006: 127) also suggests that a further notion of false consciousness also rests upon the assumption that women diet because they have been: "ideologically duped by an oppressive set of beauty ideals: being thin will make us (hetero) sexually desirable, aesthetically pleasing to ourselves and others, and better able to build an image that is appropriately feminine". Here, Foucauldian feminists have begun to provide theoretical accounts of the ways in which women's bodies are 'duped by an oppressive set' of gendered ways of performing identities (McNay, 1992; Sawicki, 1991; Young, 1990). According to Young (1990) women learn as young children how to control their bodies in distinctly feminine ways. Not only do women learn to 'throw like a girl', they also learn to sit, stand, walk, hold their heads, gesture, carry objects, and comport themselves to be a girl. Young girls' bodies are socialized into moving in a feminine and thus a more constrained manner than their male counterparts (ibid). Young (1990:154) argues that: *"the more a girl assumes her status as feminine the more she takes herself to be fragile and immobile and the more she actively enacts her own body inhibition". Moreover, a young* woman learns to experience her body as an object, a thing, and Young (1990: 155) asserts that: "the objectified bodily existence accounts for the self-conciousness of the feminine in relation to her body and the resulting distance she takes from her body". Bartky (1988) extends Young's analysis by explaining how (white middle class) women's bodies are controlled and ordered within the contemporary disciplinary regimes of femininity. She describes three disciplinary practices that contribute to current socio-historical constructions of femininity. First diet and exercise regimes are designed to attain

the ideal female body size and configuration. For example, Wolf (1991: 67) notes how increasingly women are: "recasting the natural weight of healthy, normal women as the existential female dilemma". The second category of disciplinary techniques for Bartky (1988) includes the myriad ways women place close attention to comportment, gestures, movements and nonverbal behaviours. Finally, women employ techniques, such as the application of makeup that display the female body as an ornamental surface. Taking up this point Bordo (1989: 17) argues that:

> "These rules for femininity are transmitted primarily through standardized visual images. We learn the rules directly through bodily discourse: through images which tell us what clothes, body shape, facial expression, movements and behaviour is required"

Indeed, the sheer number of articles in women's magazines describing how to dress, apply makeup and present an appropriate image attests to the fact that there are codes of behaviour to which women must subscribe. Bartky (1988) claims that these disciplinary practices are not simply individual, aesthetic choices for women; rather, they are part of a process by which the ideal body of femininity is constructed. Bordo (1989: 14) powerfully asserts that:

> "Women's bodies are trained, shaped, and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire,[and] femininity. Such an emphasis casts a dark and disquieting shadow across the contemporary scene. For women, as study after study shows, spending more time on the management and discipline of our bodies than we have in a long, long time. In a decade marked by the reopening of the public arena to women, the intensification of such regimens appears diversionary and subverting"

In other words Bartky (1988) and Bordo (1989) are claiming that women have few opportunities today for developing identities that are free from normalising beauty mandates and that through the disciplines of diet, makeup and dress women's bodies have become 'docile'. As 'docile bodies' women are "rendered less socially orientated and more focused on self-modification" (Bordo, 1989: 14). The important point made by these authors is that the disciplinary regimes of femininity have political implications because they keep women attending to their appearance, looks, bodily comportment, and image, as opposed to the material and political circumstances of their lives. In other words Bartky (1988) argues that these disciplinary practices pit women against one another and drains their time and energy. These discourses for Bartky (1988: 72) that position women in very particular ways are both self-disciplining and socially imposed, thus: "women internalize the panoptical gaze of the male connoisseur; women live their bodies as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal other". But, how do older women live their bodies as seen by another? Chapter two suggested that the visual images of naked or semi naked bodies exposed by Bartky (1988, 1990) and Bordo (1988, 1993) are rarely ever old and are rarely fat. While these authors have been invaluable in excavating how the desire for this perfectionism in relation to the slim ideal has undoubtedly led to a rise in eating disorders most studies of weight management among females have focused on adolescents and young adults (Lee, 1993). One must therefore pose the following question: Compared to younger women are older women less likely to self starve or self purge their bodies in order to recreate themselves? Indeed, this chapter has also shown how individuals develop a fascination with maintaining a youthful and sexually attractive body (Lupton, 1994, 1996) and how the uptake of cosmetic surgery are held up as examples of a yearning to resist an ageing appearance (Gilleard and Higgs, 2000). However, despite the fact that a major part of cosmetic surgery is concerned with the denial of age the debate so far has

largely turned around interventions on younger bodies (Davis, 1995, 2002; Negrin, 2002). Consequently, while there is an acceptance that the cultural understanding of aging and old age does play a role in women's about appearance and body size (Allaz et al. 1998; Hetherington and Burnett, 1994), the specific effects of ageing on women's body satisfaction still remain unclear. For example, if older women are less concerned about their appearance would they be more likely to join a commercial weight-management organisation because of health implications? Older women are just as likely as younger women to join a commercial slimming club, and there is evidence that they do utilise the available social and personal resources to construct their identities in relation to the cultural pressure to be slim. For example, Gimlin (2007: 418) noted in her study how some of her younger participants concealed their participation from non members because they found commercial weight-loss groups to be embarrassing because: "*It's like, you think of [a slimming group] as a place where your fat old gran' goes. It's not exactly cool*". Older women are therefore very worthy subjects for this type of academic investigation. Having clarified this omission the chapter will remain with the notion of false consciousness in order to show how commercial weight-loss organisations profit at other people's expense.

It's all about profit

In its neo-Marxian formulations, the concept of false consciousness implies that certain social realities are systematically obscured by an internally coherent ideology whose propagation has material benefits for a dominant group. For example, Scambler (2009) in his *Greedy Bastards Hypothesis* suggests that profit making should not be ruled out and pillories the class structures and mechanisms that enable individuals such as Jamie Oliver and the commercial weight-loss organisations, amongst others which profit at other people's expense. The pharmaceutical, diet, food and leisure industries are key

opportunists whose practices include utilising biomedical claims in order to develop and sell weight-loss drugs, eating plans and gym memberships (Monaghan et al, 2010). Indeed, the weight-loss industry continues to be a multimillion pound enterprises and commercial diet programmes, diet food products, cookbooks and self-help manuals, diet drugs, and now surgeries, services, or websites are enjoying booming sales in the UK and all Western countries and expanding into new regions. They boast a weekly fee of under five pounds per week (£4.95) and offer a reduced subscription to members aged sixty (£3.95) and above alongside monthly subscriptions aimed at both saving people money and also retaining their custom. In addition these organisations also rely on 'lay people' (who are most likely acting with good intentions) to espouse the virtues of their weight-loss method, and further spread their good word for free. Whatever their vocabularies of motive, Monaghan et al (2010:58) argues that representatives from these industries are: "basically acting opportunistically in the interests of their shareholders rather than acting altruistically in the interests of fat people". Finally, there are also many obesity campaigners within the public arena. For example, the celebrity Anne Diamond (2008) recently published a book entitled *Winning the Fat War* (Diamond, 2008) which afforded her an institutionally mandated voice to lament about the obesity crisis as a correctable. In effect Diamond is endorsing the slim ideal and normalising diet as the most popular form of correction (Bordo, 1993). While we would not deny that there may be definite pragmatic, emotional and more charitable interests that 'inform' her enterprising work (especially following the criticisms she received in relation to her bariatric surgery and participation in a TV weight-loss competition (*Celebrity Fit Club*) it is also clear that the increased publicity and credibility afforded to Diamond. Overall what can be visualised here according to Heyes (2006: 129-30) is that:

> "A systematic set of beliefs about health, beauty, and weight would indeed appear to conspire to induce a state of false consciousness, especially among consumers who are less knowledgeable about the inner workings of the diet industry or medical establishment. This ideology functions to support oppressive structures: in this case, fat phobia, monomaniacal body aesthetics, and false claims about what constitutes good health generate profits for beauty and diet industries, and are, in turn, fed to health-care providers for whom they often represent a convenient reductionism. Alternative accounts of weight, food, and health carry little research funding or corporate endorsement"

However, the ideological captivity in the form of false consciousness as expressed above cannot explain all of the power of weight-loss dieting as a cultural practice. Many dieters are not simply 'cultural dupes' (Smith, 1990) and are well aware of the contradictions in this ideology, yet try diet after diet and yo-yo their weight which, Gaesser (2002) claims is bad for their health. They resent the profits made by corporations marketing diet services or products, and many women especially will agree that a diversity of body types ought to be celebrated, and that the fashion for thinness is deplorable and oppressive (Bartky,1990; Bordo,1993, 2003; Greer,1991; Hesse-Biber,1996; Wolf,1990,1991). However, a central claim of this Foucauldian study following Heyes (2006) example, is that the continued popularity of dieting cannot entirely be explained using a model of captivation by false beliefs because it is only partial. The chapter will now turn to explore the second 'docile' account which suggests that dieting is one of a number of patriarchal disciplinary practices played out on the body through forms of assujetissement-the process of at once becoming a subject and becoming subjected (Barky, 1990; Bordo, 1993). On this view, at stake are not only false beliefs about weight loss, or thrall to an oppressive aesthetic. Dieting itself (not just weight loss as a projected outcome) is an activity that constructs the 'docile body' (Heyes, 2006).

Using Foucault's early works on the production of 'docile subjects' in a commercial weight-loss organisational setting

As ascertained in chapter one the Foucauldian feminists Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) have engaged with Foucault's work on docile bodies, and are possibly "the best-known advocates" (Heyes, 2006: 127). The chapter will draw on Bartky's (1990: 63-82) essay entitled *Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,* as well as Susan Bordo's book Unbearable *Weight* (1993 esp: 185-212). In her essay Bartky (1990) recapitulates Foucault's (1977) argument in *Discipline and Punish* that the production of 'docile bodies' requires coercive attention to be paid to the smallest details of the body's functioning, partitioning its time and space under relentless surveillance. As briefly mentioned above Bartky (1990: 72) has directed her attention to the creation of a specifically feminine docile body, and argues that gendered disciplinary practices aim to produce a woman with uniform shape, comportment, and ornamentation: "against the background of a pervasive sense of bodily deficiency". Here, according to Bartky capillary power is 'everywhere and nowhere', its effects supported by hundreds of everyday actions, yet systematically organized and enforced by no one. Body ideals are internalized by women, to the extent that: "any political project which aims to dismantle the machinery that turns a female body into a feminine one may well be apprehended by a woman as something that threatens her with desexualization, if not outright annihilation" (ibid). When discussing dieting Bartky (1990: 66) writes:

> "Dieting disciplines the body's hungers: Appetite must be monitored at all times and governed by an iron will. Since the innocent need of the organism for food will not be denied, the body becomes one's enemy, an alien being bent on thwarting the disciplinary project".

In a similar vein Bordo (1993: 186-87): "examines the normalizing role of diet and exercise by analyzing popular representations through which their cultural meaning is crystallized, metaphorically encoded, and transmitted". Specifically, interpreting the physical body as representative of the social body, she claims: "some dominant meanings that are connected, in our time, to the imagery of slenderness" as the "text or surface on which culture is symbolically written". According to Heyes (2006: 132) Bordo suggests that the slenderness ideal embodies moral judgments of the proper management of impulse and desire, with "body shape and size increasingly being read as a visible indicator of the inner moral self." For Bordo (1993: 199):

> "The failures and contradictions of the management of appetite symbolize the unstable tensions in consumer capitalism: As producers of goods and services we must sublimate, delay, repress desires for immediate gratification; we must cultivate the work ethic. On the other hand, as consumers we must display a boundless capacity to capitulate to desire and indulge in impulse; we must hunger for constant and immediate satisfaction".

In her study Heyes (2006: 133) suggests that the theoretical framework (approach to disciplinary power) that Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) advance can offer a number of more specific insights into the local practices of weight-loss dieting, which were not the object of their original research. For example, Heyes (2006) illustrates how the panoptican's potential for self discipline gets members at Weight Watchers to gaze at themselves in order to grasp some form of self control. Heyes illustrates how members and themselves and their bodies are turned into objects through exploring the ways in which Weight Watchers' meetings and online and paper materials perpetuate and encourage such fine disciplinary work. For example, through the notion of watching one's weight and recording the 'Points' value (calorific and fat content) of food and exercise in diaries

members engage in an absurd regulation of food and exercise habits that is very much like the obsessive behaviours commonly associated with eating disorders. Thus, for Heyes the commercial diet blurs the line between pathology and "normal" eating, even as it attempts to shore it up with the rhetoric of improving one's health. Here, according to McWhorter (1999: 180): "docility is a major objective of most successful normalized disciplinary practices", and at the level of the individual weight-watcher or slimming world member it is assiduously cultivated. So far this chapter has painted a rather grim picture of a commercial slimming group whereby the modern disciplinary power portrayed by Barky (1990) and Bordo (1993) appears to be ubiquitous and inescapable. In other words Foucauldian power reduces individuals to 'docile' and subjected bodies and thus seems to deny the possibility of any freedom and resistance. Addressing this negligence, Sawicki (1988: 293) argues that Bartky and Bordo have:

> "Portrayed forms of patriarchal power that insinuate themselves within subjects so profoundly that it is difficult to imagine how they [we] might escape. They describe our complicity in patriarchal practices of victimization without providing suggestions about how we might resist it".

As described in chapter one Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) suggest that these industries produce self-loathing that captivates people, bring them suffering, and impoverishes them in a sad but all too familiar spectrums of ways. Yet, if the picture is so bleak, why do so many women subject themselves to such an oppressive disciplinary regime? The chapter will therefore turn to discuss some of the arguments put forward by other Foucauldian feminists who suggest that Bartky's (1990) and Bordo's (1993, 2003) work simply reproduces a problematic dimension of Foucault's account of modern disciplinary power.

Questioning Foucault's notion of 'docile bodies'

Although the use that Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) make of Foucault's insights into the operation of normalising disciplinary power is a corrective to his failure to recognize the gendered nature of disciplinary techniques, some feminists have argued that their work reproduces a problematic dimension of Foucault's account of modern disciplinary power. For example, Fraser (1989) argues that the problem with Foucault's claim that forms of subjectivity are constituted by relations of power is that it leaves no room for resistance to power. If individuals are simply the effects of power, mere 'docile bodies' shaped by power, then it becomes difficult to explain who resists power.

Feminist critics of Foucault such as Hartsock (1990: 171-2) argues that his failure to develop a sufficient notion of resistance is a consequence of his reduction of individuals to effects of power relations. Hartsock reverberates a widespread feminist concern that Foucault's understanding of power: "reduces individuals to docile bodies, to victims of disciplinary technologies or objects of power rather than subjects with the capacity to resist". The problem for Hartsock and others such as Fraser (1989) is that without the assumption of a subject or individual that pre-exists its construction by technologies of power, it becomes difficult to explain who resists power? These authors suggest that if there are no ready-made individuals with interests that are defined prior to their construction by power, then what is the source of our resistance? Some feminists for example, Heyes (2006) have responded to these concerns by claiming that, although Foucault rejects the idea that resistance can be grounded in a subject or self who pre-exists its construction by power, he does not deny the possibility of resistance to power. In his later work Foucault (1980: 142) explains that his theory of power implies both the possibility and existence of forms of resistance and asserts that: "there are no relations of

power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised'". Foucauldian resistance neither predates the power it opposes nor issues from a site external to power. Rather it relies upon and grows out of the situation against which it struggles (Diamond and Quinby; Heyes 2006). According to Diamond and Quinby (1988) and Heyes (2006) Foucault's understanding of resistance as internal to power refuses the utopian dream of achieving total emancipation from power. In the place of total liberation these authors note how Foucault envisages more specific, local struggles against forms of subjection aimed at loosening the constraints on possibilities for action. Diamond and Quinby (1988) note how Foucault suggests that a key struggle in the present is against the tendency of normalising-disciplinary power to tie individuals to their identities in constraining ways. It is, Foucault contends, because disciplinary practices limit the possibilities of what we can be by fixing our identities that the object of resistance must be 'to refuse what we are'; that is, to fracture the limitations imposed on us by normalising identity categories (ibid).

Understandably, according to Sawicki (1994: 289) Foucault's notion of resistance as consisting, at least in the first instance, in a refusal of fixed, stable or naturalized identity has been met with some suspicion by feminists". Sawicki continues to note how many feminists are reluctant to abandon a commitment: "to some essential, liberatory subject rooted in "women's experience" (or nature), as the starting point for emancipatory theory". For Hartsock (1990) Foucault's perspective functions to prevent the possibility of feminist politics which, she claims is necessarily an identity based politics grounded in a conception of the identity, needs and interests of women. However, some of the most exciting feminist appropriations of Foucault converge around this issue of identity and its role in politics has come from Judith Butler (1990). Here, Butler argues that Foucault's

work does provide feminists with the resources to think beyond the strictures of identity politics. According to Butler (1990: 4) feminists should be cautious of the idea that politics needs to be based on a fixed idea of women's nature and interests and asserts that:

> "The premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category. These domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when the construction has been elaborated for emancipatory purposes. Indeed, the fragmentation within feminism and the paradoxical opposition to feminism from "women" whom feminism claims to represent suggest the necessary limits of identity politics".

Here, Butler (1990) distinguishes at least two problems in the attempt to ground politics in an essential, naturalized female identity. She argues that the assertion of the category 'woman' as the ground for political action excludes, marginalizes and inevitably misrepresents those who do not recognize themselves within the terms of that identity. For Butler the appeal to identity both ignores the differences in power and resources between, for example, third world and Western women, and tends to make these differences a source of conflict rather than a source of strength. Butler (1990: 148) therefore claims, that a feminist identity politics that appeals to a fixed feminist subject: "presumes, fixes and constrains the very 'subjects' that it hopes to represent and liberate".

In Foucault's presentation of identity as an effect Butler (1990) envisages new possibilities for feminist political practice, possibilities that are precluded by positions that take identity to be fixed or foundational. One of the distinct advantages of Foucault's understanding of the constituted character of identity is, in Butler's view, that it enables feminism to politicize the processes through which stereotypical forms of masculine and feminine

identity are produced. In essence Butler's own work represents an attempt to explore these processes for the purposes of loosening the heterosexual restrictions on identity formation. In pursuing this project she argues that Foucault's characterization of identity as constructed does not mean that it is completely determined or artificial and arbitrary. Rather, a Foucauldian approach to identity production demonstrates the role played by cultural norms in regulating how we embody or perform our gender identities. According to Butler (1990: 33) gender identity is simply: "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being". Butler continues to assert that the regulatory power of the norms that govern our performances of gender is both disguised and strengthened by the assumption that gendered identities are natural and essential. Thus, for Butler, one of the most important feminist aims should be to challenge dominant gender norms by exposing the contingent acts that produce the appearance of an underlying 'natural' gender identity. Against the claim that feminist politics is necessarily an identity politics, Butler (1990: 149) suggests that:

> "If identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old".

Butler foresees this new configuration of politics as an anti-foundational coalition politics that would accept the need to act within the tensions produced by contradiction, fragmentation and diversity. However, while Butler's political vision emphasises strategies for resisting and subverting identity, Brown (1990) powerfully argues that contemporary feminism should be cautious of both identity politics and the 'politics of resistance' associated with the work of Foucault and Butler. Here, Brown argues that identity politics

entails a commitment to the authenticity of women's experiences which functions to secure political authority. At the same time, however, most feminists wish to acknowledge that feminine identity and experience are constructed under patriarchal conditions. Brown suggests that this inconsistency in feminist political thought-acknowledging social construction on the one hand and attempting to preserve a realm of authentic experience free from construction on the other might be explained by the fact that feminists are reluctant to give up the claim to moral authority that the appeal to the truth and innocence of woman's experience secures. By appealing to the silenced truth of women's experience, feminists have been able to censure the repressive effects of patriarchal power. For Brown (1995: 37) the attempt to establish moral authority by asserting the hidden truth of women's experience and identity represents a rejection of politics. She argues that this kind of move in feminism:

> "... betrays a preference for extrapolitical terms and practices: for Truth (unchanging and incontestable) over politics (flux, contest, instability); for certainty and security (safety; immutability, privacy) over freedom (vulnerability, publicity); for discoveries (science) over decisions (judgments); for separable subjects armed with established rights over unwieldy and shifting pluralities adjudicating for themselves and their future on the basis of nothing more than their own habits and arguments".

In addition Brown (1995: 49) finds a similar failure to meet the challenges confronting contemporary politics in the 'politics of resistance' inspired by Foucault. As she observes, the problem with resistance-as-politics is that it does not: "contain a critique, a vision, or grounds for organized collective efforts to enact either... [resistance] goes nowhere in particular, has no inherent attachments and hails no particular vision". In light of these insufficiencies, Brown (1995: 49) calls for the politics of resistance to be supplemented by apolitical practices aimed at cultivating: "political spaces for posing and questioning

political norms [and] for discussing the nature of "the good" for women" (Brown 1995: 49). The creation of such democratic spaces for discussion will, Brown argues, contribute to teaching us how to have public conversations with each other and enable us to argue from our diverse perspectives about a vision of the common good : "what I want for us", rather than from some assumed common identity "who I am".

The key problems identified above by feminist critics as preventing too close a convergence between Foucault's work and feminism; his reduction of social agents to 'docile bodies' and the lack of normative guidance in his model of power and resistance are indirectly addressed by Foucault in his late work on ethics (McNay, 1992). Whereas in his earlier genealogies Foucault emphasized the processes through which individuals were subjected to power, in his later writings he turned his attention to practices of self-constitution or 'practices of freedom' which he called ethics (Sawicki, 1998). Here, moral judgment is displaced, and a different kind of ethical discourse comes to the fore. The chapter will therefore turn to explore volumes two and three of *The History of Sexuality* (*The Use of Pleasure* 1987 and *The Care of the Self* 1988) in order to underpin how practicing freedom is central to Foucault's exploration and analysis of the ethical practices of antiquity.

Exploring Foucault's technology of the 'active self'

The ethical practices of antiquity refer to the ways in which individuals in antiquity were led to exercise power over themselves in the attempt to constitute or transform their identity and behaviour in the light of specific goals. What interests Foucault about these ethical practices and ancient 'arts of existence' according to Sawicki (1998) is the kind of freedom they presuppose. Here Foucault suggests that the freedom entailed in practicing

the art of self-fashioning consists neither in resisting power nor in seeking to liberate the self from regulation. Rather, it entails the active and conscious arrogation of the power of regulation by individuals for the purposes of ethical and aesthetic self-transformation. In her reflections on Foucault's positive account of freedom, Sawicki (1998: 104) notes that it offers a more: "affirmative alternative to his earlier emphasis on the reactive strategy of resistance to normalization" (Sawicki 1998: 104). For the late Foucault (who died aged 57) individuals are still understood to be shaped by their embeddedness in power relations, which means that their capacities for freedom and autonomous action are necessarily limited (ibid). However, according to Sawicki (1998: 105) in *The Care of the Self* Foucault (1988) suggests that by actively deploying the techniques and models of self-formation that are: "proposed, suggested, imposed upon them by society, individuals may creatively transform themselves and in the process supplant the normalization operating in pernicious modern technologies of the self". Here, Sawicki sees a link between Foucault's notion of practices of freedom and Donna Haraway's (1991) call for a cyborg politics that emphasizes the conscious creation of marginalized subjects capable of resisting domination. For example, rather than being seen as determined by nature, Haraway argues the body is increasingly coming to be regarded as a social and cultural construct, capable of radical transformation. Against those who seek to preserve the integrity of the body from the encroachment of technology, Haraway (1991: 177) argues that such interventions can be productive of fruitful new conjunctions, which:

> "disrupt the rigid oppositions between human/machine, nature/culture, male/female, dualisms that have been 'systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of colour, nature, workers and animals".

While there are some eco-feminists such as Adrienne Rich who condemn the technological intervention into women's bodies, Haraway believes that women should embrace these technologies and learn to use them for their own ends. If they refuse to do so, they run the risk of reiterating the traditional patriarchal binarism which aligns women with nature and opposes them to culture. As Haraway (1991: 154) writes:

> "From one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final appropriation of women's bodies in a masculinist orgy of war. From another, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, notafraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints. The political struggle isto see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point".

Rather than treating technology as the enemy, Haraway suggests that it should be regarded as an aspect of our embodiment. She sees such a conception as underpinning a new understanding of the self as fluid and open to constant change rather than as fixed and immutable and goes so far as to entertain the possibility of a post-gender world where gender distinctions will be transcended. In a more critical vein, feminists like Grimshaw (1993) and McNay (1992) argue that Foucault's promising turn to a more active model of subjectivity still leaves crucial issues unresolved. In Grimshaw's (1993: 66) account, Foucault evades the vital question of:

> "when forms of self-discipline or self-surveillance can ... be seen as exercises of autonomy or self-creation, or when they should be seen, rather, as forms of discipline to which the self is subjected, and by which autonomy is constrained"

In response to this criticism, Lloyd (1988) suggests that it is Foucault's earlier notion of genealogy as critique which allows us to distinguish between autonomous practices of the self and technologies of normalisation. For Lloyd, the Foucauldian practice of critique-a practice which involves the effort to recognize, decipher and problematize the ways in which the self is produced generates possibilities for alternative practices of the self and, thus, for more autonomous experiments in self-formation. Lloyd (1988: 250) explains that:

> "It is not the activity of self-fashioning in itself that is crucial. It is the way in which that self-fashioning, when allied to critique, can produce sites of contestation over the meanings and contours of identity, and over the ways in which certain practices are mobilized" (Lloyd: 1988: 250).

With the introduction of a notion of freedom in his late work, Foucault (1988) also clarifies the normative grounds for his opposition to certain forms of power. For example as detailed in chapter one in his discussion of ethics, Foucault suggests that individuals are not limited to reacting against power, but may alter power relationships in ways that expand their possibilities for action. Thus, Foucault's work on ethics can be linked to his concern to counter domination, that is, forms of power that limit the possibilities for the autonomous development of the self's capacities. By distinguishing power relations that are mutable, flexible and reversible, from situations of domination in which resistance is foreclosed, Foucault (1988: 298) seeks to encourage practices of liberty: "that will allow us to play ... games of power with as little domination as possible". Sawicki (1998) therefore argues that Foucault's notion of practices of freedom has the potential to broaden our understanding of what it is to engage in emancipatory politics. In Foucault's conception of freedom as a practice aimed at minimizing domination, Sawicki distinguishes an implicit critique of traditional emancipatory politics which tends to conceive of liberty as a state free from every conceivable social constraint. Following

Foucault, Sawicki (1998: 102) argues that the problem with this notion of emancipation is that it does not go far enough: "Reversing power positions without altering relations of power is rarely liberating. Neither is it a sufficient condition of liberation to throw off the yoke of domination". Sawicki continues to suggest that if, as Foucault suggests, freedom exists only in being exercised and is, thus, a permanent struggle against what will otherwise be done to and for individuals, it is dangerous to imagine it as a state of being that can be guaranteed by laws and institutions. By insisting that liberation from domination is not enough to guarantee freedom, Foucault points to the importance of establishing new patterns of behaviour, attitudes and cultural forms that work to empower the vulnerable and, in this way, to ensure that mutable relations of power do not congeal into states of domination (ibid). Thus, for Sawicki (1998) the value of Foucault's late work for feminism consists in the conceptual tools that it provides to think beyond traditional emancipatory theories and practices.

Indeed, at the very start of reading *The Slender Body* Bordo (1993: 185) alludes to Foucault's work on dietetics in ancient Greece, but suggests that these practices are: "instruments for the development of a 'self'... constructed as an arena in which the deepest possibilities for human excellence may be realized". By contrast, she suggests that in the modern world:

> "Fat, not appetite or desire, became the declared enemy, and people began to measure their dietary achievements by the numbers on the scale rather than by the level of their mastery of impulse and excess. The bourgeois tyranny of slenderness...had begun its ascendancy (particularly over women), and with it the development of numerous technologies-diet, exercise, and, later on, chemicals and surgery-aimed at a purely physical transformation".

Bordo (1993: 198) later renounces this quote, revealing its 'limitations' by saying that: "examination of even the most shallow [contemporary] representations" in fact "discloses a moral ideology". So one wonders why Bordo should start the essay in this way only to later turn back on her own words. In response to such a change of heart Heyes (2006) argues that Bordo's reliance on Foucault's genealogical phase obscures the paradoxically enabling elements of the process of dieting that might be better theorized through Foucault's final work. Further, Bordo focuses on outcomes in theorizing the body's role in the symbolic economies of gender and consumer capitalism-on anorectic, toned, and slender icons. Her primary emphasis is on the representative functions of ideal bodies, especially bodies in advertising-the hypothetical product of rigorous diet and exercise. Both Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) think of dieting (usually united with toning exercise) as concerned with the minutest management of the (usually female) body's size, contours, and surface. And indeed it is. However, almost all those who struggle to attain an ideal (or, at least, better) body will fail (as demonstrated by a 98 percent failure rate) or backslide in their weight-loss and exercise goals (as demonstrated by a 97 percent recidivism rate). If this were the whole story, as both authors implicitly recognize, then weight-loss diets would hardly have the phenomenal cultural resonance that they do. Heyes (2006) therefore revealed the fact that neither Bordo (1993) nor Bartky (1990) fully theorizes the micropractices of power that make up the day to day experience of weight-loss dieting. This erasure leads them to stress the repressive moments in the construction of the slender body, contra the enabling functions of the dieting process.

As detailed in chapter one this thesis aims to supplement rather than challenge Bartky (1990) and Bordo's (1993) 'docile bodies' thesis with his later works on the active self because this will make it more useful to the project of articulating a coherent feminist

ethics and politics. Weight-loss dieting is emotional, psychological, and the practical functions of an organized weight-loss program can be self-transformative (Heyes, 2006, 2007). For Heyes (2006) commercial diet plans emphasize this aspect of what they sell, precisely because their creators know and they know that their customers know that weight loss is unlikely to be a permanent result of their product. The rewards and the pleasures may often lie elsewhere, but they do exist. Obviously, to dwell too lovingly on these pleasures may sound like a triumph to dieting and like Heyes before me this is certainly not the intention here. The point that this chapter is making here is that however, intent on characterising dieting as an oppressive disciplinary regime, feminists may have been theorising at too high a level and have failed to explore the details of the capabilities that it can develop for older women. For example, Nikolas Rose (1996) has identified three ways of relating to the self that can be utilised by this study: epistemologically (knowing yourself), despotically (mastering yourself), and attentively (caring for yourself), each of which is a different kind of technology of the self. It is the attentive technology-care of the self-which Foucault thinks we have failed to understand as a politicized activity. In order to underpin his argument Rose (1996) suggests that Foucault returns to the ancients to find ways of living that, although inevitably implicated in disciplinary practices, cultivate a broader repertoire of human possibilities instead of increasing 'docility'. This is an ethical as opposed to a moral project, which returns to the art of living as a project not captured by the Christian (and academic analytic) philosophical emphasis on prohibitions and commandments (ibid). To capture the activities he had in mind, Foucault (2001: 143) reclaimed the Greek term askesis-the struggle to create an art of living that ethically engages the world and states:

> "For the Greeks the word does not mean 'ascetic,' but has a very broad sense denoting any kind of practical training or exercise. For example, it was a

> commonplace to say that any kind of art or technique had to be learned by mathesis and askesis-by theoretical knowledge and practical training...This techne tou biou, this art of living, demands practice and training: askesis".

'Care of the self' is not an indulgence, or a distraction from the affairs of the polis, but rather a necessary condition of effective citizenship and relationships. We owe it to ourselves and to others to constitute ourselves as ethical agents through asketic practices (Rose, 1996). The notion that diet can constitute a technology of the self is not at all new. In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault (1985: 99-139) included a lengthy discussion of ancient views of dietetics, which he suggested was often a more important aspect of the 'regimen of pleasures' than sexual relations. The chapter will therefore briefly introduce the hypomnemata which is Foucault's central medium for the transmission of asketic advice about diet in order to underpin its use in the next chapter and subsequent chapters.

The Hypomnemata

Hypomnemata is a word that in its original context has a very precise meaning: it is a copybook, a notebook. Foucault in Rabinow (1997: 273) states:

> "In the technical sense, the hupomnemata could be account books, public registers, individual notebooks serving as memoranda....Into them one entered quotations, fragments of works, examples, and actions to which one had been witness or of which one had read the account, reflections or reasonings one had heard or had come to mind. They constituted a material memory of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering these as an accumulated treasure for rereading and later meditation. They also formed a raw material for the writing of more systematic treatises in which were given arguments and means by which to struggle against some defect ... or to overcome some difficult circumstance"

In the ancient world, says Foucault in Rabinow (1997: 273) hypomnemata were key aids to caring for the self. Their purpose was "not to pursue the indescribable, not to reveal the hidden, not to say the non said, but, on the contrary, to collect the already said". Here, commercial weight-loss groups have understood the kind of working on oneself that dieting provokes, and have produced their own hupomnemata accordingly. For example, Weight Watchers and Slimming World's hypomnemata include leaflets handed out at meetings, magazine articles, website materials, and even cookbooks that carefully exploit key ascetic themes from a popular culture preoccupied in more or less ethical ways with care of the self. Of the three types of technology of the self that Rose (1996) identified above-epistemic (knowing yourself), attentive (caring for yourself), and despotic (mastering yourself) the 'docile bodies' thesis implies that the despotic predominates in dieting discourse because sensuous experiences of embodiment are minimised in favour of an emphasis on the regulatory controls which are exercised from the outside (Turner, 1984). Especially where disordered eating is overtly at stake, the language of self-mastery does indeed take centre stage in both self-reports and critical analyses (Bordo, 1993); however, commercial diet programs make clever use of the epistemic and attentive moments, too. Here, it is possible to draw four parallels between the forms of care of the self Foucault (1988) described and endorsed, and the rhetorical strategies of Weight Watchers and Slimming World's hypomnemata. Indeed, the underlying premise that this thesis is making is that following Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) these slimming clubs are using this rhetoric to deepen its member dependence on the organization and, by implication, on the 'docility' the organization cultivates. However, at the same time the discipline of weight loss also generates real capabilities, and fosters a kind of attentiveness toward the self (O'Farrell, 2007). Indeed, as McNay (1992) notes, there is little in Foucault's (1988) final work that helps feminists identify how disciplinary practices that

travel under the sign 'care of the self' might constitute practices of freedom, and how they (sometimes simultaneously) cultivate docile bodies. Here, the Weight Watchers and Slimming World's rhetoric cultivates both positions: that the care of the self implicit in successful dieting will improve one's self-knowledge, and that knowing oneself is central to weight loss. Here, Weight Watchers' and Slimming Worlds' hypomnemata suggests that the key to avoiding a diet lapse is to know yourself well enough to take action before your personal temptations take over. In this context, the self to be known is not a static, essential one, but rather ever transforming. For example, on the Slimming World website they invite you to "*be the person you really want to be, now and forever*" (www.slimmingworld.co.uk, 2010). From this statement we can see that the transformed self is not just a goal, because the process of transformation itself invents new capacities and invites reflection on a post-asketic self that is not yet known. Foucault thought, of course, that care of the self as a practice of freedom would require that we reject the language of authenticity (Biggs, 2005). That is, we should not understand ourselves as seeking to liberate a self that was always there, but rather to invent ourselves as something new that is not yet imagined. Hence Foucaut's (1983: 237) notion that: "the self is not given to us. I think that there is only practical consequence, we have to create ourselves as a work of art". The older woman who voluntarily uses anti-aging products or limits her intake of food recreates herself as a work of art whose bodily form is sometimes so confronting that cannot be and is not ignored. Indeed, the weight-loss discourse is particularly insidious, sometimes appealing to the authentic self, while other times turning back on itself to claim that the self we seek to liberate is always developing-always, of course, positing the telos of weight loss and thinness in a way that sets bodies into a hierarchy (Bordo,1993).

The second point to be made is that the hypomnemata invite reflection on everyday accomplishments and the evolution of new capacities (in other words replacing negative messages with more positive ones). For example, relating back to the popular TV show entitled *Supersize and Superskinny* described earlier in this chapter, the programme aims to demonstrate how losing weight can enable women to undertake activities they might previously have allegedly been unable or certainly unwilling to try. In this category, physical play with one's children, or bringing the older woman into the equation, play with one's grandchildren is an extraordinarily popular trope and has served as motivations for weight loss. Here, the messages that this programme transmitted was that losing weight makes one into both a new person with new capacities, and a conventionally better caregiver and mother and grandmother. Indeed, it is a feminist commonplace that many women's achievements go unrecognized or are invisible, and none more so than an older woman's achievements (Woodward, 1999). As these popular TV shows demonstrate losing weight, provokes a ready congratulation; it is tangible, and can be graphed and tracked; it has setbacks and successes that seem clear cut. Weight Watchers uses its materials to link diverse accomplishments to weight loss, which then becomes an outward and visible symbol of other successes. Going back to the TV programme *Supersize, Superskinny* it is also possible to see that the transitional period of losing weight is also represented as temporally significant, as women allegedly use the processes of self-discovery and transformation it cultivates to reassess the ethics of their own existence. For example, in the programme women often cite their workload as a stressful event that leads towards fast food consumption. Once they had embarked upon a new lifestyle they often stated that weight-loss dieting had given them not just a new body, but a new life.

Thirdly, the dieting hypomnemata places emphasis on the importance of making one's own choices, initiating transformation, and approaching food (and other things) with wisdom and flexibility. For example the new '*flexipoints*' addition to the Weight Watchers plan carries the slogan: "*the real world is full of real choices: Weight loss should be too*" (www.weightwatchers.co.uk, 2010). Indeed, when Foucault (1985: 106) comments that: "regimen should not be understood as a corpus of universal and uniform rules; it was more in the nature of a manual for reacting to situations in which one might find oneself, a treatise for adjusting one's behaviour to fit the circumstances" he could well be running a Weight Watchers' or Slimming World meeting. It might be objected that these contemporary hypomnemata differ from the practices of writing the self that Foucault discussed because they are primarily passive, designed to be read rather than actively engaged. Citing Socrates, Foucault (1985: 108) wrote:

> "To become an art of existence, good management of the body ought to include a setting down in writing carried out by the subject concerning himself; with the help of this note-taking, the individual would be able to gain his independence and choose judiciously between what was good and bad for him".

However, the dieting subject is being written here, not writing itself. It is important to note here that these texts are not books; they are small leaflets designed to be carried in a pocket or purse, or websites that continually evolve and offer something new to the repeat visitor. In addition as mentioned already both Weight Watchers' and Slimming World members are also encouraged to keep a weight-loss diary to record not only what they eat, but also how they feel, and to write down tips to themselves that will help them in their project. Here, it would appear that the argument that this Foucauldian study appears to be following is one that may seem to be too much like an endorsement of commercial weight-loss programs as capacity-enhancing activities, especially for women. Feminists are much

more familiar with an image of the beaten down, obsessive, and oppressed dieter as the irrefutably 'docile body' (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Wolf, 1990). By articulating in some detail how dieting discourse appropriates and exploits the language of care of the self, however, this study hopes to demonstrate its function as both disciplinary and also enabling; in ways feminists have largely ignored (McNay, 1992). The point that this section of the chapter is making is that dieting hupomnemata are clever at touching a cultural nerve (Burr, 1995). They are also from the evidence above quite manipulative, and self-serving, and we should never lose sight of the fact that this focus is commercial enterprises whose primary goal is profit (Scambler, 2009). Although these texts may provide glimpses into an ethical world of self-development and new capacities, they are ultimately immobilizing as much as enabling. Whatever skills and capacities dieting might enhance are, in the rhetoric of the commercial programs, immediately co-opted back into a field of meaning internal to weight loss (Gimlin, 2007). Only losing weight, they would have us believe, can lead to the true self-knowledge, self-development, self-mastery, and self-care that was described earlier by Rose (1996). Earlier this chapter stressed that research has shown that restrictive dieting when practised alone or in groups rarely produces long-term weight loss (Hesse-Biber, 1996). The chapter will therefore continue to discuss how much is at stake for older women when experiencing this failure.

Why bother: dieting doesn't work

With weight loss as the synecdoche (a part that is used to represent the whole) for multiple forms of working on oneself, recidivism is likely to be particularly devastating with regained weight standing in for ethical weakness, a return to old habits, and failure to care adequately for the self, as well as to be responsible to others (Rodin, 1992). Here, Rodin suggests that losing weight and regaining it can be seen as an ignominious defeat for one's

efforts to create an art of living. This partly explains why women diet over and over again, seeking to regain the sense of reincarnation that the process is designed to cultivate. Although profitable for commercial organizations, this cycle of elation and failure ultimately makes body weight metonymic of a host of political inequities that clearly cannot be redressed through the individualized practice of dieting (Bordo, 1993). Given the hyperbolic constructions of the 'Success Stories' that one encounters when visiting the organisations websites/magazines and leaflets dieters can be forgiven for thinking that any achievement will be a cure all, forgetting that these stories are fabrications, presentations of weight loss as commercial organizations would like it to be (Bartky, 1990). Even as we advocate diet resistance (Cordell and Ronai, 1999; Gimlin, 2007) and alternative feminist activities (Greer, 1991; Cooper, 2010), we must recognise that for many women giving up dieting in response to finally taking on board the futility of weight-loss programs (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Wolf, 1991) is experienced as much as grieving as liberation. We may well realise that the books, websites, magazines, and weekly meetings are false friends, but, those women who actually act on the knowledge rather than just propositionally rehearsing it must go through some kind of mourning (Heyes, 2006). Here, we mourn not only the loss of the future thin self that even if not attained can always be looked forward to, but also the loss of a forum in which, however conditionally, we might be helped to take care of ourselves (ibid), in the ways that Rose (1996) has suggested.

So far this chapter has presented an anti-foundationalist perspective which conceptualizes the body as a discourse, and perceives the body as an effect of social discourse. However, as stated in the introduction of this chapter, binaries such as essentialism/constructivism, nature/culture, foundationalism/antifoundationalism, body and mind continue to be problematic for sociologists. Consequently, the dominant goal among scholars currently

articulating a sociological perspective on the body (Prout, 2000; Shilling, 1993; Turner, 1992; Williams & Bendelow 1998) is to overcome these dualities and integrate 'materialist' and 'constructionist' views. So far this chapter has aimed to shed some light on understanding and theorising the ways in which bodies are discursive-shaped, represented, and constructed. In other words the aim of the argument has been to critically engage with the self/body relation and, in particular, tendencies to privilege representational practices in the constitution of the body- a problematic tendency which results in the disappearance of the material body behind layers of representation, becoming only that which can be: "spoken or readily put into words" rather than a lived body (Radley, 1995: 7). Consequently, the body tends to be conceptualized as an inert mass controlled by the mind, which is seemingly abstracted from an active human body (Shilling, 1997: 79). Bodies, however, cannot simply be treated as though they are the 'natural' foundation or passive surface upon which culture overlays a disciplinary system of meanings. Yet various forms of social constructionism such as the one utilised by Foucault deny the body as a lived entity by capturing 'the body only insofar as they show how its functions, its movements, its 'inner' and 'outer' workings, have been shaped by 'social structures and discourse' and leave the body as 'flesh marginalized' (Radley,1995: 7). The chapter will therefore turn to discuss how Foucault's body is seen as a vanishing body in order to attempt to somehow bridge the gap between 'materiality' and social constructionism.

Exploring Foucault's vanishing body

As briefly described above there is a fundamental tension in Foucault's approach to the body which means his work is unable to fully overcome the dual approach sociology has traditionally adopted to the body (Shilling, 2003). Here, Shilling goes on to describe how

on the one hand, there is a real substantive concern with the body as an actual product of constructing discourses. For example, Foucault is often concerned with the body as a real entity, as when he explores the effects of scientific thought and disciplinary technologies on the body. Given the emphasis Foucault places on historical discontinuity in his work Shilling (2003) suggests this leads him to treat the body as a trans-historical and cross-cultural unified phenomemon. As described earlier in this chapter what this means is that the body is always already there to be constructed by discourse. For example, in chapter two the body that was always there was dissolved as a causal phenomenon into the determining power of the biomedical discourses of aging as decline[11]. The point to be made here is that irrespective of the time or place, the body is equally available as a site which receives meaning from, and is constituted by external forces (Shilling, 2003). Using Weeks (1992) to illustrate this point Shilling (2003: 70) argues that:

> "This view provides no room for recognising that different aspects of human embodiment may be more or less open to reconstruction depending upon specific historical circumstances. It also makes highly questionable the claims of those like Jeffrey Weeks who argues that Foucault allows us to historicize the body".

On the other hand Shilling (2003) describes how Foucault's epistemological view of the body means that it disappears as a material or biological phenomenon. The biological, physical or material body can never be grasped by the Foucauldian approach as its existence is permanently deferred behind the grids of meaning imposed by discourse. Consequently Shilling argues that one can therefore get a sense when reading Foucault that

[11] In this discussion the biomedical model is understood to have four components. 1) The mind and body are essentially different and medicine is restricted to considerations related to the body. 2) The body can be understood as analogous to a machine. 3) Medical answers are thought to be more reliable when they are founded on the basic sciences. 4) And thus biophysical answers are preferred to all others (Longino and Murphy, 1995).

his analyses are somewhat disembodied. Indeed, the body is present as a topic of discussion, but is absent as a focus of investigation. As described earlier in this chapter Foucault was deeply concerned with disciplinary systems, but the body tends to become lost in those discussions as a real material object of analysis. Shilling (2003) therefore suggests that one manifestation of this is Foucault's view of the mind/body relationship. Once a body is contained within modern disciplinary systems, it is the mind which takes over as the location of discursive power. Consequently, the body tends to be reduced to an: *"inert mass which is controlled by discourses centred on the mind"* (Shilling 2003: 70-71). However, this mind is itself disembodied because we get no sense of the minds location within an active human body. In other words, the bodies that appear in Foucault's work can be accused of not enjoying a prolonged visibility as corporeal entities. Indeed, bodies are produced, but their own powers of production, where they have any are limited to those invested in them by discourse (ibid). As such the body is determined by the power of discourse, thus, it becomes very difficult to conceive of the body as a material component for social action. Indeed, while it remains important to understand and theorise the ways in which bodies are discursive-shaped and constructed Foucault is insufficiently concerned with lived experience and fails to appreciate the phenomenological experience of humans as organic creatures with "bodies-in the more traditional sense of muscles, nerves, genes, and blood'' (Moore, 1997: 1). Ironically for Turner (1984) as described in chapter one, despite all his references to pleasure and desire as described above he has simply ignored the phenomenology of embodiment. Consequently, instead of overcoming the dual approach that sociology has adopted towards the body, Foucault's work just produces a body in a different form. The body is affected by discourse but we gain little sense of how the body can react back and actually affect that discourse (ibid). Even when Foucault makes the occasional reference to the body as putting up resistance to power and the

dominant discourses as described above in the feminist accounts, he cannot say what it actually is about the body that resists. Indeed, this characteristic of Foucault's work can be further illuminated by comparing his view of the body with naturalistic approaches.

Shilling (1993: 41) describes naturalistic views or what Turner (1992) terms a foundationalist view as those that conceptualize the body as the pre-social and biological basis on which the 'superstructure' of self and society is founded. Naturalistic views: "hold that the capabilities and constraints of human bodies define individuals and generate the social, political, and economic relations that characterize national and international patterns of living". Here, naturalistic approaches posit the natural as the raw material of social life and sexual or 'racial' difference is taken as prior to social differences when it comes to analysing the embodiment of humans. For example, as demonstrated in chapter two 'woman' and 'man' are ontologically stable objects which make no allowance for cross cultural or trans-historical change (Shilling, 2003). However, for Foucault as demonstrated above the natural is a construction of the social. Shilling (2003: 71) goes on to state that:

> "The body is always already culturally mapped; it never exists in a pure or uncoded state. While the strength of this view is its recognition of the production of social categories and its analysis of systems of representation, this is not built on the grounds of the demise of essentialism. Instead, natural essentialism is displaced by discursive essentialism, a situation which leaves Foucault without the means of examining a mutual development of biology (for anything that is natural about the body) and society".

In essence, Shilling asserts that society is brought so far into the body that the body disappears into a phenomenon that requires detailed historical investigation in its own right. It is present as an item of discussion, but as absent as an object of analysis. As the

body is whatever discourse constructs it as being rather than the body that needs exploring in Foucault's work (ibid). Ultimately, the determining power of discourse means that Foucault's work goes no further than naturalistic accounts in allowing for a theoretically adequate view of the body. The body may be surrounded by and perceived through discourses, but it is irreducible to discourse (Shilling, 2003). However, Frank (1991: 49) recognises that bodies:

> "Do not emerge out of discourses and institutions; they emerge out of other bodies, specifically women's bodies. Bodies provide people with the means of acting, but they also place constraints on action. The corporeal character of bodies remains an obdurate fact. There is a flesh which is formed in the womeb, transfigured (for better or worse)in its life, dies and decomposes".

More specifically, Frank argues that bodies are the medium and the outcome of social body techniques (i.e. a combination of discourse, institutions and the corporeality of bodies), and that society is also the medium and outcome of those bodily techniques. For Frank (1991) discourses do not have the determining power they possess in Foucault's work but refer to ideas of the body's abilities and constraints which are experienced by bodies as already there for the self understanding. In contrast Frank suggests that institutions are physical places which are located in time and space. Body techniques are usually experienced as socially given, but are only instantiated in their practical use by bodies on other bodies. Moreover, body techniques are simultaneously constraining and enabling.

The chapter will therefore turn to explore the use of phenomenology in order to attempt to incorporate the view of the body as a corporeal phenomenon. In doing so this section of the chapter hopes to demonstrate that this corporeality does not disappear simply because

it is located in society, but becomes taken up and transformed as a result of its engagement with social relations. This study fully recognises that this is a promising basis on which to develop what is positive about social constructionist views about the body. So far this chapter has provided important insights into how older women's bodies may be affected by power relations, and the chapter recognises that older women's corporeality of the body also needs to be taken serious. As a feminist sociologist of age and aging one must always strive to expand the view of the body in ways which begin to overcome the dual approach sociology has traditionally adopted to the body as described in chapter two.

Exploring the phenomenology of embodiment: The importance of capturing the lived experiences of older women

According to Ritzer (1996) phenomenological thought has influenced the work of postmodernist/ poststructuralist theory. Therefore the concepts such as constructionism, situationalism, and reflexivity that are at the core of phenomenology also provide the grounds for these recent formulations. For example, the basis of poststructuralism that language is socially constituted, thus denying the possibility of objective meaning, is clearly entrenched in phenomenology (May and Williams, 2002). The procedure known as deconstruction (i.e. deconstructing formally taken for granted narratives and constructions) essentially reverses the reification process highlighted in phenomenology. The argument that knowledge and reality do not exist apart from discourse is also clearly rooted in phenomenology (Turner, 1984). May and Williams (2002) continue to suggest that postmodernism's emphasis on the representational world as reality constructor further demonstrates the phenomenological bent toward reflexivity. On the other hand, phenomenology has been used to reverse nihilistic excesses of postmodernism and post-structuralism (ibid). Importantly, phenomenology also finds room for a micro-social

foundation focusing on the actor as a constructive agent in theories of 'critical realism' (Layder, 2007). Henceforth, phenomenology advances the notion that human beings are creative agents in the construction of their social worlds.

While this is at the level of understanding, phenomenological concerns are also frequently researched in investigating social life by using qualitative methods (Ritzer, 1996). For example, some phenomenologists have conducted ethnographic research (using face-to-face techniques of participant observation and in-depth interviews) that has made the turn towards studies in which the body is a central feature of a particular milieu, be it boxing (Wacquant 2004), gym-going (Crossley, 2006), Karate-do (Bar-On Cohen, 2006), martial arts (Spencer 2009), or veteran runners (Tulle 2008). Such qualitative tools were used in these phenomenological research study's to yield valuable insights into the micro physical dimensions of specific spheres of human life and to exhibit the constitutive activity of human consciousness (Gubrium and Holstein, 1995). By using phenomenology through its in-depth qualitative gathering of intimate human feelings and meanings, the micro based theory highlights how individuals apprehend the means by which phenomena, originating in human consciousness, come to be experienced as features of the social world (ibid). According to May and Williams (2002) since phenomenology insists that society is a human construction, social science itself, and its theories and methods are also constructions, phenomenology seeks to offer a corrective to the field's emphasis on positivist conceptualizations and research methods that may take for granted the very issues that phenomenologists find of interest. In other words phenomenology presents theoretical techniques and qualitative methods that illuminate the human meanings of social life.

The central task in phenomenology is to demonstrate the reciprocal interactions among the processes of human action and reality construction (Sibeon, 2004). Rather than contending

that any aspect is a causal factor, phenomenology views all dimensions as constitutive of all others. Phenomenologists use the term reflexivity to characterize the way in which constituent dimensions serve as both foundation and consequence of all human projects (May and Williams, 2002). The task of phenomenology, then, is to make manifest, reflexively, the nonstop tangle of action, situation, and reality in the various modes of actually being in the world (ibid). Indeed, May and Williams (2002) provide the following breakdown of how this process works. Phenomenology begins with an analysis of the natural attitude. This is understood as the way ordinary individuals participate in the world, taking its existence for granted, assuming its objectivity, and undertaking action projects as if they were predetermined. Here, as demonstrated by the likes of Wacquant (2004), Crossley (2006), Bar-On Cohen (2006), Spencer (2009), and Tulle (2008) the language, culture, and common sense are experienced in the natural attitude as objective features of an external world that are learned by actors in the course of their lives. Human beings are open to patterned social experience and strive toward meaningful involvement in a knowable world. They are characterized by a typifying mode of consciousness tending to classify sense data. In phenomenological terms humans experience the world in terms of typifications (May & Williams, 2002). That is, people are exposed to the sights of their environments, including their own bodies and other people. They come to capture the categorical identity and typified meanings of each in terms of conventional linguistic forms. In a similar manner, people learn the formulas for doing common activities and the practical means of doing so are often referred to as recipes for social action (ibid). For example, actors assume that knowledge is objective and all people reason in a like manner and that each actor assumes that every other actor knows what she knows of this world. Thus, they all believe that they share common sense. Yet, each person's biography is unique, and each develops a fairly distinct stock of typifications and recipes for action,

thus, interpretations may differ. Here, Biggs (1999b) makes the point that phenomenological work encourages researchers of older women to gain an empathic appreciation of their participants' lifeworlds and enhanced affiliation with them through the use of biographical narratives that highlight their individuality and humanity. Where does the story of the human body begin? What is in fact meant by the 'body'? One can simply argue that the body is 'present', 'lived', 'real' and 'experienced.'

In his study entitled *Habit(us), Body Techniques and Body Callusing; An Ethnography of Mixed Martial Arts* Dale Spencer (2009) conduced participant observation in an MMA club and in-depth interviews with professional MMA fighters, in order to reveal how manifold fighting techniques are learned and deployed. Here, Spencer's study as briefly mentioned above joins recent ethnographic research that has made the turn towards studies in which the body is a central feature of a particular milieu. In the same vein as some of the other studies Spencer addresses a gap in the sociology of sport and body literatures regarding the processes related to the actual acquisition of embodied knowledge and concrete practices of accomplishing sporting activity. As discussed above Spencer notes how it is important to study bodies in constant flux and not as fixed bodies, nor as determined by a single causal factor. Here, Spencer (2009) suggested that this embodied ethnography is a hardening one: On the one hand he endured bumps on his shins and forearms, bruises scattered throughout his body, black eyes, cuts, torn ligaments and muscle soreness that is an obstinate bodily experience. On the other hand, Spencer also suggested that he gained a body of strength, speed, endurance, hardness and, foremost, a body capable of giving and taking pain. Following Crossley (2004) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) Spencer argued that it is important to focus on the learning of body techniques *in situ* that contribute to the production of a particular mixed martial art fighter habitus. This involved focusing on ways of training that instils body techniques. Spencer focused on the

role of reflexive body techniques in constructing a body capable of both giving and taking pain, an aspect that is necessary to participation in the sport. In addition Spencer also considered how the learning of body techniques is productive of MMA fighter identities. Consequently, In his analysis Spencer thoughtfully utilises a phenomenological conceptualization of habitus to discuss the production of an *MMA* fighter's habitus as a lived-through structure-in-process that is continually subject to change through the learning of additional body techniques and the working on the body in and through reflexive body techniques. Similarly, in her study entitled *The Ageing Body and the Ontology of Ageing: Athletic Competence in Later Life* Emanuelle Tulle (2008) demonstrates how older runners have taught her two lessons. First the older runners have shown her that the ontology of old age is not the aging body on its own. Biological aging does undoubtedly throw up challenges for the management of everyday life and for identity, as it did for these athletes. For example, the older women athletes Tulle interviewed successfully resisted their enfeeblement and confinement to reduced physicality. All of her participants, even those who had retired from athletics and subscribed to the dominant discourse of ageing described in chapter two of this thesis had achieved levels of competency normally not associated with ageing physicality. In essence Tulle (2008) asserted that they certainly all claimed an athletic identity, but, they were only able to do this by integrating themselves in a field in which they acquired new dispositions and aspirations which were rendered normal, irrespective of age. The second lesson that these athletes taught Tulle was that agency in later life need not be confined to the privatized fight against one's aging body. Tulle (2008) found that the field itself can become a site in which resistant embodied agency can be collectively worked out. The distinctive feature of Veteran athletes is that they do not deny bodily ageing. The field allows for an alternative ontological position with a reconfigured mind/body relationship.

Two options are available. The first one is that the mind and the body should act as one, but with increasing age or injury they begin to act against each other. The second position is that the mind and the body sometimes act as one but at other times, for instance during a race, when the body tires out, the mind can take over, thus Tulle reminds us that there is an instability, or fluctuations, in the mind/body relationship which is considered normal, not pathological. The ability to manage these fluctuations become part of the capital acquired in the process of becoming and being an accomplished athlete, albeit an aging one. From this, Tulle suggests that we have a socially rooted ontology. In effect Tulle's (2008) study reinforces the urge for the sociology of the body and the sociology of aging constantly to engage with the social and the cultural to make sense of the ontological dimension of aging. Doing otherwise would confirm the surrender of aging to biology.

Indeed, if the relationship between older women's self-identity and the body is one in which both are increasingly indeterminate and open to choice then it becomes important to ask what *choice* means in relation to one's body and, therefore, the processes which constitute embodied identity (Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 1993: 5). Drawing from the above studies it would appear that the position that needs to be taken up here, namely that the body must be conceptualized as an event (Budgeon, 2003) instead of an object challenges Giddens's (1991) theorization of an instrumental relation to the body where the body is brought into the self-reflexive biographical project as an object of choice. What has been argued here according to Budgeon (2003) is that feminist critiques, while effectively engaging with economies of representation, remain constrained in theorizing women's embodied agency and the choices women make about their embodiment because these critiques too often remain within a binary logic and consequently fail to acknowledge that the embodied self exceeds representation. To think outside or beyond representation is a problem which underlies the more general question of what it means to live the body

within and across multiple sites of connections and negotiations (ibid). As stated in chapter one this is not to argue that textuality cannot be implicated in the relation between self and body but for Budgeon (2003), Frank (1991), and Shilling (2003) it does not provide a wholly sufficient strategy.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the negligence of the body within the sociology of age and has highlighted the lack of a well articulated gender dimension. The chapter has argued that it is generally accepted that the body is central to the picture we have of ourselves (Featherstone, 1991; Goffman, 1968), and how writers have conceptualized body management practices as reflections of a contemporary notion of the body as a '*project*' (Giddens, 1991), or in Foucauldian (1893: 237) sense: "we create ourselves as a work of art", that is transformed in line with a 'developing sense of self' (Shilling, 2003: 187). Building upon the social construction of aging presented in chapter two, this chapter has again followed Foucault and explored the enterprising act of socially constructing fatness, or overweight and obesity, as an individual and collective problem. Here, the chapter interlinked food as a social practice and as communication in order to demonstrate how this process is complex and hence drew liberally on an eclectic range of scholarship (e.g. the sociology of the body, moral panic theory, Foucauldian critical weight studies etc) in order to present a typology of obesity epidemic entrepreneurs (that is, those who actively make fatness into a correctable health problem).

In doing so the chapter firstly, highlighted how negative constructions of aging have not only served to marginalise older women, but also marked them as unworthy subjects for academic investigation in this area (Tunaley et al, 1999). Secondly, the chapter has been framed around the argument that body work is as equally important for older women as it

is for younger women and that it is no longer simply a question of maintenance but one of lifestyle and choice. Shaping of the body through diet, exercise, and possible corrective surgery is a fleshy testimonial to the aestheticization of everyday life (Featherstone, 1992), a fascination with appearance, and some may argue the narcissisms of contemporary consumer culture (Lasch, 1980). In order to fully explore this area the chapter fully engaged with two Foucaults: the 'docile' (technologies of power) versus the active self (technologies of the self) in order to underpin the argument that weight-loss dieting is not only as a quest for the ideal body, but also as a process of working on the self, marketed with particular resonance and sold to older women, that cleverly deploys the discourse of self-care feminists have long encouraged. It was argued that until we recognize the power of this discourse, especially as cultivated by commercial weight-loss programs, feminists interested in the sociology of age and aging will be ill equipped to understand the perennial appeal of a self-disciplining practice that almost always fails its ostensible goals. In particular the chapter has uncovered the need to supplement existing feminist critical accounts of dieting (i.e. Bartky,1990, and Bordo,1993), which typically rely on the central explanatory concepts of either 'false consciousness' or 'docile bodies' to better understand its enabling moments. Such moments exemplify Foucault's thesis that the growth of capabilities occurs in tandem with the intensification of power relations, and how it is an area that has received little sociological attention and no feminist attention at all (McNay, 1992). The chapter therefore suggests that older woman's weight-loss dieting needs to be understood from within the minutiae of its practices, its everyday tropes and demands, its compulsions and liberations; and in turn, these cannot be resisted solely through refusal. To understand dieting as enabling is also to understand that we have reason to embrace the increases in capacities it permits without acceding to the intensification of disciplinary power it currently requires. Finally, the chapter grappled with the fundamental tension in

Foucault's approach to the body where it was ascertained that his theoretical underpinnings were insufficiently concerned with lived experiences. Consequently, despite all his references to pleasure and desire he ignored the phenomenology of embodiment. In recognising how this neglect has serious implications for Foucault's analysis the chapter engaged with Dale Spencer's (2009) phenomenological analysis to illustrate how corporeality does not simply disappear simply because it is located in society, but becomes taken up and transformed as a result of its engagement with social relations. In doing so it was ascertained that this is a promising basis on which to develop what is positive about social constructionist views of the older female body.

As reflected in chapter one The 'multivocalities' of language and 'interpretive repertoire', or discourse, that constructs representations of the social world and ourselves as varied, changing, and sometimes contradictory, has revealed diversity of meaning, challenging the assumption of a single underlying form or structure (Dunlap, 1997). With the advent of post-structuralist views and the concomitant acknowledgement of multiple realities (Biggs, 2005), there developed a need for methods of enquiry that offered less structure, ones that made allowances for the complex nature of everyday life (Dunlap, 1997). Following Foucault this research aims to explore how the cultural constructions of aging are played out in the weight-management setting? Identify how such constructions influence older women's self-narratives and others' expectations about their capacities, behaviours and concerns (Arber and Ginn, 1991). Also identify if and how older women are positioned differently in relation to body-management practices like dieting (Hetherington and Burnett 1994), such that both the meanings that women attribute to their experiences of weight loss, and the extent to which they can benefit from organisational resources, vary by their stage in the lifecourse. This is achieved through participant observation in two commercial weight-loss diet organisations and in-depth biographical interviews with the

older female participants. This study builds on other ethnographic research (albeit in a different vein) that has made a turn towards studies in which the body is a central feature of a particular milieu (Wacquant 2004; Crossley 2006; Bar-On Cohen 2006; Spencer 2009; Tulle, 2008). In doing so the study will reveal how this embodied ethnography is a hardening one; on the one hand, demonstrating how the docility of such a disciplinary regime captivates older women (including myself) and shows how such a regime can bring them suffering, and impoverish them in a sad but all too familiar spectrum of ways. On the other hand the study will also reveal how older women (including myself) found the practice of dieting empowering, and how it was also a means of self-discovery. In other words, there were real life pleasures to be had in a practice that has often been construed as completely repressive and dehumanizing. Thus, in this creative analysis, this normalising body-altering practice emerges as a site where a desire to care for the self is expressed and concentrated and where capacities for reflection, patience, labour, self-control, and new forms of pleasure are produced, even as rigid norms are enforced and the pain of failure is intensified and reinvested in renewed efforts to conform. Agency not only persists within this set of regimes, but in some significant respects it is magnified and cultivated through them. The next chapter presents a discussion of the methodology in order to show that freedom is an not an impossibility for a normalized subject, and the following two chapters aims to test out the conceptual discussions raised in chapters one, two, and three in order to marshal some evidence to convince the reader that this study is right.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Introduction

> "Qualitative research involves immersion in the situations of everyday life...These situations are typically banal, or normal ones, reflective of the everyday life of individuals, groups, societies and organizations....The researcher attempts to capture data on the perceptions of local actors "from the inside", through a process of deep attentiveness of empathic understanding (verstehen)." (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 6).

Chapter four provides an account of the conduct of the empirical research undertaken for this thesis. I discuss the choices that I have made to answer the key questions relevant to undertaking a social research project. For example which research method? What is the sampling strategy, and ethical considerations undertaken? How was the data collected and analysed? How can I remain reflexive? And so on (Bryman, 2004). In summary in this chapter I discuss how I follow Miles and Huberman's (1994) dictum of 'capturing data on the perceptions of local actors from the inside and from attentiveness of empathetic understanding' (verstehen) by detailing the methodology I adopted to uncover how the weight loss groups generated narrative strategies and opportunities for its members that were informed by cultural constructions of aging and the organisations interests.

The chapter discusses in detail how I adopted an ethnographic research methodology, utilising feminist interpretations of Foucault's approach to data collection and discourse analysis, to explore the narratives expressed by the participants both in the research arena's and in the interviews. It was my intention that through the process of analysis internalised social norms constructing gendered, aging, overweight bodies, as well as 'disciplinary' (technologies of power) and enabling (technologies of the self) discourses

could be identified. In doing so the aim was to access socially produced discourses that construct meaning in relation to older women's experiences of their transformation of the self/body and identity in the social location (weight-loss diet management setting) and the discursive resources made available as well as the subject positions formed and taken up.

For the purpose of this study, to facilitate the exploration of older women's personal experience of the self-transformation through bodily practices in a weight management setting, and the influence of dominant discourses in positioning women, I adopted a feminist perspective. A feminist perspective provides a useful orientation to investigate socially constructed concepts of gender, and seeks to give meaning to the subjective experience (Freedman & Combs, 1996). In the study I worked within a post-modern social constructionist framework. I applied Foucault's understanding of the use of discourse in power relationships, and how dominant discourses can sometimes blind older women to the possibilities of alternative positions and subjugate them to normative standards, thus eradicating individual agency (Budgeon, 2003; Tulle, 2008; Twigg, 2004). Drawing on Foucault's work, it was my intention to investigate the premise that the exclusion of certain discourses and the wielding of power allow certain people to silence and marginalize others while reifying and legitimising dominant discourses.

Here, meaning is derived from nuances of words and phrases as they are used in different contexts, including the many different social worlds, subcultures and languages in which older women often find themselves situated. These shared systems of meaning are drawn upon to communicate, and as mentioned previously any choice of analytic method needs to reflect the context in which the meaning was formed as well as how the researcher, as interpreter, mediates the process (Parker, 1994). I have therefore proposed the following research questions to guide my research.

1. How is a sense of the self constructed by the body/physical appearance, and how and to what extent (if any) do such constructions influence older women's self-narratives and other's expectations about their capacities, behaviours and concerns?
2. How do commercial organisations appropriate and debase the askeses-practices of self care that Foucault theorised, and how and to what extent (if any) does this increase an older woman's capacities at the same time as they encourage participation in ever-tightening webs of power?
3. How and to what extent (if any) are the cultural constructions of aging played out in the weight management setting, and are older women positioned differently in relation to body management practices like weight-loss dieting?

In chapter one I described how I wanted to produce sociological writing that starts from a common but fraught standpoint, that of the simultaneously critical and engaged feminist. As a point of departure this chapter will therefore turn to explore gender and the necessity of positioning in order to underpin the need for an autobiographical beginning. According to Jarviluoma et al (2003:1) gender is an important criterion in identifying ourselves and is central to the way we perceive and structure the world and events in which we participate. It influences "all aspects of our being, of our relationships and of the society and culture around us". Gendered conceptualizations, norms (what is considered to be proper behaviour), values (the personal characteristics that are highly valued), and attitudes to gender have a profound effect on the personal and social, the micro and macro levels of our lives (ibid). As demonstrated so far in this Foucauldian study, gender must be taken seriously in every kind and at every level of research, from practical choices to

methodological questions, as well as at every stage of the research process (Moi, 1990). Indeed, Jarviluoma et al (2003: 2) assert that:

> "In the analysis of qualitative materials, gender can be identified and analysed at all levels: at the individual/personal level (identifications, subject positions) and at the socially constructed and maintained discourses (texts, ideologies and social institutions). Likewise, of course, in-between these levels: how subject positions are negotiated within the prevailing gender systems and how gender discourses produce individual gender positions".

In research work, gender should be understood as a concept requiring "analysis, rather than something that is already known about" (Jarviluoma, et al, 2003: 2). The common sense understanding of gender should always be seriously interrogated. What is our common understanding of gender? How is it represented in cultural action and products? What kind of power structures does it produce? And what are the mechanisms by which we construct our understanding of gender? (Moi, 1990). The researcher has her own experiences of the gendered world and society. In other words the theory, research and the politics of gender are intimately related, and the theoretical stance in relation to gender in research has practical consequences (Krekula, 2007). For the purposes of this study the research act is held as inseparable from the interplay of a social context, its actors and overarching institutional realities, as well as the researchers own biography, disciplinary pre-inclinations and practical situation (Bryman, 2004). Having briefly ascertained the need for such a positioning the chapter will continue with a brief description of my biography in order to posit my disciplinary background and fully acknowledge how my interest was formed for undertaking this Foucauldian study.

An autobiographical beginning

It is important to note that nobody starts with a totally blank sheet and it must be recognised that "the view from nowhere [is] always a view from somewhere" (Spencer, 2001: 444). My view from somewhere developed in the following two stages. Firstly, during the past thirty years, I have joined slimming clubs several times, and for several reasons. As a younger woman I internalised some of the negative cultural imperatives that have been explored in chapter three by Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993). I was influenced by the negative stereotypes of overweight people which shaped my behaviour and influenced what I thought about myself and others (Ronai, 1997: 125). Here, my perceived 'overweight' body became firstly, a medium through which oppressive cultural norms of femininity can be expressed (and also resisted), and secondly, a project whereby "forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection transformation...and improvement via the normalizing disciplines of diet" (Bordo, 1993: 166). In viewing myself as being 'overweight' (i.e. of having a BMI of 26 and above), and imagining 'overweight' as being a cultural failure, I felt compelled through various periods of the life course to purchase body related goods and services in order to address and manage issues related to both health and physical appearance (Featherstone, 1991; Lupton, 1996), according to the dictates of idealized constructions of feminine embodiment (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Wolf, 1990). In doing so I became one of the 80 percent of women who diet at any given moment (Orbach, 1993). I remembered that on all of the occasions that I voluntarily joined these clubs I became self-disciplined into their regime and lost between one and two stone in weight. However, my engagement was always short lived (usually over a period of two to three months) and I seemed to put the weight back on quite quickly. As I approached what is considered to be midlife (my current age is 48 years) I have noticed that the same principles also apply to the process of aging, whereby some

women extensively compare themselves to and strive to achieve and maintain the physical attractiveness of youth and beauty (Goodman, 1994; Wolf 1991).

The second reason, I have entered the research field was for the purpose of undertaking a commercial slimming club ethnographic study for my MA in Research Methodology based at the University of Liverpool (2008) that predominantly focused upon the dieting community. Here, I became a fully paid participating member in order to explore whether members of the dieting club felt they were part of a supportive and cohesive community. However, despite my initial interest I started to become increasingly more interested in the role of an organisational setting and age in shaping individuals (including my own) experiences of embodied selfhood. In particular I observed that both the meanings women attributed to their experiences of slimming, and their opportunities for benefiting from organisational resources, varied by their stage in the lifecourse. Indeed, I found that these notions of a dominant ageist culture and a fixed path through clearly defined stages of standard life cycle are clearly subject to questioning by supporters (such as myself) of postmodern/poststructural social theory. By positing the older female body as a medium through which negative oppressive cultural norms are expressed, I became increasingly interested as a Foucauldian feminist in taking these ideas further (to Ph.D level) and engaging with the research questions mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. I shall come back to discuss my future engagement with both Weight Watcher's and Slimming World as the chapters progress, but for now the chapter will turn to discuss my decision to use 'Foucault's toolbox' and how I utilised feminist interpretations of Foucauldian discourse as a methodology, which emphasised the enmeshment of my subjective self and texts within the research. As the chapter progresses I will discuss the theoretical challenges that I faced in conceptualising my own 'truths' and power when using a feminist post-

structuralist/postmodernist philosophy. I will also discuss sensitivity concerning my constructions of 'truth', and my power over the research process when interpreting data which, arguably, became an object of discourse analysis in its own right. In addition I will discuss how this approach required me to engage in self-reflexivity and to heighten my awareness of the 'outer' social, cultural and discursive contexts of the research. I aim to demonstrate how engaging in self-reflexivity and analysing the 'self' can strengthen the discourse analysis through broadening my own discursively formed views and by exposing how my constructions and subjective experiences interacted with my research.

Using 'Foucault's toolbox'

Initially, as with any piece of research, the process starts in the library where one generates an interest in an area one wishes to explore further. Within chapters two and three I have taken the social constructionist approach and I have identified that my topic of interest has only been given very superficial attention. My disciplinary background is in sociology and social policy, and more recently I have engaged with Foucauldian feminist interpretations of the sociology of age and aging, which have provided a perspective from which to investigate the topic. Within chapter three I have staged my argument from a postmodernist/poststructuralist stance whereby I have constructed an argument that we are witnessing a decline, or the end of the era of grand narratives and theories (Giddens, 1991). Postmodernists/poststructuralists are anti-foundationalist and have according to Marks-Maran (1998) produced a revolution in many disciplines (in her case to nursing). Indeed, poststructuralist theory has been applied to research in the social sciences for over two decades. Since the development of 'second wave feminism' in the 1960s and 1970s, feminist researchers have been drawing on a variety of different theories to provide insight and understanding of the gendered power relationships and gender inequalities in society.

As demonstrated in chapter three poststructuralist theories appear to offer a new explanation of power relations in a postmodern society which is more flexible, and many feminist researchers have turned to poststructuralist theory as a consequence (Davies, 1995: Butler 1990). As described in chapters one and three Foucault (1980) argues that the self is not a fixed coherent personality as presented in humanist and positivist theory: instead it is positioned and positions in 'discourse'. This theory has led to the analysis of various discourses in research and discourse analysis is the main technique employed by poststructuralist researchers. However, as discussed in chapters one and three there appears to be two fundamental conflicts between feminist and poststructuralist theory which make them 'uncomfortable bedfellows' (Francis, 2000). The first is the clash between modernist (feminist) and poststructuralist positions; and the second is the poststructuralist aim of deconstruction compared to the feminist need for a system to explain the socioeconomic reality of gender difference. In this section it is argued that moral and emancipatory concerns are dismissed by poststructuralists as modernist truth narratives which should themselves be deconstructed rather than developed. Indeed, these theoretical incompatabilities will be further interrogated as this chapter progresses, but for now the chapter will turn to discuss Foucault and discourse analysis.

Foucault and discourse analysis

As demonstrated in chapter's two and three there has been a rapid acceleration in the social science literature that covers theoretical work under the aegis of 'Foucauldian' (Katz, 1996). These chapters have identified the ways in which his theory has attempted to understand how age and aging, the 'crisis of obesity', and weight-loss dieting practices are socially constructed by languages and used by professionals and disciplines in order to control and regulate the experiences of older people (in this case older women) and to

legitimise powerful groups (Katz, 1996; Biggs and Powell, 2002). For example, Foucault has been useful to explain how both aging and 'obesity' has taken the form of a 'surveillance assemblage' (Evans et al, 2008). There is a fundamental methodological premise in Foucault's work that discourses, as knowledge and truth claims, play a significant role in constructing what is 'real' for each of us (Bartky, 1990 ; Bordo,1993). However, as touched upon in chapters one and two, in terms of a Foucauldian contribution to research there has been a conspicuous silence. Indeed, authors such as Megill (1995) go as far to suggest that there are no such persons as 'Foucauldians' and that there is no such thing as a 'Foucauldian method'. The chapter will therefore turn to engage with Foucault's reluctance to clearly delineate a research method, particularly with respect to genealogy (ibid).

"I take care not to dictate how things should be" (Foucault, 1994:288)

Foucault (1994) himself disliked prescription and it is doubtful that he ever intended for researchers to suffer from that malaise to the point of being unwilling to make an intellectual commitment in outlining methodological possibilities (Kendall and Wickham, 1999). Indeed, discourse analysis is a flexible term and what one is actually doing is greatly dependent on the epistemological framework being drawn upon (Fairclough, 1992). According to Kendall and Wickham (1999) it would therefore appear that many scholars using discourse analysis within a Foucauldian framework have adopted a Foucauldian reticence to declare method through fear of being too prescriptive. In addition there are also those who refer to themselves as 'doing' discourse analysis because they loosely link their analysis to patterns of power and periodically cite Foucault with the assumption that this too is a Foucauldian discourse analysis (Graham, 2005). The point to be made here is that I have found it quite difficult to find coherent descriptions of how one might go about discourse analysis using Foucault. Perhaps the difficulty in locating

concise descriptions as to how to go about doing 'Foucauldian' discourse analysis is because as Megill (1995) suggests there is no such thing?

I am therefore fully aware of the awkward tension that exists when attempting to do postmodern/poststructural work whilst still satisfying the conventions of feminist academic writing and scholarship (Francis, 2000; Graham, 2005). Despite there being no model for discourse analysis qua Foucault, should one claim to be drawing on a Foucauldian framework there is a very real danger in one's work being dismissed as un Foucauldian if one doesn't get it right (O'Farrell, 2005). But how can I get it wrong when there are supposedly no rules to follow? Indeed, this appears to be an interesting but precarious dilemma that has an exclusive/exclusionary effect, and for this reason it is understandable that some theorists such as Megill (1985) have perceived Foucauldian theory as inaccessible and dangerous. So, why use Foucault to investigate social aspects of female aging and identity within a weight management setting? The answer to such a question lies in the fact that in chapters one, two and three I have engaged with postmodern/poststructuralist theories that often emphasise free play and flexibility, in order to formulate the argument that, with the erosion of the cultural constraints of the past and the proliferation of new bio-technologies more older women can "mould their appearance to how they would like to be" (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000: 132). However, I also recognise that while the body and self may appear to be a uniquely individual endeavour; it is an endeavour that is located within a specific cultural and historical context and is both produced and limited by existing power relations (Pitts, 2003: 34). Consequently, taking on board the points made in chapters one, two, and three, I have established that when the issue of social identity in later life is analysed Foucault's 'docile' (technologies of power) versus the active self (technologies of the self) are both useful in order to understand

weight-loss dieting as both a disciplinary and also as an enabling practice. In addition when considering the limitations of Foucault's interpretations of the body I have also fully acknowledged that the materiality of the body should not be denied. Following the work of Frank (1991), amongst others I argue that corporeality does not disappear because it is located in society, but becomes taken up as a result of its engagement with social relations.

In chapters two and three I have utilised Foucault's genealogy to "erect a scaffold for the specific purpose" (Gutting, 1994: 16) of exploring the differential ways in which female overweight bodies are "regulated understood and constructed" in old age by many distinct regimes (Nettleton, 1995: 233). Genealogy investigates the complex and shifting network of relations between power, knowledge and the body which produce historically specific forms of subjectivity. Foucault therefore links his genealogical studies to a modality of social critique which he describes as a critical ontology of the present (Katz, 1996). Foucault (1984: 50) explains that ontology of the present involves "an analysis of the historical limits that are imposed on us in order to create the space for an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them". Thus, genealogy is a form of social critique that seeks to determine possibilities for social change and ethical transformation of ourselves (Katz, 1996). In other words history does not stop and we should not allow this history to stop or allow it to settle on a "patch of imagined sensibleness in the field of strangeness" (Kendall and Wickham, 1999: 4); as Foucault (1980: 54) himself says, albeit in a different context "we should seek to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest". In fact Foucault (1975) openly said:

> "All my books ... are little tool boxes ... if people want to open them, to use this sentence or that idea as a screwdriver or spanner to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power, including eventually those from which my books have emerged ...

so much better ! (Foucault 1975: 'Interview with Roger Pol Droit', cited in Paton 1979, p. 115).

I regard Foucault as a careful, gifted, but elusive thinker and accept that his work is not the product of idle speculation or groundless grand theorising (Graham, 2005). I will therefore be using Foucault's box of tools in order to attempt to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power, and the taken for granted negative assumptions relating to aging, gender, and weight-loss dieting (Paton, 1979). My Foucauldian feminist study aims to develop what might be called a discursive analytic; a methodological plan with which I can set about doing a form of poststructural discourse analysis that is informed by and consistent with the work of' Foucault. In doing so it is hoped that my thesis, through a careful analysis of the above research questions can search for evidence that older women are being empowered through their internalisation of dominant discourses because other successes can follow their weight-loss. Having clarified the answer to the question so, why use Foucault to investigate social aspects of female aging? The chapter will continue to very briefly discuss the distinctions made between Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and discourse analysis informed by the work of Foucault. However, this is not a set of rules that I am attempting to display but a journey of how I try to negotiate the right moves in order to get to where I want to be. Sandra Taylor (2004:436) defines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as allowing:

> "a detailed investigation of the relationship of language to other social processes, and of how language works within power relations. CDA provides a framework for a systematic analysis – researchers can go beyond speculation and demonstrate how policy texts work".

In Taylor's (2004) discussion, distinction is made between two approaches to discourse analysis. This is principally between Critical Discourse Analysis which as we can see draws inferences from structural and linguistic features in texts and discourse analysis informed by the work of Foucault. The difference between the former, which Taylor (2004: 435) describes as paying "close attention to the linguistic features of texts" and the latter, described as "those which do not", is perhaps more complex than this. For a start, as mentioned earlier in this chapter there are more than just these two approaches to discourse analysis and other epistemological frameworks inform them (Kendall and Wickham, 1999). For example, in his introduction Van Dijk (1997) suggested that the entire 700 pages of the two-volume set on discourse can be an "elaborative answer" to a question, *what is discourse?* According to Ball (1993: 269) perhaps the common thread between analyses in the latter group is maybe not Foucault at all but instead a poststructural sensibility which is born of a "theorising that rests upon complexity, uncertainty and doubt and upon a reflexivity about its own production and its claims to knowledge about the social". The main difference between CDA and poststructural theoretical approaches (using Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard among others) to discourse analysis may be found in the characteristic avoidance of claims to objectivity and 'truth' by those in the latter tradition (Kendall and Wickham, 1999). The chapter will therefore turn to discuss the avoidance of claims to objectivity and truth in more detail.

Searching for 'truths'

> "If there were only one truth, you couldn't paint a hundred canvases on the same theme" (Pablo Picasso, 1966).

My ultimate goal is to attempt to provide possible answers to those consciously articulated questions presented at the beginning of this chapter. However, I do recognise that we

cannot expect the answers to be found in the 'final truth', nor even provisional 'truths' about the research phenomena (Jarviluoma et al, 2003). Rather they will be interpretations arising from an analysis, which, in turn is conducted systematically on selected material from a chosen theoretical perspective and position. Questions therefore arise as to how we can research 'truths' when there are no essential characteristics and no shared human experiences from which thematic schema or interpretive labels can be naturally conceived (Humes and Bryce, 2003). Butler (1990) argued that terminological categories to describe people, such as 'race', class, age, religion, ethnicity, sexuality and so forth, exist within a matrix of differences. It would be wrong to assume that filling people with these various components could allow researchers to come up with an assumption of what the 'truth' should be. This is because research categories for people and their experiences would take as many forms as there are people (Moi, 1987). In this sense, there is no one 'truth' about the subjective experiences of the people we research that is waiting to be unearthed. There is no one truth about the way we, as researchers or analysts, should make sense about the lives and experiences of others (ibid). According to Dunlap (1997: 48) in presenting theories of people and their life experiences, which are unstable concepts, all we as researchers can speak about is our personal observation of the discourses, the "assumptions, values, and worldview as they are embodied in communal practice" that people use to talk about the self. If our observation is all there is, then the histories and experiences from where our interpretations are formed must form part of our analysis. As demonstrated in chapters two and three older women are all subsumed by the 'truth claims' embedded within discourse; they participate in them, they perpetuate them and sometimes they resist and/or rebel against certain discourses (Tulle-Winton, 2002). According to Dunlap (1997) when considering that both subjugated and dominant knowledges are constituted by discourses in language use, which are subtle and often out

of the realm of consciousness it becomes a worthwhile objective for researchers to develop better understandings about their own discursive formations and power in order to minimise their power over the research participants and the research process. Therefore, I engaged in an analysis of the 'self', which involved me being stripped of my "creative role and analysed as a complex variable function of discourse" (Foucault 1977: 138). I analysed and brought to light the discourses that were unconsciously embodied in my everyday social interactions, which were in plain view but which I had previously failed to see. Wittgenstein (1953: 144) suggested we change our 'ways of looking at things' and see things through new ways. Indeed, as a student of Foucault I reject both a sovereign account of selfhood and the notion that power is external to selves and primarily prohibitive, thus I am trying to resist the feminist temptation to see older women, recidivist dieters, as mere dupes or victims of the normalising sexist ideologies and institutions that they at times recite and inhabit. Here, Wittgenstein suggests that we are sometimes held captive by our 'pictures of the world', thus we must approach the world through some kind of 'picture'. In other words we approach the world with some set of expectations and organizational or interpretive strategies, and when our pictures prevent us from imagining any alternatives for ourselves, we become imprisoned in a way of life; we become unfree (Owen, 2003). According to Heyes (2006) when applying Wittgenstein's analogy of a picture that holds us captive to weight-loss dieting practices, two ubiquitous pictures are especially dangerous. One is that of the self as a deep, discoverable nature hidden beneath our bodily surfaces and behaviours. The other is that of power as an external force that acts to prevent that true self from becoming audible and visible. Heyes maintains that these two dovetail at the point of the body, what she refers to as the canvas or stage where the deep self may or may not be able to express its nature in the face of powerful social institutions and ideals. With both these pictures operative but implicit and

uninterrogated in their thinking, Heyes (2006) suggests feminists have been unable to see how 'normalising' power actually works or what alternatives there are to its hegemonic dictates. As a result, feminist analyses of bodily practices such as weight-loss dieting have tended to be fruitless and even counter-productive. As detailed in chapters one and two feminists such as Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) have assumed that the means by which individuals are enticed into diet plans are largely representational or symbolic; as a result, they have misjudged the allure such practices have for older women who wish to develop self-control and a sense of autonomy, however limited, and thus have missed an opportunity to offer something better. In effect Wittgenstein (1953: 189) suggests that we should not be concerned with hunting out new facts but rather, he said, 'the essence of our investigation' is '*to understand something that is already in plain view*'. He suggested that the 'whole hurly-burley of human actions' consists of "unnoticed background activities that we react to and respond to without intellectual deliberation in our everyday lives that we live" (Wittgenstein, 1981: 567). For Shotter (1994) these background activities are depicted in language, they are used to describe our histories, our wants and desires and they are shaped as much by social contexts that we attempt to fit ourselves into as our socially constructed inner self from which we also act out. In response to each other, our histories and our background activities construct what we think about ourselves and how we understand our research participants in socially 'fitting' ways (ibid). Although some authors such as Moores (1993) and Probyn (1993) have expressed ambivalence towards researcher 'self-talk' and reflexivity, I argue herein alongside Shotter (1994), Graham (2005), and Heyes (2006) that individual researchers must seek to understand the contexts that they attempt to fit their own 'selves' into, as well as their socially constructed inner self from which they also gaze out before and during any attempts to understand the

'realities' of others. In support of my chosen methodology, I drew on Valerie Walkerdine's (1997: 59) guidance to make sense of my place in the research as:

> "it is an impossible task to avoid something which cannot be avoided, instead of making futile attempts to avoid something which cannot be avoided, we should think more carefully about how to utilise our subjectivity as a feature of the research process".

Indeed, the importance of exposing me and my discursive constructions within my research becomes evident when considering Walkerdine's (1997) view that it is impossible to avoid my researcher subjectivity because I cannot avoid it. I therefore advocated for the wise and productive use of researcher subjectivity in order to show others the active formation of my research interpretations. Kincheloe and McLaren (1998: 273) stated that:

> "research is conditioned by the way it is theoretically framed' and is 'dependent upon the researcher's own ideological assumptions'. Hence, I examined the discursive construction of my inner thoughts, against which I perceive everything, I challenged it and checked it against what other feminist poststructuralist authors had written. As well, I brought myself into plain view for others to see – for I could only present my research findings to others by providing them with a description of my conceptual lenses constructed from my own subjective and discursively formed milieu".

The process of analysing my own discourses was therefore essential in order to gain some coherent understanding of embodied experiences of those whom I researched, which was framed by my interpretation of feminist postructuralist theory. In so doing, my feminist positioning consented to pathways in which to listen to the texts of others and to investigate, interpret and elucidate individual uniqueness within an inextricable mixture of

historically contextualised social existences (Jarviluoma et al, 2003). The chapter will therefore briefly discuss researcher subjectivity.

Researcher subjectivity

The feminist researcher Harding (1986: 9) confronted the powerful foundations of scientific and social inquiry, and argued that:

> " claims to objectivity, value-free research and separation of the knower from the known, are myths masked by masculine constructions 'of what counts as a scientific problem and in the concepts, theories, methods, and interpretations of the research', which are 'not only sexist but also racist, classist, and culturally coercive".

In a similar light, Donna Haraway (1991: 188) said that researchers cannot do a "god trick of seeing everything from nowhere ...And like the god-trick' research is dominated by the masculinist-scientific 'conquering gaze... this eye fucks the world". For Patton (2001: 51) the pragmatic solution is to therefore avoid "futile debates about subjectivity versus objectivity because no 'credible research strategy advocates biased distortion of data to serve the researcher's vested interests and prejudices". Instead, my value-based inquiry in the true Foucauldian feminist tradition uses a reflexive approach to interrogate, explore and realise the influence of my own power, discursive formation and subjective positions over my research endeavours so that my unintended distortions would be exposed (Graham, 2005; Lather 1991; Etherington 2004; Sunderland 2006). As Patton (2001: 66) asserts researchers that acknowledge their subjectivity and who use value-based inquiry, "with the use of all of one's capacities through personal experience and engagement ... through ownership of voice and perspective" could more likely find results that have greater depth of meaning and authenticity (Biggs, 2005).

Indeed, when considering that power is embedded in discourse (as demonstrated in chapters two and three), historically through "an allegorical construction ... not as raw, bleeding facts but in textual production, in narratives" (Chambers, 1997: 77), it could be considered that historical processes might deprive researchers and their subjects of creativity in understanding and making sense of experiences and existences in the world. Yet, Foucault (1972: 185) suggested that his schema was 'to free history from the grip of phenomenology', not 'free history of thought from all taint of subjectivity' (ibid: 201). Therefore, by exposing and analysing my own autobiographical background, my discursive formations and the taint of my subjectivity on my research is what I consider to make my analysis honest (Jarviluoma et al, 2003). Harding (2003: xv) summed up this point by noting that: "our social activities both enable and limit what we can know. Distinctive kinds of thinking have distinctive material conditions". For Harding research can only be conducted and results presented as the researcher's version of a particular moment in history, filtered through their own constructions of the social milieu. Like other feminist poststructuralists/postmodernists such as Graham (2005) I advocate that researcher subjectivity through a reflexive engagement, better enables a depth of understanding of other individuals in society through enabling researchers to work with and against their own discursively formed meanings.

In summary, I would argue that discourse analysis informed by Foucauldian or other poststructural theory endeavours to avoid the substitution of one 'truth' for another, recognising that: "there can be no universal truths or absolute ethical positions [and hence].. belief in social scientific investigation as a detached, historical, utopian, truth-seeking process becomes difficult to sustain" (Wetherall, 2001: 384). For example, while

the 'truth' of Foucault's (1976) panopticism briefly mentioned in chapters two and three cannot be proven from genealogy, it can provide us with an idea with which to play around with as we explore the texts of biomedicine, or organisations (in this case dieting organisations) that impinge on the lives of older women. I would argue that: "the process of analysis is always interpretive, always contingent, always a version or a reading from some theoretical, epistemological or ethical standpoint" (ibid). Foucault's theorisation of the constitutive and disciplinary properties of discursive practices within socio-political relations of power is a demonstration of the postmodern concern with how language works to not only produce meaning but also particular kinds of objects and subjects upon whom and through which particular relations of power are realised (Luke, 1999). Thus, text work through discourse analysis drawing on Foucault aspires to dissect, disrupt and render the familiar strange by interrogating, as Foucault (1980a: 237) describes: "the discourses of true and false... the correlative formation of domains and objects... the verifiable, falsifiable discourses that bear on them, and ... the effects in the real to which they are linked."

My ultimate goal as a feminist discourse analyst is to explore the relationship between discourse and reality, interpret a hidden meaning, and mediate between the past and the present (Graham, 2005). The concrete representation of discourses is *texts*, or *discursive 'units'*. Here, they may have a variety of forms: formal written records, such as news information, organisational statements (the hypomnemata) and reports, academic papers; spoken words, pictures, symbols, artifacts, transcripts of social interactions such as conversations and individual interviews; or involve media such as TV programs, advertisements, magazines, novels, etc. In facts, texts are depositories of discourses, they 'store' complex social meanings produced in a particular historical situation that involved

individual producer of a text unit, and social surrounds that is appealed to the play (ibid). It is noted that texts are almost irrelevant if taken individually and it is their interconnection that makes discourse analysis valuable. As Graham (2005) explains, activity does not occur in a vacuum, and the discourse itself does not hold meaning. Accordingly, if we are to comprehend discourse, we must also understand the context in which they arise. Exploration of the interplay between discourse, text, and context builds the focus of the discourse analysis. Therefore, we must observe selections of the texts that embody discourses. We cannot simply concentrate on an individual text but only on a set of them, however, we must refer to the concrete bodies of the texts. Similarly, we should examine the context in which the texts were found and discourses were produced (ibid). This brings me to a point I made in chapter one with regards to the fact that it has been argued that postructuralism and feminism can be what Francis (2000) refers to as awkward bedfellows. Before moving on to discuss data collection and analysis it is therefore necessary to reiterate some of these theoretical incompatabilities in order to try to resolve or circumvent them.

Add poststructural theory to feminist projects and stir

In chapter two I discussed how feminism is an inherently modernist theory for the following three reasons. First, it supposes a founding subject ('woman', and the shared position of women because of their sex). Second, feminism is based on the 'truth narrative' that patriarchy oppresses women, and the moral assumption that such oppression is wrong, and that we should work to end this oppression. Hence feminism is an enlightenment project, born of the humanist, enlightenment idea that the world can be made a better place through human endeavour (Soper, 1990). This also supposes a continuous, and potentially socially improving, history; a third modernist tenet (Francis, 2000). Indeed, there is no

fixed definition of feminist research, yet feminist sociologists such as myself usually agree to its emancipator aims. However, such emancipatory concerns can raise theoretical tensions between the use of poststructural theory with feminist projects (Francis, 2000). As demonstrated in chapter three many feminists call themselves poststructuralists, and have used poststructuralist discourse analysis to further feminist aims. However, it has been argued by Francis (2000) that feminist discourses represent 'truth discourses'. As discussed in chapter three and also in this chapter for many poststructuralists (including myself), truth discourses or grand narratives exercise a power relationship, as they claim truths or moral connectedness and involve totalitarian generalisations (Shotter, 1993). Hence, the work of many poststructuralists (including my own) as demonstrated above endeavours to investigate and deconstruct such narratives to reveal the origins, hypocrisies, intentions and inconsistencies of discourses whose 'truth' we often take for granted. Indeed, the work of Barthes (1973) and Derrida (1966) aims to reveal the severance of 'positive truth claims', by deconstructing narratives to allow for textual 'play'. However, Soper (1993) attacks the androcentricity of poststructuralism by maintaining that its rejection of emancipatory metanarratives theoretically disempowers the oppressed and upholds the radical right. Indeed, Foucault himself admits the conservative insinuations of his work which joys in deconstruction as opposed to reconstruction (Francis, 2000). In essence Francis (2000) argues that without grand narratives it becomes impossible to generalise about power relations because such narratives are essential for explaining power differences. Bordo (1990) and Hartsock (1990) go even further, suggesting that poststructuralism is a reactionary male ploy to undermine feminist theory by depriving feminists of the conceptual tools they had developed to explain and combat their subordination. However, a number of pro-poststructuralist feminists have attempted to resolve or circumvent these apparent incompatibilities.

With regards to my sociological study I fully support the author Spretnack (1993) who argues that feminist researchers should not be tentative, but proud of their emancipatory aims and beliefs. As Davis (1997) points out poststructuralism encourages exploration with new ways of thinking and speaking and by utilising this perspective she reveals that she no longer has to feel concern about the contradictions or inconsistencies between the different theories she utilises. She asserts that she does indeed 'want her cake and wants to eat it', and that poststructuralism makes this possible: poststructuralist theory reveals the impossibility of coherence and unity. As demonstrated in chapter two and above there is no fixed definition of feminist research and we all think and behave in multiple and contradictory ways (McNay, 1992). Although the combination of poststructuralist perspectives with a feminist approach may be problematic, it will prove useful in my study in opening up new theoretical avenues, and provide explanations for processes which have previously baffled researchers. For example, how older women are being empowered by their internalisation of dominant discourses relating to weight-loss dieting practices, and how other successes can follow what is deemed to be an oppressive disciplinary regime. By deconstructing the powers of these discourses it becomes possible to see how both practices of critique and practices of body transformation can make us less docile, less obedient, less uncritical, and less afraid. And if we can become increasingly less of those things, who knows what else we might increasingly become? As Heyes (2006) notes, nobody never knows, exactly, how one will be transformed and this is true of any bodily discipline; to see and experience that truth, however, we must embrace the uncertainty instead of pre-labelling all but one chosen outcome as failures. I therefore fully comprehend that apolitical poststructuralism, which joys in deconstruction and textual

play, cannot, by its very nature, be used for *reconstruction* and change in the sense that many feminists would wish to attempt.

Indeed, following Francis (2000) I have demonstrated how poststructuralism has shown the weaknesses and limitations of totalising, modernist theories, and cannot provide emancipatory narratives with which to replace them. My challenge, then, as detailed in chapter one is not to embrace post-modernist and poststructuralist approaches wholesale as Marks-Maran (1998) argues, but rather to develop a new theoretical framework which can acknowledge the complexity of human interaction and power relations while also furthering emancipatory aims. In doing so I hope to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of this chapter and I will endeavour to make sure that the discourse analysis is intelligible in its interpretations and explanations, and that the process of collecting, analysing, and explaining the data is recognisable. This brings me to the next part of the chapter which details the research design.

Research Design: An Ethnographic Approach

> "Research design is a plan for collecting and analyzing evidence that will make it possible for the investigator to answer whatever questions he or she has posed. The design of the investigation touches almost all aspects of the research, from the minute details of data collection, to the selection of techniques for analysis" (Ragin, 1994:191).

According to Ragin, it is impossible for a researcher to account completely for how they went about conducting their research, given that qualitative research, like the aging process, is not seen as proceeding in a somewhat linear fashion. The process of qualitative

research may be described as a sequence of decisions. When you start your research and to propel it forwards you can make a choice between a number of alternatives at various points in the process, from questions to data collection and analysis (Flick, 2009). A key starting point when planning my research was to build upon reflections of previous experiences of the research arena's alongside, gaining knowledge of the relevant feminist and Foucauldian sociological literature concerning postmodernism/ postructuralism, the self, body, and identity construction, alongside some background knowledge of obesity, food ,and weight management organisations. Consequently, from the start I was extremely aware of the fact that "researchers are no more 'detached' from their objects of study than their informants....they have their own understandings, their own convictions, their own conceptual orientations" (Miles & Huberman, 1984: 8).

I define my methodological approach as ethnographic (Willis, 2000), and I am enthusiastic about slimming club ethnographic research as mentioned within my biographical beginning due to having adopted this approach within my MA studies. However, ethnography is quite difficult to define due to its varied association with different academic disciplines. One of the best definitions is that made by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 1) who describe it as a set of methods which involve the researcher participating:

> "Overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions-in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on issues that are the focus of research".

Traditionally ethnography involves the researcher moving into a community and living inside it for an extended period. I shall therefore turn to chart how I spent six months participating in both Weight Watchers and Slimming World's weight-loss programmes and begins with gaining access.

Gaining Access

> "In order to research social life and collect data for subsequent analysis and interpretation it is first necessary to gain access to sources of data" (Hornsby- Smith, 1993: 53).

As stated above if participant observation means becoming part of a group or organization then the question arises of how one can gain access to the sources of data. This means that the ethnographer has to be accepted as part of the group. Bryman (2004) suggests that frequently in literature within the practice of participant observation questions of access are regarded as methodological and theoretical inconveniences that need to be overcome. The period of moving into a setting' is therefore both analytically and personally important. One particular point that needs to be uncovered here is that when negotiating access into the organization it is necessary to be aware of power relations within the research arena (May, 1998). For example, if management are your level of entry into the organization (as in this case), it could incur some form of suspicion of your intentions. Taking on board these points I approached the two research arenas (Weight Watchers, and Slimming World based in the Wirral Peninsular) at the beginning of July (2011) and fully discussed the research intentions with the group leaders (who then needed to seek permission from a higher level). Permission was granted by the Ethical Board (based at the University of Liverpool, see Appendix B) and also by the weight management organisations for me to attend as a member for a period of six months. The chapter will therefore continue to discuss how I became immersed from which my feminist politics had until now kept me far away.

Welcome to the world of diet management organisations: The role of the ethnographer

As already discussed I have joined slimming clubs several times and for several reasons, thus I fully acknowledge my previous involvement and impact on the research setting (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993). From my own experiences of fatness and thinness it was ascertained that neither feminist nor biomedical perspectives on weight management have fully captured the complex nature of the practice or its variations by age, gender, class and ethnicity. As stated above I joined both organisations at the beginning of July (2011) and my motives for joining this time around was a complex mix of the personal and professional. For example, when I first entered the research arenas (and because of my feminist politics) I was very sceptical about weight-loss dieting practices because I was tempted to be 'captivated by the picture' of the beaten down, obsessive, and oppressed dieter as the irrefutably docile body described by Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993). In addition I was also aware that both Weight Watchers and Slimming World's dieting hupomnemata are very cleaver at touching a cultural nerve; they are quite evidently hackneyed, manipulative, and self-serving, and I felt that I should never lose sight of the fact that my focus is on commercial enterprises whose primary goal is profit. I shall therefore begin by describing the two research arenas in order to underpin how they are organised in terms of staff, members and equipment. Beginning with Weight Watchers this particular group operated within a community room situated within a large church. The community room was bright, airy, and fairly modern and upon entry members were instructed to formulate a queue in front of three tables that contained an array of consumer goods for sale. For example, the tables were littered with Weight Watcher magazines, cookbooks, sugar free sweets and bars, and personal journals etc. As you progressed in the queue two members of staff signed you in and then collected a fee of £4.95 alongside any

other items purchased. You then proceeded to the end of the three tables to a semi-private table (cordoned off with a flimsy screen) whereby the group leader assisted by another member of staff weighed you to document your weight-loss or (lack of it) and engage with some sort of discussion as to how you felt your week had gone. Once you had been weighed you were encouraged to remain to class (although this was not mandatory and many women disengaged themselves from the class upon completion of getting their weight charted). For those remaining to class there were rows of chairs placed in front of many bill boards advertising success stories, recipes and food products. Members could also help themselves to tea and coffee (a donation tin was provided for this service) and could sit and chat while waiting for the class to begin. The class usually began after around 40 minutes (depending on the amount of members coming through the process) and the leader would lead a group discussion involving the dieting process. Moving on to Slimming World the classes were held in a Liberal club (that remarkably contained a room downstairs which still only allowed men to frequent). Once you had entered the building you had to make your way up two flights of stairs and would be greeted by a member of staff. The set up almost replicated the Weight Watchers one described above. However, the room was far smaller and much gloomier and when large numbers stayed to class at it's more busy periods some members had to stand up due to a lack of chairs/space. Like Weight Watchers there were also plenty of consumer goods offered for sale alongside advertising billboards.

On my first visit to both organisations I had to fill in some forms and was given a pack containing three booklets that fully explained their diet programme. I was then weighed and told to remain after the class had finished in order to go through the diet plan with the leader and raise any questions so that I was fully able to follow the diet for the first week.

Most notably, the slimming consultants at both Weight Watchers' and Slimming World would allow members to choose their own ideal weight (i.e. after losing 10 percent of your body weight) as opposed to rigidly imposing the BMI as a measure of success, health and moral worth. Indeed, this tallies with Becker's (1963: 161) depiction of enforcers who:

> "Have no stake in the context of particular rules themselves, and often develop their own private evaluations of the importance of various kinds of rules and infractions of them. . . [E]nforcers, then, responding to the pressures of their own work situation, enforce rules and create outsiders in a selective way".

Because I was attending two different groups (i.e. Weight Watchers on a Monday and Slimming World on a Thursday) that had different types of programmes I decided to elect to set my target weight at a 2 stone loss (28 lbs) and follow each of the programmes over a two week period which turned out to be successful. The chapter will therefore turn to discuss how the programmes operate.

Playing the weight-loss game and trying to win

Weight Watchers programme is uniquely positioned on the website as allowing you to "play the weight loss game and win". The website suggests that this weight-loss programme is based on up-to-date science and has been tried and tested over the years by real people. The actual programme comes from experts at the weight-loss game which is "designed for living and losing" (weight that is). Weight Watchers utilise what they call a ProPoints plan of 29 points as a baseline, which is advertised as being a fantastic counting system (i.e. of protein, carbohydrate, fat, and fibre) that allows you to eat what you like, when you like, until you reach your daily total. For example, the main webpage for the *Discover Plan* indicates that 2 slices of medium sliced toast equals 3 points, and one large

slice of Weight Watchers (own make) thin crust pizza topped with vegetables equals 6 points. The main impetus of this plan is to guide you through the process of making healthier food choices and enabling you to eat more of the things deemed good for you and for weight-loss, and less of what they call the bad foods which are not good for you (with access to over 30,000 foods and 1,000 recipes and meal ideas). You get a weekly *flexi Points* allowance to play with every week too so you can have some treats (which in my case was usually alcohol) in order for you to be able to enjoy family nights out whilst still being in control of your weight-loss. For this plan I had to evaluate the points (calorific and fat content) value of everything that I consumed and write down in a food journal everything that I consumed which included a section for how I felt that particular day. I was also expected to drink plenty of water, have two servings of milk/dairy products, two bread/cereal products and five servings of fruit and vegetables per day. On the first day of joining the leader told me that "this is a new liberating plan, with much greater choice and flexibility!"

Unlike Weight Watchers the Slimming World programme which is known as *Food Optimising* does not require counting points or weighing food items (which is why they say it is so popular with older members). Their diet has the three following steps. Firstly, you are encouraged to choose from free foods from their *Extra Easy,* and their *Green* (Vegetarian choice) or *Red* (meat, fish, and poultry choice). Here, you are allowed to eat as much food as you like as long as you stick to these choices indicated by the plan and you can change them from one day to another or remain on the same choice for the duration of the diet. Step two allows you to make a choice from what they term as *Healthy Extras* which like Weight Watchers are two servings of milk/dairy products. Two servings of bread/cereal and five portions of fruit and vegetables which varies according to what plan

you are doing. Step three allows you to choose between 5 and 15 *syns* (short for synergy) which allows you to have treats such as biscuits, cakes, dressings etc and the syn values of thousands of food items are indexed in their booklets. For example, a penguin biscuit has a syn value of 5.5, whereas a 30g packet of kettle chips (crisps) has a syn value of 12.0.

Once I had established myself as a participating member I collected written materials, regularly visited Weight Watcher's and Slimming World's websites, attended weekly meetings (at different times throughout the day), and took every opportunity to talk to other participants whilst waiting in the queue to be weighed or when seated waiting for the class to begin. In order to build up trust and rapport I wanted to position myself as somebody who is both participating as a fully paid member within all weight-loss management procedures and as someone who is enthusiastic about the research subject. I wished to be seen as being flexible, as possessing an open mind, as somebody seeking to understand the participants own experiences of what their aging and overweight body meant to them? Some of the questions that I expected to preoccupy my fieldwork would be how the participants were motivated to join a slimming club? How others have influenced their decisions to lose weight? How they deal with the challenges they may face? How do the participants engage within various linguistic strategies for constructing identity in relation to the overweight body? Are those strategies informed in anyway by the organisational rhetoric that encouraged the client's commitment to slimming, and which in turn had been shaped by the cultural discourses that both devalue older women's bodies and link younger women's social worth to their appearance? How is weight-loss dieting enabling, (i.e. is it a process for working on the self that cleverly deploys the discourse of self care). Indeed, these are just a small number of possible questions that as an ethnographer I would routinely ask during the fieldwork and a copy of my ethnographic

guide can be found in (Appendix D). After our initial exchange I constantly reminded the participants that I am undertaking a Ph.D and the reasons why I wished to find out the information mentioned above. I wanted the participants to fully understand what I was doing and the reasons why I was doing it. I wanted them to understand my academic background so that they did not see me as being too independent from the research arena, at least in the context of the research I was conducting.

Through my participation and immersion in all aspects of the weight-loss programmes I found a lot of things about Weight Watchers and Slimming World were surprising, and the overall experience persuaded me of the need for nuanced microanalysis of the 'politics of the ordinary'- the plethora of everyday practices that form our habitus and that are held in place by hundreds of tiny instantiations. As detailed in chapter one my focus in this study is on the way Weight Watchers and Slimming World's tactics embody the paradox Foucault highlighted so well: that normalising disciplinary practices are also enabling of new skills and capacities. For example, I observed how deliberately losing weight by controlling my diet involved the self-construction of a 'docile body', through paying attention to the minutest detail. Here, as McWhorter (1999: 180) notes "docility is a major objective of most disciplinary practices" and at the level of the individual weight watcher it is assiduously cultivated. I observed how the obsession with measuring, recording, and hierarchy extends to the weight scales whereby members (including myself) engaged in absurd behaviours around the weigh-in. I will present the analysis of these behaviours more fully in chapters five and six but the point that I am trying to make here is that any evinced skepticism about Weight Watchers or Slimming Worlds' methods, or unchastened confession of deviance from their plan had to be actively suppressed by the leader 'lest the house of cards come tumbling down'. I observed many altercations between the member

and leader during this process and at times when pressed the leader could become abrupt or reprimand, reducing a delinquent member to feel somewhat humiliated. Like Heyes (2006) I have also never been in another adult setting where discipline was applied to such small behaviours and deviance addressed with such serious and inflexible responses from the organisations leader. In essence I fully witnessed how weight-loss organisations captivate people, bring them suffering, and impoverish them in a sad but all too familiar spectrum of ways as described by Bordo (1993). However, on the other hand I also began to fully understand the satisfaction that many older women (including myself) found not only in losing weight, but in working on themselves in however circumscribed a context. For example, in becoming aware of exactly how and what one eats and drinks, I realized that changing old patterns can have embodied effects, or setting a goal and moving toward it, are all enabling acts of self-transformation (Heyes, 2007). This component of dieting in part explains its popularity and function, and why simply providing information about the invidiousness of dieting without offering substitute activities to fill the same needs is bound to fail as a feminist strategy. During my six months of participation I lost over a stone and a half (23lbs), thus almost reaching the goal that I had set myself, and had the experience of reaching 3 of the slimming club landmarks (group congratulation of each 7lb lost). It is fair to say that I did find the practice of dieting empowering and found it to be a means of self-discovery. In other words there were real pleasures to be had in a practice that my feminist politics taught me to be construed as completely repressive and dehumanizing. In essence this normalising body altering practice can be seen as emerging as a site where a desire to care for the self is expressed and concentrated and where capacities for reflection, patient labour, self-control, and new forms of pleasure are produced, even as rigid norms are enforced and the pain of failure is intensified and reinvested in renewed efforts to conform. Agency not only persists within this set of

regimes, but in some significant respects it is magnified and cultivated through them. Yet, my taste of this empowerment associated with the slender ideal was unfortunately short lived because once I disengaged myself from the programmes (and no longer had to endure being weighed) my self-discipline to the regime (and exercise alongside it) somewhat slipped. Consequently, I regained all of the weight that I had lost which I can honestly say left me feeling disappointed and I toiled with Heyes (2006) idea that my weight gain could stand in for ethical weakness and a return to my old habits that I fought so hard to break. It also left me questioning my ability to adequately care for the self as well as to be responsible to others in terms of my health (Lupton, 2007).

So far this chapter has given a detailed account of my participation in the research arenas and has demonstrated how observation guides us to some of the important questions that we would wish to ask (Whyte, 1984). This usually took on the form of what Spencer (2009) called 'jottings' in the field book which are later turned into longer narratives. The jottings corresponded to particular events that illuminate the themes of the study. In relation to this study the field notes inform how particular techniques are transmitted between the trained leader and the older women, and between the older and younger women themselves. More generally, the field notes help to describe the nature of weight-loss dieting practices *in situ* (Spencer, 2009). For example, one of the most fascinating practices as briefly introduced above concerned the weekly weigh ins which will be discussed in the following analysis chapters. This exposure to the social scene over time and the observation of participant's actions were written up in full immediately after leaving the research arenas) and memos were made to prompt these questions within the small ethnographic interviews in the research field and expanded to the more in-depth biographical interviews. However, before commencing with a discussion on conducting

ethnographic interviews with older women, I feel it is necessary to raise some of the criticisms surrounding how the powers of observation and selection is reliant upon my abilities as an ethnographer. For example, within his criticism section, May (1996: 154) directs us towards the fact that within participant observation it is possible that researchers will omit a whole range of data in order to confirm their own pre-established beliefs, leaving the method open to the charge of bias. In addition, it has also been argued that small scale settings leaves it open to the charge that its findings are local specific and not generalizable; thus lacks external validity. In other words it is not necessarily the case that another researcher would have found the same findings. In response to this criticism all I can do is argue for the validity of my findings because I have approached the project in a reflective self aware manner (Silverman, 2005). As already mentioned I endeavoured to have the older women's experiences as the starting and finishing point (Stanley and Wise, 1993), and this successful execution will depend upon my skills as an ethnographer, my understanding of the issues which inform the research practice, and practicalities (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Having clarified this point the chapter will now progress with a discussion of how I conducted ethnographic interviews in the research arena in order to utilise the cultural resources at my disposal.

The Ethnographic Interviewing of Older Women

> "It is best to think of ethnographic interviews as a series of friendly conversations in which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants. Exclusive use of these new ethnographic elements, or introducing them too quickly, will make interviews become like a formal interrogation. Rapport will evaporate and informants may discontinue their co-operation" (Spradley, 1979: 58-59).

Spradley (1979) suggests that ethnographic interviews that take place within the research arena should include the following elements that distinguish them from just being 'friendly conversations'. Firstly, the participant ethnographer should request to hold a small interview resulting from a particular observation taking place that can address the research question. Secondly, the ethnographer needs to fully explain the project once again and reiterate the ethical considerations. During the fieldwork I held many small ethnographic interviews (none of which were tape recorded) which proved particularly useful for obtaining comparative views from older and younger members (some of which are utilised in the analysis chapters). However, while these small ethnographic interviews proved useful for clarifying the production of statements, I soon realised that at times the making and maintaining of interview situations became problematic because of the open fieldwork. Consequently, I found it more practical not to solely rely upon spontaneity, but to build up relationships and rapport with participants, and take the opportunity through regular contact to invite them to be interviewed where a time and place can be arranged exclusively for the interview. The form of sampling that I employed was purposive or theoretical sampling which is most often associated with ethnographic research (Atkinson, 2001). This involved the selection of cases for analysis on the basis that they potentially serve to build, expand upon, corroborate or refute an ethnographer's interpretation of what is happening within the research arena (Bryman, 2004; Willis, 2000). Sampling is undertaken because it is concerned with the refinement of ideas as opposed to strengthening statistical rigor (Willis 2000). Here, as the ethnographer I actively sought to create and subsequently disprove their emerging understanding with regards to the events they are concerned with (Bryman, 2004). This involves the selection of cases for analysis on the basis that they chiefly serve to expand, collaborate or even refute an ethnographers interpretation of what is going on within the research arena (Willis, 2000). In order to

address my research questions which aim to draw attention to the importance of both an organisational setting and age in shaping individual self/body and identity work, in order to identify positive and negative identity constructions. My sample population was therefore designed purposively on the basis that to be included in my study women had to be over the age of 55 years and had to be a member of either one of the two groups indicated which are all based on the Wirral Peninsular. The participants had to be involved in the purchasing of body-related goods and services (Featherstone, 1991), whereby they receive particular accounting strategies for both the cultural shaping of the body alongside the cultural constructions of aging, which perpetuate positive and negative identity constructions. It is estimated that for good social research dictated by purposive or theoretical sampling technique would require an interview sample use of between 25-50 people (Bryman, 2004). At the beginning of the data collection a total of 38 women aged between 55-75 years actually agreed to take part in the study. All 38 women were invited be interviewed after I had been in the research arena for approximately two months, and a total of 36 women were eventually interviewed for this study. Among them 29 were aged 55-65 years and the following 7 were aged 66 plus (see Appendix E for interview details). All of the participants were white and lived in the Wirral area at the time of the interview. Here, it must be mentioned that I made a tremendous effort to try to obtain a representative sample whereby I could explore how older women of different ethnic backgrounds experienced weight-loss dieting, but unfortunately I was unsuccessful. Among the older members the majority had been married/cohabitated and twelve were divorced, and six were widowed. A total of thirty two participants had previously attended commercial slimming clubs at some point in their lives, dropped out and then rejoined. The chapter will now turn to discuss conducting the interviews and how the interviews have been used extensively in discourse analysis.

The use of interviews in discourse analysis

For the purpose of this study I conducted face to face in-depth biographical interviews that focus on manifold issues related to older women's aging and weight-loss dieting trajectories. It was ascertained that in-depth biographical interviews would serve to complement the field notes described above in so far as to explore how they reveal the 'backstage' (Goffman, 1959) reflexive body techniques that the older women engage in both inside and outside of the research arenas. As discussed in chapter three the notion of biography is central to understanding older women's meanings and experiences of mind and body relevant to the lifecourse. Older women make their own biographical histories across the lifecourse and from the earliest age to old age, they create biographical narratives to create a sense of coherence and self-identity (Biggs, 1999). By tracing an individual's life career trajectory over the lifecourse, the concept of biography allows us to document the development of their unique configuration of personal powers, skills and emotional-cognitive capacities as they emerge out of the interplay of social involvements and constraints. This is because biography refers to the comparative development of variable powers between people, while tracing specific individual's experiential trajectories of across the lifecourse and the unique social configurations in which they are enmeshed (ibid). Having clarified the use of biography, for the purposes of this study I adopted a constructivist approach to interviewing for the following reasons. Firstly, the constructivist approach requires a much greater sensitivity to the interpretive procedures through which meanings are achieved within the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Harris, 2003). Following Gubrium and Holstein (1997), I wish to prioritize the '*how*' questions as opposed to the '*what*' questions: In the Foucauldian sense the research focus is on identifying meaning making practices and understanding the ways that older women in my sample participate in the construction of their lives. In other

words as a constructivist I am interested in the ways that the social activities taking place within the slimming clubs are organized and conducted. As a good starting point for beginning the discussion about interviewing I have drawn upon Sennett and Cobbs (1972: 43) suggestion that:

> "The researcher first has to define some criterion by which he can judge the people he will interview as "representative" of other people's feelings. Then, he must decide what kind of questions will be meaningful to a person as representative of some larger group. Third, he must find some way of boiling down the responses he gets so that he can make comparisons between different groups of people...The poll thus requires the pollster to know in large what he is doing and what he wants before he talks to anyone"

The chapter will therefore turn to explore how I went about talking to the older women about their experiences person to person and asking them the right kind of questions (See Interview guide in Appendix F).

Asking the right questions and following the ethical guidelines

From conducting a small pilot study I came to the conclusion that most people like telling me about their life journey and with a little encouragement from me (as the interviewer) provided some useful accounts of their experiences in the interviews. The pilot study allowed me to refine my research questions (so I knew what I was doing before I talked to anyone), test out the ethical procedures and make sure that I presented myself to the interviewees in the correct manner. My aim within this thesis is to empower older women, thus I drew on the work by Mishler (1996: 118-119) who states:

> "Various attempts to restructure the interview-interviewee relationship, so as to empower respondents are designed to encourage them to find and speak in their own voices. It is not surprising that when the interview situation is opened up in this way, when the balance of power is shifted, respondents are likely to tell stories. In sum, interviewing practices that empower respondents also produce narrative accounts".

Once the pilot studies had taken place the individual older women identified from within the two groups were invited to participate in biographical interviews to talk about their personal experiences of managing their aging bodies and identity through diet. The women who agreed to participate in the research were each offered the choice of being interviewed at a local coffee bar or café, providing it is not too busy or noisy; within my office at the University of Liverpool; at one of the research locations; within the participant's home if this is the most appropriate location due to possible mobility restrictions. Of the 36 women interviewed 2 took place in my office at the University of Liverpool, 7 within the research location (as detailed earlier), and the remainder took place within the participant's home. Prior to conducting the interview the participants were each given a participant's information sheet (see Appendix C) which detailed the aims of the study, safeguarded any rising sensibilities and informed them that the interviews would last around one to one and a half hours (which eventually yielded approx 56 hours of data). As mentioned above the aims of the interview are to explore rather than interrogate (Kvale, 1996), thus I was concerned with establishing myself as somebody they could trust. I wanted to position myself in their eyes as somebody who was enthusiastic about my research topic, possessed an open mind. While I understand that asymmetry of power cannot be totally overcome within the research context I felt it could be minimised in this case in relation to gender as both myself and participants are female and of a mature age (ibid).

When I first met the interviewees I used the process of signing the consent forms to present myself successfully. At this stage I advised each participant that their privacy would be respected and confidentiality would be maintained throughout the research. Participants were also allocated pseudonyms (which they chose themselves) in order to replace their real names within the thesis and were informed that any identifiable features would not be included. There are no specific harms, risks or disadvantages associated with being involved in this project therefore the principle of no harm is being adhered to and beneficence will be shown to all participants by the researcher. I provided two copies of the consent form for each participant (see Appendix F). One copy was signed by the participant prior to being interviewed and kept by the researcher, while the second copy was given to the participant for their information. The form addressed the following three elements of consent separately, which are consent to participate in the research; consent to audio recording of interviews and consent for information to be used in publications. For participants whose first language is not English, consent forms will be read out and verbal consent recorded (however, the entire sample spoke English). It was also ascertained that personal contact information will only be used by the researcher to arrange interviews and to inform participants of completion of the thesis in order to offer a summary of findings. At this point I also discussed the possibility of follow up interviews by telephone in order to obtain any extra information and the entire sample agreed that this would be possible. As informed consent principles demand the ability for participants to set limits on the level of their disclosure (Flick, 2007), personal boundaries will be respected and if participants did not wish to answer specific questions, they were informed the interviewer will move on. Participants were also advised that they could withdraw from the interviews at any stage throughout the process and if that happened individuals would be asked if the information they have given so far may be used. If they agree to this, the partial interview

will be kept until completion of the project when the data may or may not be used depending on the relevance of it. If the participants did not want any part of their interview to be used, the recording would be erased and the reason for withdrawal established. This information would be included in evaluation of the thesis. The interview schedule would be subject to a process of iterative design which may refine the questions or the focus of them during the early stages of the fieldwork. Once this procedure had been carefully followed I felt that this helped me build a rapport between us and because I was also participating in the study I felt it was easier to develop the flow of conversation as I obviously needed to communicate to some extent the local language. I framed the questions using everyday language as opposed to sociological language because I did not wish to stop people in midflow, and ask them to clarify what they meant when discussing certain words or phrases. After the initial exchange I would once again remind interviewees that I was undertaking a Ph.D and briefly highlighted my background which I felt helped in them seeing me as being too independent from the organization and the context of the research.

From conducting the pilot interviews it was quickly ascertained that I should become a good listener and wherever possible avoid interrupting a story or to stop a story if I deemed it to be irrelevant. During the interview I encouraged the participant to talk about specific times as opposed to asking about their life over a long period (Elliott, 2005), and I also tried to be aware of the way interviewees said things (did they raise their voice at key points). I looked for non verbal signs of good rapport such as open body language, good eye contact and so on (Bryman, 2004). I was pleasantly surprised at how easily the participant opened up to me. They talked frankly about their bodies and *how* they had changed throughout the lifecourse; how they internalized both positive and negative

cultural discourses throughout the lifecourse, their rationale for joining the organization; and *how* they attributed age with dieting etc. This relates to the earlier discussion of the constructivist approach priotitizing *now* questions and identifying the *meaning making* practices and understand the ways in which they participated in the construction of their lives (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997).

Upon completion of the interview the participants were invited to ask questions and were informed that they would be offered a copy of the transcribed interview for verification and their personal information if they wish to receive one. They were offered a summary of the research findings after completion of the thesis. I also assured the participants that the next stage would be to transcribe the digital recordings and that the recordings would be stored digitally on a password protected computer within a locked office within the University until the thesis was completed to enable the interviews to be replayed if necessary to clarify or reanalyse data. The chapter will now turn to discuss the process of discourse analysis.

Keeping my head down: concentrating on the discourse analysis

Although there are some useful computer packages available for assisting with the analysis of qualitative data I preferred to use colour marker pens and colour coded folders to help me organise and analyse my interview scripts. Stage one of the preparation processes involved firstly, organising the field notes, research diary entries, and organisational literature (hupomnemata) in preparation for the analysis. Secondly, I had to clean up the transcripts in order to eliminate pauses and any repetitions in order to make the material easier to read (Elliott, 2005). As discussed earlier in this chapter there are several descriptions of what constitutes discourse and discourse analysis, thus it is necessary to

continue to explain my understanding of these which has developed through an interpretive reading of Foucault. In addition, because of my avoidance in appearing to be too prescriptive the next section is again not a set of rules that I have followed but is a journey that I have taken to get to where I wish to be in terms of my feminist interpretation of Foucault's discourse analysis.

As already ascertained in this chapter discourse analysis is the main technique employed by poststructuralist researchers. Chapters two and three have drawn on the work of Foucault (1977) to underpin how discourses are perpetuated by social structure and practices. By analysing discourses my aim was to deconstruct or open up the 'text' or social practices to different readings. As already ascertained in each of the chapters presented so far, the self is not coherent, but is positioned and positions in multiple, shifting discourses. Hence, instead of studying the 'thought' of a person (as though they have a coherent personality which can be studied), discourse analysts study the spoken and written texts, in which discursive constructions can be identified. As a general point of departure qualitative analysis is often started by analyzing and counting the distribution of answers question by question. The researcher selects some sections of participants discourse as providing the satisfactory answers to her questions, whereas other parts of participants' discourse are ignored or treated as unimportant (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984). Generally these authors claim that it is assumed that this procedure will result in a logical and coherent picture of the researched groups actions or views, and can be generalized to classes of social action (such as information seeking behaviour) and to whole groups of actors (ibid). Gilbert and Mulkay 1984: 2) continue to assert that:

> "The difficulty with taking a collection of similar statements produced by the participants as literally descriptive of social action is the variability in the

participant's statements about a particular topic. Not only do different actors tell different stories, but over an entire interview, it is often exceedingly difficult to reconstruct or summarize the views of one participant, because each actor has many different voices"

I therefore abandoned the assumption that there is only one truly accurate version of the participants' action and belief. I am fully aware that interview talk is, by nature, interpretation work concerning the topic in question. In other words it is a reflexive, theoretical, contextual and textual, because the objects of talk surrounding the gendered self/body and identity construction in weight management settings are not abstract ideal entities that everyone sees in the same way. When talking about their experiences of the self/body, dieting and identities the older women do not only produce a neutral description and express their opinion, they produce different versions and this version contains an evaluation (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). After reading about the many different ways of 'doing' discourse analysis I finally established that a practical way of dealing with discourses from a Foucauldian perspective is proposed by Kendall and Wickham (1999) who suggested that one should act on Foucault's (1972: 11) advice to regard discourse analysis as "the breaking down of the material according to a number of assignable features whose correlations are then studied". Hence, the level of analysis limits to the structure of the statements and the active types of connection that unite them.

In order to achieve this I firstly carefully read and reread all of the field notes, small ethnographic interview notes, research diary, and the weight management's hypomnemata in order to limit the field of research to a reasonable amount of data. Remembering that statements make sense according to the rules they follow I began to analyse them using different coloured marker pens and folders. For example, my aim was to disrupt these

discourses in order to open up the text in order to explore new ways of thinking and speaking. In other words I wanted to be able to open them up to new theroretical avenues and provide expolanations for the processes that had previously puzzled researchers. In order to achieve this I read and reread the field/notes, research diary, organisation hupomnemata, and the biographical interview transcripts and broke them down into the different discourses. For example, taking the coloured pens and folders I constructed the following discourses: biomedical discourses (statements that convey biomedical attributes), Social biographical discourses (statements that convey social rules and normative expectations) and familial discourses (statements that convey gendered responsibilities), and supportive discourses (statements that convey the possibility for new capacities) to name but a few. I then placed the accounts relating to these discourses into different coloured folders. In doing so I was able to carefully compare and contrast all of the accounts from each of the participants and link them to the field/notes and organisational hupomnemata. As mentioned earlier the aim of this part of the analysis was to engage with the self/body relation, and in particular this discourse analysis tends to privilege representational practices in the constitution of the body. However, as detailed in chapter three and also in this chapter this can be problematic because it results in the disappearance of the material body behind layers of representation as opposed to the lived body (Radley, 1995: 7).

In recognition of this limitation I did not wish to simply treat bodies as though they are the 'natural' foundation or passive surface upon which culture overlays a disciplinary system of meanings (Budgeon, 2003). In other words during the analysis process I was at all times fully aware that Foucault's form of social constructionism does deny the body as a lived entity by capturing 'the body only insofar as the analysis can only show how its functions,

its movements, its "inner" and "outer" workings, have been shaped by social structures and discourse' and leave the body as flesh marginalized (Radley, 1995: 7). Indeed, as described throughout this chapter if the relationship between self-identity and the body is one in which both are increasingly indeterminate and open to choice then it becomes important to ask what: "choice means in relation to one's body and, therefore, the processes which constitute embodied identity" (Shilling, 1993: 5). In my attempt to bring materiality back into the terms of analysis of subjectivity I fully acknowledged that this demands the initiation of a different ontological strategy, one that goes beyond a division between materiality and representation. In doing so the movement advocated here is towards a way of thinking, not about what the body means but how it becomes through a multiplicity of continuous connections with other bodies (Budgeon, 2003). In other words where bodies are not just restricted to other humans or organic entities but opened out to the possibilities of connections with the inorganic as well (ibid). This part of the analysis aims to show how our being cannot be reduced to an effect of the consumption of images but instead is the result of various forms of self-inventions which occur within embodied practices which also are not effects of representation but sites of production. This part of the analysis aims to reveal how the self/body configuration is one which is lived via its immersion in a multiplicity of sites, knowledge's and processes, and required that I therefore had to understand the choices older women make in 'doing' embodied identity. This required me to move beyond reductionist accounts, away from questions about what women's bodies mean to question what the older members in the sample can actually do with their bodies.

Having charted in this chapter how I went about collecting and analysing my data, the chapter will now conclude before moving on to discuss my research findings in chapters

five and six. As already discussed in this chapter I have used an ethnographic research methodology and feminist interpretations of Foucauldian discourse analysis has been employed to carefully review the field notes, small ethnographic interviews, the organisation literature, the research diary, and the older women's biographical accounts.

Conclusion

The literature review I conducted, which covered various aspects and perspectives on the older female self/body and identity construction in a weight management setting, exposed me to a world of discursive constructions and experiences of these areas that I have and to some extent not been previously aware of. I feel this greatly advantaged me in that it helped me to contextualise and expose me to some of the issues that surround the older female self/body and identity within the research arenas. At the same time, I also acknowledge that by allowing the literature to frame my understanding of aging, gender, self/body, and identity through weight-loss diet management my ability to engage with the discourses presented by the women I interviewed could potentially have been skewed, with me privileging certain discourses over others. In line with postmodern/ poststructuralist approaches, I have attempted in my analysis to minimize the influence I brought to the process in order for the discursive constructions of the women interviewed to emerge. For this reason I have incorporated many of their own words in the following analysis. It was my intention to reflect the subjective experiences of the older women interviewed. I do acknowledge the inter-subjective nature of the relationship between myself, as the researcher, and the older women I interviewed. I also acknowledge that my framework of understanding will have an impact on the analysis presented in the next two chapters. With this in mind I strove to maintain a reflexive approach during the process of analysing the discourses employed by the older women and the analysis of the three

research questions with regards to Foucault's technologies of power and technologies of the self. In this chapter I have staged an argument that the work of Foucauldian feminists on dieting, would be more complete if it mirrored the phases of Foucault's own oeuvre, showing how not only technologies of power but also technologies of the self are engaged in a complex interplay. In the next chapter the analysis will focus predominantly on Foucault's ('technologies of power') account of disciplinary practices to show that deliberately losing weight by controlling diet involves the self-construction of a docile body through attention to the minutest detail (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993). In doing so this will underpin the analysis in the next chapter that engages with Foucault's technologies of the self in order to show that the disciplinary practices of what one eats and drinks and realising that changing old patterns can have embodied effects, or setting a goal and moving toward it, are all enabling acts of self-transformation (McNay,1992). As detailed in chapter one this thesis is weighted in favour of its conceptual underpinnings, thus by observing these conceptual ideas and testing them out in the following two chapters I hope to show that the two commercial enterprises have co-opted working on oneself in ways feminists need to understand in order to resist.

Chapter five: Research Findings

Introduction

As explained in the concluding comments made in the above chapter, this chapter will present discourses employed by the women interviewed to expose and explore the ways in which women come to discipline and survey their own bodies by engaging in practices which produce their own 'docile bodies' according to the dictates of idealized constructions of feminine embodiment (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993). The slenderness ideal, according to Bordo embodies moral judgments of the proper management of impulse and desire, with body shape and size increasingly being read as a visible indicator of the inner moral self. In the reading and analysing of the transcripts I noted that the disciplinary practices explained by these authors and also by Heyes (2006) arose in the biographical journey's of the older women interviewed. What struck me was how each woman interviewed expressed her own constellation of discourses, which, when considered together, comprised a unique experience and associated meaning. Here, this illustrates that any given individual in any given society, can contain multiple, shifting and often self-contradictory identities. Thus there are many ways of being (McNay, 1992). The analysis begins by exploring older women's desires to transform an aspect of their embodied self and embark on weight-loss dieting because they act on beliefs about the possibility and desirability of losing weight for the sake of their health. As chapter three of this thesis discussed it is an accepted truth that we are almost all too fat and that losing weight with the exception of anorexic, ill, or permanently thin individuals, will have positive health consequences (Heyes, 2006). All thirty six older women interviewed presented a biomedical understanding of weight gain and all attributed their dieting to concerns about the health implications of being overweight. Here it must be noted that biomedical words such as 'obesity' are a necessary part of this empirical work in order to demonstrate how

‘fatness’ has been medicalized, and how medicalized thought, talk and action takes “weight as a primary determinant of health, wellbeing and moral worth” (Evans et al 2008: 13). The chapter will therefore commence by exploring these concerns through the following older women’s journeys. Importantly to protect the anonymity of the older women in line with the BSA ethical guidelines (http://www.britsoc.co.uk), they have all been given pseudonyms. It was my intention to reflect the subjective experiences of the women interviewed.

Setting the scene: Older women’s desires for self-transformation and motivations for joining a commercial weight-loss dieting organisation

Biomedical discourses

> “Our health is our wealth dear and it’s up to us to see that we look after ourselves when young and old” (May age 75).

Drawing from ideas such as biopower (the governance and regulation of bodies through appeals to life, risk and responsibility), Monaghan et al (2010) has explored how the social construction of ‘obesity’ discourse has taken the form of a ‘surveillance assemblage’. The following analysis demonstrates how the web of expert medicalized judgments surrounding the body is concerned with the measuring of populations (Lupton, 1997:10). Here, I prefer to argue that this ‘rationalized’ approach to borrow from Ritzer (2004) can more accurately be viewed as a ‘rubber cage’, rather than and ‘iron cage’ simply because standardized weight tables are artifacts of actuarial insurance company definitions that were themselves never based on comprehensive statistical information (Gaesser, 2003). Since the 1980s and 1990s when obesity began to be seen as a global epidemic (WHO, 1998) this rationalized approach is currently statistically determined through the BMI

(body mass index). This index suggests that a person with a BMI over 26 are considered to be overweight, while those with a BMI of over 30 are labelled as obese, and those with a BMI of 40 and above are morbidly obese. The following older women's biographical accounts highlight how the web of expert medicalized thought, talk and action that takes 'weight' as 'a primary determinant' of health, wellbeing and moral worth (Evans et al., 2008: 13) and how dieting is seen as the most 'popular form of corrective' (Bordo, 2003: 202). Alice (age 57) who appeared in the opening account in chapter one who is divorced and works as a caterer told me that:

> *"I went to visit my GP because I have suffered from back ache since sustaining an old netball injury in my 20s. The GP weighed me and told me that I was very overweight and almost bordering on being obese... He went through the health implications of being obese with me and then told me that I would have to try to lose the weight myself through healthy eating and exercise...I therefore joined Weight Watchers and have taken up yoga in order to change my life for the better*".

From this analysis it is a matter, first, of recognizing the desire for body/self transformation that regimes of normalisation have produced and cultivated and the capacities for sustained self-discipline and self-reflection that individuals caught up in those regimes (surely to some extent all of us are developing). And then it is a matter (a feminist matter) of working through those regimes and discourses to open them up to unanticipated possibility. In addition to Alice's account Gillian (age 56) described how she recognised her desire for body/self transformation from being depressed after a rather difficult divorce led to her putting on weight. Gillian described how she overate for comfort and at one point also became alcohol dependant to get through her pain and explained:

"I initially went to my GP as a cry for help because I was abusing my body with food and alcohol which simply made me more depressed...My GP is a good listener and was quite supportive because I have known her for donkeys years...After a few tests my GP discovered I had type 2 diabetes which can be controlled through medication and diet...She told me I am morbidly obese and she explained in medical terms how bad this is for me...Seeing her and gaining the information has given me the wakeup call I needed to join Weight Watchers and do something about it to take some control of my life again" .

In addition Pat (age 59) who is married and works as a social worker told me that she was at present 'on the sick' after an operation on her shoulder went drastically wrong which led to her being unable to use her arm. Pat informed me that she has been going through a lengthy court battle to gain some compensation after the medical establishment admitted liability. Pat informed me that:

"I could show you at least six or seven doctors reports that I have had done in the last two years since starting my claim for compensation. The reason why I have joined Slimming World and intend to lose all of my excess weight is because on every single report, each doctor has began their report with the words Mrs Jones is a 59 year old obese lady...I know they are only doing their job but I was referred to them because a surgeon botched up the operation on my arm, not because I am supposedly obese...Anyway, these reports made me cry, so now that my claim has been sorted I have decided to do something about it to make myself feel better"

The above accounts demonstrate the trust involved in accepting the medical expertise of doctors' medical staff, (that there is a normal range to which everybody bears a relationship) and acquiescing to the demands involved in the treatment process (that deviation from the norm is read as proof of behaviours that can be pathologized, and that conformity is evidence of good health or conduct). Here, the focus of treatment was on the body: the site of intervention. In the process the body was closely monitored, observed and

manipulated, resulting in the production of what Foucault termed 'docile bodies'. As Gillian (56) went on to explain she had been given some medication to help with the type 2 diabetes and was told to also adjust her diet which meant giving up sugary foods etc. Gillian informed me that she has to attend a clinic in order to monitor how her body responds to the medication and said: "*In my case I took the advice seriously and did I was told which resulted in a positive appraisal*". In addition Pat (59) told me that: " *Whether I believe that I am obese or not these doctors have now sowed the seeds of doubt and when I looked up the complications associated with being obese on the internet I have become obsessed with getting my BMI down to under 24*". The following accounts from Collette (age 55) and Jane (age 58) directly and indirectly further touch upon another important theme that has emerged in chapters one, two, and three of this thesis: namely that weight gain (slower metabolism and middle aged spread) is seen a consequence of the 'inevitable physical decline and deterioration' bound up with stereotypes of the biomedical discourses of old age, rather than as a marker of personal failure (Tunaley et al, 1999: 756). Here, Collette (age 55) went on to describe her 40s as a significant milestone with regards to her entry into midlife (Gullette 1997) and as being the start of her concerns with regards to health and appearance (Featherstone & Hepworth 1997). Collette who is a married catering supervisor states:

> *"I had a hysterectomy in my late forties and have just piled the weight on because I think my metabolism has slowed down...I used to be able to eat loads more than what I do now and never put the weight on...I went to the doctors because of this and he has told me that I can lose it with a healthy diet and if I stepped up the exercise...It's really hard though as I love my food and drink and accept that putting weight on is part of getting older*".

In a similar vein Jane (age 58) who is divorced and works as an accountant noticed that:

"Since going through the change my body shape has altered a lot and I have now got this middle aged spread that I can't seem to get rid of like I used to... The nurse told me that some women do gain weight as they get older and that I would need to be more careful about what I eat or drink in the future to keep the weight under control. She also told me that because I have a desk job I need to also take up some kind of physical exercise".

As demonstrated above, for some older women paying closer attention to diet and health have not been lifelong practices. Jane continued to tell me that she was a bit surprised by the change in her body shape which seemed to "*suddenly come from nowhere*". When Jane turned 50 she told me that she should thought that she should start paying more attention to her physical condition and, with self-deprecating humour, describes how she bought some exercise equipment to enhance her weight-loss this time round, and told me that:

"*my daughter and son poke fun at me because I have bought myself an exercise bike out of the catalogue and have it parked in the middle of my living room floor so that I can sit and cycle while watching TV...I got this idea out of a magazine and thought I would give it a whirl...My children think I am having a midlife crisis and that I will soon get bored of it and that it will go either in the loft or on ebay...Maybe it will, but for now it seems to be working and I have even been out and bought myself some gym clothes and trainers to maybe take up some light jogging*".

For Jane, there is the sense, which she attributes to reading things in the mainstream press, that as she gets older she should take better care of his physical self. First, good health, fitness, and the ability to engage freely in a variety of activities are assumed of those in normative (not-too-young, not-too-old) age categories. In other words, 'mature' able bodied active adults are the normative age embodiment category; witness clothing,

catalogues, television shows, advertisements, etc. In the contemporary UK, individuals define themselves and are defined by others, consciously or not, in relation to the dominance of this category (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1998). In addition, talking about these issues is a mechanism by which older women accomplish age and embodiment in interaction, as they talk about themselves and their bodies to a noticeably younger and ostensibly able bodied person. In other words they 'do age'. Here, Judith (age 64) who is married and a retired grocer told me that she decided to join Weight Watchers because she also felt a decrease in her energy levels had impacted on her weight gain. She told me that:

> "*The thing about age at the physical level is that I think I just do not have the kind of energy I used to have when I was younger... I mean, there's a lot of physical things that I just don't do anymore...I have accepted that slowing down is natural as you get older and because of that you are bound to put on some excess weight*"

Gail (age 65) a divorced dog breeder echoes this point and states that:

> "*I feel I have slowed down a lot from when I was in my late 50s...I run a dog breeding business so I have a lot to do and I need to walk the dogs a lot...I have found that I have slowed down a lot and now my daughter has started to take over the manual side of the business for me...I have put on a bit of weight which is understandable if I am eating more without doing enough exercise*".

'Slowing down' appears to be a recurrent phrase. However, it is not always negative. For example Judith (age 64) says; "*I actually feel I kind of earned it, you know? I mean, like it's time to slow down and take it easier*". In addition, while she acknowledges that she has slowed down, Gail still describes herself as more energetic than most people of her age. Carmel (age 64) who is single and a retired bar maid told me that:

"I think a lot of people tend to slow down and sit by the fire when they get old... I personally don't like to do that. I like to keep moving... I'm one of those people who just can't sit and do nothing. I have to you know, be active and I have to be even more active than usual now because of this weight that I have put on"

Carmel claimed that together, this level of energy and her relatively high activity levels are part of what keeps her healthy and feeling younger than her chronological age. Carmel suggests that:

"I have joined Slimming World to help me to keep going with looking good and feeling good. Even though I am retired I still want to be smart in my clothes and I feel that I can pretty much keep up with what I used to do, or have done most of my life... I'll still do a lot of things that I did before. I go roller-skating with my godchildren because I can't find anyone [my age] to go roller-skating with, and this helps me to keep fit too".

Similarly, Brenda (age 67) who is a married housewife also joined Weight Watchers on the recommendation from her health practice nurse after finding it difficult to lose weight as she aged and explained:

"I used to be stick thin when I was younger and was only a size 10...but now I have slowed down and I have had to buy size 18 clothes to hide this enormous stomach...Being this big made me feel ill and depressed so I joined Weight Watchers and since losing 3 stone I feel much healthier and I am also pleased because I look better now and am now in a more respectable size 14...the hubby thinks I look better too and I am not as grouchy [laugh]".

What we can see from Brenda's comments is that while health appeared to be the main motivation for losing weight she soon directed her attention to her appearance. Here,

Brenda has indicated how clothing size is also a measure of her body's acceptability (or lack thereof), and has described a size spectrum that has ranged from a more negative size 18 to a more respectable size 14. In effect Brenda has constructed an exemplar of the ideal slim female who can purchase and wear attractive clothing that she contrasted with the deviant, obese case (Cordell & Ronai 1999). In being a size 18 she had differentiated herself from women with more 'acceptable' bodies, and upon regaining a more acceptable size described how that had pleased both herself and also her husband. In effect this shows that like younger women, older women like Brenda are also concerned about weight (Hurd Clarke 2002), and that gender differences in body satisfaction exist throughout the life span (Pliner et al. 1990). Here, Brenda's desire to transform an aspect of her embodied self clearly demonstrates how the body is inhabited partially through its definition by normalizing forces of idealized body images. In a similar way to Brenda, Alice (age 57) explained that she often felt under pressure to change aspects of herself and said:

> "*In the summer months I always feel more pressure because people are able to walk round in skimpy tops shorts that show off the tops of their arms and legs, and I can't do that because my arms and legs look fat and ugly*".

The data collection process for this study did begin in the summer months and ended in the winter and this did have a bearing on the amount of pressure that older women felt they had to lose weight. For example, I spoke to Alice by telephone during the late autumn and winter months (because she had dropped out after three months) about the pressure to change aspects of herself and she told me that: "*It's a lot easier when you can cover up parts of your body that you don't like... So you don't have to worry about showing too much flesh*". This point was also reiterated by several other older women in the sample as well as the younger members I spoke to during the fieldwork. Indeed, these points will

continue to be emphasised as the chapter progresses, but for now the chapter will turn to explore social biography discourses that convey social roles and normative expectations relating to both health and appearance in more detail.

Social biography discourses

> *"Little pickers wear big knickers"... "Eating better' makes us look better and feel better"... "Remember there is a thin person in you screaming to get out and stay out...Don't let all your hard work go to waist (as in your body waist)"* (Weight Watchers consultant 2011).

Chapter three illustrated how women's slimming practices have been widely criticised by feminists, who see them as a reflection of the 'cult of thinness' that equates a female's social value with her physical appearance (Hesse-Biber, 1996). For example, Foucauldian feminist writers such as Bartky (1990), Bordo (1993) have associated weight-loss dieting with the tyranny of slenderness and the enforcement, by patriarchal disciplinary practices, of an ideal body type that carries a powerful symbolism of self-discipline, controlled appetites, and the circumscription of appropriate feminine behaviour and appearance. Young (1990) writes of the socialization into femininity and the context within which subjectivities are constructed. She notes the subtleties of everyday micro-level interaction and practices that outline messages of what's expected. In chapter three I outlined how in a Foucauldian feminist analysis dieting was understood as a disciplinary process that serves to construct 'docile bodies'. Here, Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) have recapitulated Foucault's (1977) arguments in *Discipline and Punish* that the production of 'docile bodies' requires coercive attention to be paid to the smallest details of the body's functioning, partitioning its time and space under relentless surveillance. Social biography

discourses create situations in which older women feel they are being evaluated in relation to social norms and pressurized to conform to the 'normative gaze' relating to youth and slimness. The chapter therefore aims to analyse the ways in which social pressures from partners, friends, family members, and society played a part and how these pressures often undermined their confidence and ability to feel good about themselves. This section of the chapter will therefore begin with exploring the ways in which media representations organized their own, as well as others; ideas about how their bodies should look. It could be said in the following examples that their bodies are problematized through the normative effects of the discursive constructions of femininity or the internalization of body images constituted through phallocentric representational economies-assumptions that underlie many feminist analyses that rely upon the body as materiality inscribed by or constituted through representation (Budgeon, 2003). For the following older participant's, appearance is the principal dimension of embodiment. Andrea (age 59) who is a divorced support worker returned to this theme repeatedly. She admits to feeling shame and discomfort, and some anger and bitterness, at the changes in her appearance wrought by time. Andrea admits to feeling old in the context of appearance and said:

> "*In a lot of ways, I look much older than a lot of women 59. I have sagging skin and some of that is due to a lot of sun damage and yo yo dieting throughout the years...This excess weight that I am carrying around my legs really gets me down. Look, at my thighs and fat knees...I look older than women of 65...I can't put up with being fat much longer because it makes me look older than what I am*".

From this sample, Andrea seemed unusual among my participants in that she seemed very deeply hurt and troubled by the changes in her appearance. When I asked her if she could identify the sources of those feelings, she pointed to her earlier career in dancing when she told me she was very slim, fit and agile. Andrea feared that however hard she dieted she

could never regain the way her legs and body used to be when younger. In a similar way Suzanne (age 55) who is married and works as nursing home assistant told me that:

> "*I am young at heart and I am always conscious about the way I look...It really annoys me sometimes that the bodies in magazines are never old and wrinkly and are never fat and flabby...They are always perfect when in reality that isn't the case...I am also conscious of the fact that when we are watching a TV programme or film my husband always compliments the thin people as having a nice body and looking good...He never says that about me because I don't have the perfect slim body, and I don't look good*".

Interestingly, Suzanne continued to explain that she saw the movie *A Streetcar Named Desire* starring Vivian Leigh, Karl Malden, and Marlon Brando many times when growing up. Suzanne recalls a famous scene where Karl Malden takes a woman by the hair and puts her under a bright light bulb and he says: "*how old are you? My God, you're an old woman*". And this is like a betrayal to him. She's old and she'd been presenting herself as an attractive woman. But because of the fact that she's old, that automatically made her unattractive and he rejected her horribly... Suzanne told me that this film had a tremendous impact her, that men, when they would find out that you're old would treat you like scum. She felt that she also lived with this betrayal through being old and overweight and was therefore extremely upset when her husband compliments the younger and slimmer actresses and takes little notice of her.

However, Val (age 58) who is a divorced shop assistant is not especially gullible. In her interview, she makes numerous observations about the artificiality of a Hollywood appearance. But her observations illustrate an important dimension of meaning. She knows that the ever youthful appearance of celebrities depends on surgery, makeup techniques, air brushed photos, and lighting and camera angles. She knows, in other words, that

celebrities ''show their age'' just like everyone else and are also prone to put on weight if they give up the regime. Despite this knowledge, Val nonetheless told me that:

> "*I feel permanently insecure about my own appearance because of the pressure from magazines that tell you what to eat, what to wear, how to have sex, how to be more womanly, and generally tells you what to do and when to do it... I feel pressured to keep up with the fashions, with the latest hair do, and also to keep as young as I possibly can...I think you are also meant to be skinny and there is a lot of pressure on us to be thinner and to stay that way..As much as I know what's going on I always still dream of looking that good*".

These older women clearly demonstrate an acute awareness of the mediation of their own relationship to their bodies and their relationship to others by media imagery and have identified the normative nature of this mediation. In addition most of the older women who took part in this study also made some reference to the ways in which ageism has a stronger impact on women than on men (Rice 1989), particularly their evaluation and experience of their body. For example, Joanne (aged 57) who is a married bakery assistant argued: "*when my husband got grey hair he turned into a silver fox, but when I got grey hair it was a sign that I wasn't looking as young anymore so I felt pressured to dye it*". Collette (age 55) echoed this point and said:

> "*my husband is not impressed when he see's my grey hair coming through and he moans that I am looking too old...I sometimes feel very pressurised by his comments because although he doesn't say it he still wants me to try to still look as young, slim and as sexy as possible*".

Of course other older women such as Thelma (age 65) are more comfortable with the changes in their appearance over time and despite the fact that she has worked as a dental receptionist for over 35 years, she is largely unconcerned with her own appearance. She

colours her hair "*because it demonstrates the fact that I'm not afraid of it,*" and she wears it in a casual style because "*it does not take a lot of time*". However, with respect to clothes, she says:

> "*I've always had a good figure and worn clothes with ease...I must admit that I have not felt comfortable putting on weight because it has affected my self esteem with regards to feeling uncomfortable and not looking as good in my clothes*".

Similarly Sally (age 61) who is a children's nurse argued that when her partner puts weight on:

> " *he just laughs and says he is more chunky and it suits him...but when I put weight on he said it makes me look older because I don't look as good...meaning I don't look as sexy in my clothes when we go out*".

In addition Val (57) admitted that while the media had some bearing on her reasons for joining Weight Watchers she felt most of the pressure had came from her husband and declared that:

> "*He knows how to get under my skin and whenever we have a row he throws it up in my face that I am starting to look old, fat, and frumpy, and that If I don't get a grip he would stop taking me out and would start looking elsewhere...I told him he was no oil painting himself, and to go for it...but he just laughed and told me that women look much worse than men when they get grey hair, wrinkles, and put weight on...To this day I don't know whether he really meant it but his comments did deeply trouble me*".

In effect the above accounts reveal how aging can undermine women's traditional sources of power. Joanne, Collette, Thelma, and Val all report to a point becoming socially invisible (feeling they are no longer the focus of male attention, sidelined in the power

stakes, and finding no reflection of their situations in the cultural imagery of advertising or the media). While cultural representations of women's bodies may work towards discursively constructing bodies in particular ways, such texts were encountered by the older women interviewed in ways that suggested that they connect with these images and their own bodies in critical and subversive ways. As stated in chapters two and three and earlier in this chapter media projections of images of thin, fashionable and glamorous women were often cited as contributing to the discontent they felt with their own bodies (Bordo, 1993; Wolf 1990, 1991). The chapter will therefore turn to explore these bodily deficiency discourses in more detail.

Deficiency discourses

Deficiency discourses are about negative self-judgment: about seeing the self as somewhat lacking. Concomitant feelings expressed were often a sense of inadequacy, failure, disappointing others, and the feeling of being ashamed of oneself as decribed by Goffman (1963) in chapter two. For example, Carol (age 55) suggested that:

> *"I am now on the wrong side of the fifties and I am conscious of every wrinkle and of every roll of fat that I get and I strive to do as much about it as I possibly can to try to look good for my age...Some of my friends that are the same age are more relaxed and have accepted the wrinkles and weight gain as a sign of age...I am not like them because I don't want to let myself go until I have no choice"*.

Here, Carol clearly defines old age and weight gain as abominations and imperfections that generate fear, animosity, and distancing (Goffman 1963). As detailed the stigma associated with aging and of being overweight has been internalized by Carol (as a spoiled identity, or disrupted biography) and experienced as a profound sense of shame and aversion towards her own and other older women's bodies (Jacobs 1990). Carol further

demonstrated how due to being involved in an RTA she put on weight because she could not exercise and tended to over eat for comfort. Carol went onto explain: "*I didn't get much sympathy from my husband and two kids who told me I was getting too fat and to get a grip...they all teased me for looking old, fat and frumpy and called me Heather Trott off Eastenders*". She continued to tell me how this affected her self esteem and that she joined Weight Watchers to help her become more disciplined in terms of food management and said:

> "*I joined this club not only to get my husband off my back to prove I was serious about losing the weight, but also because I need to carefully monitor what I eat and drink and I need to get weighed each week to keep me focused...I have become more obsessed about food limitation because I am still unable to exercise due to my injuries...So far in six weeks I have lost a stone and I feel so much better and much happier too...This has also reduced the fat jibes that really got to me*"

Carol's biographical journey demonstrates how the powerful influence of others appraisals has led to her 'felt identity' (Goffman, 1963), and further demonstrates that you are as young or old, or as fat or thin as others make you feel. This point was also illustrated by Jean (age 56) who is currently separated from her partner and is employed as a court clerk, who explained:

> "*I have noticed an influx of younger female court clerks recently and unlike me I started to feel a few pangs of jealousy when I noticed the attention they got from the male barristers, solicitors, court staff, and even clients...I have always been quite smart in my attire but after putting on a lot of weight and getting to a size 20 I started to feel a lot older and less attractive and this affected my self esteem and to a point my work...I suppose what I am saying is that I am trying to keep up with the younger clerks by regaining a more slimline figure and so far I have trimmed down to a size 16*".

Similarly, Margaret (age 61) who owns a cattery told me that:

> "*We have recently moved house and my partner found an old photograph of me when I was younger and a size 12...He said he would take me on a cruise if I could get back to being a size 12 to 14...I fancy a cruise so I have joined Weight Watchers and also the gym to help me help me get from being a size 18*".

In addition, Joanne (age 57) explained that: "*just getting to a size 16 has given me a buzz because I can now just grab clothes off the rail and they fit...I am going to have a makeover when I get to a size 14*". As demonstrated these constructions of the slim ideal alleviate the negative identity implications of being overweight by contrasting the speaker favourably with a 'worst case scenario' (Cordell and Ronai, 1999). As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, having lost weight the majority of the older women in this study have characterised clothing size as a measure of their body's acceptability (or lack thereof). For example, Sam (age 58) explained the process of self-assessment and said:

> "*At present I am a size 20 so I can't just go into the likes of Top Shop and get something that fits me because they start from a size 8 and only go up to a 16...my goal is to get to a 12 so I can go in there and buy myself something to wear instead of relying on the drab clothes you get in the likes of Evans*".

Here Sam in a similar way to Brenda (age 67) who was mentioned earlier has also described a finite spectrum that ranged from the more desirable 8 to 10 through to a more a respectable size 12 to her own size 20. Rather than distancing herself from the deviant, Sam's narrative located her at the extreme negative end of a body-size continuum. Other older women who took part in the study also expressed negative self-perceptions by

contrasting their experiences to those of slimmer family members or friends. For example, Denise (age 58) explained that she joined Slimming World because:

> *"I was sick and tired of never looking good no matter how much I paid for my clothes...I could never just walk into a shop like my friends and pick up a dress on a hanger try it on and it would fit me".*

Similarly, Thelma (age 65) expressed that she tends to go shopping with her sister who is nice and slim and explains that:

> *"my sister is lucky because she can just pick up what she wants, try it on and then looks fabulous when we go out...But for me I struggle to find decent clothes that fit me and end up buying from outsize catalogues which are more expensive and I am left with the sinking feeling when trying it on that it may not fit and I would have to send it back for an even bigger size".*

This point was also highlighted by Jean (age 56) who said:

> *"I am the fat one in my group of friends who has to go round Evans or M and S looking for something to wear while they can go to the more trendy shops with ease...I joined Slimming World because I could not do it on my own and I really want to do it this time so that shopping is less of a drag and I can look as good in my clothes when we go out as they all do".*

Here, Joanne, Sam, Denise, Thelma and Jean have constructed an 'exemplar' of the ideal slim female, who can purchase and wear attractive clothing that they contrasted with the deviant, obese case (Cordell & Ronai 1999). In so doing, they have all differentiated themselves from women with more 'acceptable' bodies, and have therefore actively engaged with images of 'beauty' and the associated discourses. This clearly demonstrates

that the problem is not discipline itself, but with the goal of these particular disciplines, namely that they tend to have a single, rigid goal, that of conformity to an ideal bodily appearance and comportment. However, some of the older women in this sample appeared to position themselves individually in relation to beauty standards: they accept some, reject others and try to come to terms with those beyond their reach (Gimlin, 2007). For example, Elaine (age 59) who is a midwife explained that:

> *"I have never really been over a size 16 since I was in my 20s and to be honest some people need to seriously get a grip because in reality there is no way that you can ever look like some of the people you see in magazines because even if you got to a size 10 you still would not look like them...My motto is to be happy in your own skin and accept that some things are just not going to happen...The media has a lot to answer for though especially with younger women...At least I am not under as much pressure as them".*

In addition, Julie (age 63) echoes this point and says:

> *"I have lost some weight and I am happy finding clothes that just fit me and are comfortable without worrying about what size they are...These people who moan about being a size 10 need to get real...Just be happy with who you are and not with what size you happen to be".*

While experiences in daily life are mediated by an abundance of images it is also a context in which these older women engage with those images, their own embodiment and their positioning within systems of representation in a resistant fashion. For example, one strategy developed by these older women in dealing with the pressure to make their bodies conform to images of ideal femininity was to normalise a pathological relationship to their bodies. The discomfort produced by their desire for what they did not have was dissolved by placing all women within this position. Indeed, having a problem with the way one

looks was interpreted as quite a 'normal' relationship, so, rather than feeling as though one's body was abnormal and in need of transformation, it was *that very feeling* which was normalised. Earlier on in this chapter I briefly described how ageism has had a stronger impact on women compared to men, and how some of the older women such as Joanne (age 57), Collette (age 55), Diane (age 55), Val (age 57) and Carol (age 55) have not only been pressurised into losing weight through the media but also by male approval. The chapter will therefore turn to explore through relational discourses how the majority of the older women in this sample downplayed the relevance of their body for their relationships with their partners.

Relational Discourses

> "*I don't think he's that bothered about me being fat... We've been married since our early twenties and I wasn't that thin when I met him*" Rosie (age 69).

In a similar vein Kath (age 64) who is married and works as a lollipop lady described how she has lost two stone since going to Weight Watchers and how her husband hasn't even noticed the difference. Kath said:

> "*I tell him how much I have lost just to get some recognition and approval from him but he just says good for you... he just tells me that he has always loved me just the way I am and would rather that I didn't have to deprive myself of things at my age*".

For Rosie and Kath being in a long term relationship minimised the role of male approval, thus Rosie stated that: "*Unlike some people, for example, a few of my friends I have never really needed a slim body to keep my man*" This tendency is also consistent with the notion that older women should not be overly concerned about their physical attractiveness, an

assumption that the male partners of some older respondents seemingly encouraged. Indeed, the following accounts demonstrate how some older women's partners are somewhat inconvenienced by their weight-loss dieting practices and begins with Anna (age 56) who is in a relationship and works as a nursery nurse. She explained:

> "*I have drastically cut down on going out for meals, eating takeaways and drinking in the week which irritates my partner...She said that this diet malarkey is getting on her nerves as it is ruining her social life...She also refuses to eat the healthy meals that I cook and often says I am not on a diet so I don't want to eat rabbit food every night*".

Similarly, Joanne (age 57) argued that she was in a no win situation because on the one hand her husband wanted her to lose weight, while on the other hand complained when she withheld having alcohol and supper in the evening with him. Anna continued to tell me that she had shared these concerns with the rest of the class at a meeting and the leader discussed with the group the notion of a 'saboteur', (i.e. an individual who intentionally or unintentionally undermined the member's weight-loss efforts). Brenda (age 67) also identified her husband as being a saboteur and explained how he:

> "*hates it when I rejoin a slimming club because he says the whole thing bores him and he thinks it is ridiculous that I cook us both different meals...I have given up going in the past because of his moaning but I am riding it out this time because I want to do this for me*".

In a similar way Collette (age 55) found some resistance at meal times from both her husband and her 30 year old son who often complained that she put more effort into cooking her healthy meals and spent less time on the traditional meals her family were used to receiving, thus Collette said:

"When I first started at Slimming World I tried to get my husband and son involved in eating the same kinds of foods as myself...They were having none of it and I have had nothing but grief about it since...However, I have come through all the moaning because this time I wanted to do this for me and not give up like I have usually done in the past when things have got on top of me".

Chapter three presented a detailed account of food as a social practice, as communication and how food constructs identities. Here, it would appear that the significance of meal preparation needs to be acknowledged how the symbolic meanings of shared meals and meanings vary across the female lifecourse. As detailed in chapter three within ritual contexts, food often acts symbolically by representing or standing in for expressions such as life, love, grief, or happiness. Even within our daily experiences, the ways that we eat and dine with others can be categorized as ritualistic because they involve repetition, expected behaviours, and roles for both the participants and the food (Cramer et al, 2011). Foods connect people, both physically and symbolically, when we sit down to dine together. In addition we also identify with others based upon the types of food that we eat such that we may feel a common bond with people who have similar eating habits to our own (ibid). The point to be made here is that as those responsible for family meal preparation, most of the older members responded to their diet's requirements by preparing different evening meals for themselves and for their family members, both because the latter resisted changes in their meals, and because the women felt obliged to accommodate their tastes (as most had done for years). The burden of this additional work was noted by many of the older women who fatalistically accepted this as auxiliary to their weight-loss efforts. For example, Anna (age 56) said:

"I constantly tell my partner that she can still have a takeaway and she can still have a drink but I have to watch my pro points...I am determined not to give up this time despite the moans and the temptations".

Similarly, Joanne (age 57) told me: "*When he moans about the different meals getting cooked in our house I put him in his place by saying it's not you doing the extra work is it*"? Joanna also identified how her husband constantly tries to entice her into eating foods that he knows are banned and explained that:

"*When I have got near my goal he always convinces me that to keeping going is a waste of time and money and now I have lost the weight I don't have to go...But I do because in the past when I have given up I have just put the weight back on and he doesn't like that either...it's a no win situation*".

Indeed, the feelings that emerged reflecting the pressure from family members to give up on their weight-loss activities are expressed succinctly in the following accounts:

"*Why are you bothering to lose weight... you look fine as you are...it's ok for you to put weight on as you get older and you should just enjoy yourself*" (Sheila age 68).

"*Stop depriving yourself of having a good time...you will only put it all back on again when we go on holiday*" (Collette age 55).

"*I wish you would stop this nonsense as it's ruining our social life*" (Irene age 59).

"*You have always had that body shape so why are you trying to change it now at your age*" (Dorothy age 66).

"*Your retired now so relax and enjoy yourself...stop beating yourself up about your body shape and accept that I love you the way you are*" (Kath age 64).

The above accounts illustrate the ways in which the older women's family members think that they no longer have the responsibilities of earlier life and deserved to enjoy themselves. These discourses therefore resonate with the view that aging may actually increase women's acceptability of their weight and reduce their guilt about eating, thus effectively absolving them of culpability for being overweight (Oberg & Tornstam 1999). Indeed, even though many women aged 55 and above want to lose weight, often their weight-loss goals are more realistic than those of younger women (Allaz et al. 1998). For example, the following accounts show how some older women are more accepting of a wider range of body shapes (Hurd Clarke 2002), and less likely to undergo cosmetic-surgery procedures to reduce body size, such as liposuction and 'tummy tucks'. As Noreen (aged 74) who is a widow and retired shop assistant informed me:

> *"I have worked in a department store for most of my working life and have been involved in measuring women for fashion garment alterations...I have come across lots of bodies of different sizes and shapes during the course of my career...We are all different and I have noticed too how my body has changed over the years also...I like to say that I have always had a more fuller figure and as I have aged I have embraced that fuller figure even more...I am at Weight Watchers at present as I want to lose weight for my grandsons wedding"*

In a similar way Janet (age 59) expressed the point that:

> *"Not everyone is the same...I am pear shaped so while my waist is quite acceptable at present I cannot shift the weight that has gone onto my hips, buttocks and tops of my legs...I have lost almost three stone now since being told that I am an obese lady, but my bottom half is still huge and just won't budge and the only way to do*

something about that would be to go under the knife which is something I would never do".

Judith (age 64) expands on this point and has explained how:

> *"My body has changed in shape as I have aged and no matter how hard I diet some of the fat around my middle and tops of my legs just won't shift...I suppose we have to accept that weight gain is a consequence of aging and that we should appreciate the fact that there is not as much pressure put on me to be as slim as when I was younger".*

Janet (59) continued to note how: "*depending on your body shape you have to go with what can be achievable through diet and exercise...It wouldn't do for us all to be the same*". In addition Noreen (age 74) explained: " *I only intend to stay at Weight Watchers for a couple of months just to shift a bit of excess weight that I used to be able to get off myself through cutting out bread and potatoes...I suppose I needed some newer tips*". From these accounts it would therefore seem fair to argue that old age does provide a degree of detachment from beauty imperatives. Although all of the older women in this sample were not entirely satisfied with their body size, hence their decision to join a commercial weight-loss organisation, their beliefs about physical changes over time did slightly reduce self-criticism and feelings of guilt. This brings us to the question of how older women in the sample felt about body practices such as cosmetic surgery with regards to weight-loss management.

Cosmetic surgery (in this case liposuction and tummy tucks) is often cited as the example of body project practices and, in the postmodern world, a practice whose occurrence is increasing (Bordo, 1993; Shilling, 1993; Throsby, 2008). What does the increased

popularity and acceptance of this technology reveal about the ways in which older women live their bodies? What issues are raised for older women's embodied agency by these practices? In her analysis of women who undergo cosmetic surgery Davis (1995: 57) emphasizes that women's agency must be central to any account of the relationship between identity and the decision to alter one's body because to deny women's agency would mean that: "cosmetic surgery becomes a strangely disembodied phenomenon, disavow of women's experiences, feelings, and practical activities with regard to their bodies". In addition, an argument that treats women who have their bodies surgically altered as compliant to a system that serves men's interests and reproduces the conditions of their own oppression relies upon a faulty conception of agency; that women could not possibly make an active and knowledgeable choice (Budgeon, 2003). In effect, these practices, according to Davis (1995), Budgeon (2004), and Throsby (2008) are not about women wanting to become physically beautiful, but about women's relationships to their bodies and, through the body, the world around them. For Davis (1995: 169) it is about: "embodied subjectivity where the body is situated in culture rather than determined by it". Davis's study provides valuable insights into how women live their bodies and suggests that subjectivity and the material body are aspects of the self which are irreducibly connected such that bodies are never just objects but part of a process of negotiating and re-negotiating self-identity. The multifaceted issue of body modification was explored with the older women in this study by asking them how they would react to a situation in which a decision to undergo cosmetic surgery was being negotiated. Their replies were quite evenly split between those who supported surgery, those who advised against it and those who were unsure. Almost all of the older women in the sample felt that the decision to undergo surgery was intrinsically about constructing an identity. Here emphasis was not placed on dominant ideals but on individualized intentions, needs and desires and,

therefore, a popular reply involved the evaluation of the surgery in terms of whether it could enhance their confidence: a way of being in the world. However, it did not follow that the surface of the body could be so readily altered to fit with an account about confidence. For example, the following accounts presented by the older women below demonstrate that confidence is not just about how one's body looks.

> "*I know that having liposuction or a tummy tuck is not really for me...My sister has had a tummy tuck done after losing loads of weight because her stomach was in a right mess, and I think having these things done is now a lot more common but my sister assures me that what she has really changed is her outside appearance but she still doesn't feel that confident on the inside*" (Andrea age 59).

Irene (age 59) echoed the point made by Andrea and said:

> "*I think having liposuction done would probably make you feel great and give you a bit more confidence for a while, but if you are that way inclined you would then move on to become more obsessive about something else...I mean look at the likes of that Michael Jackson, he made a right mess of his face because he was never satisfied...I mean how could you be confident looking like that*".

Indeed, these accounts suggest that the outside of the body is not simply reducible to the self or vice versa, and that changing the outside appearance of the body does not correspond to a transformation of the self in and of itself. Thus, the older women spoke about their bodies and self-identities in ways that challenge the idea that a body can be chosen or transformed through interventions enacted upon its surface and draws into question Giddens's (1991) suggestion that the body is increasingly a 'project' (an object) that is made and remade according to the definition of the narrative of self that is under construction. Neither the self nor the body can be chosen because they are very often lived as though they are already there. The body is already the self and the self is already the

body. The following ways in which these older women speak about their embodied selves give cause to question that there is a separation in embodied identity that is a mind/body split in which the body is separated out from self as an object. Indeed, Thelma (age 65) illuminates this point when she described how:

> "*My saggy stomach has always been a mess since having seven children and since losing weight it looks even worse...I would never contemplate having a tummy tuck because I have lived with it as a younger woman and I will continue to live with it now...It's a permanent reminder of the triumphs associated with being a mum and of managing to lose weight*".

In addition Brenda (age 67), and Anna (age 56) both expressed that while it might be a good idea for some people (maybe a bit younger than them) it was not something that they would do. As Anna said:

> "*I think liposuction [is that what it's called where you have the fat sucked out of you]? and taking laxatives for that matter is cheating. I personally don't think that the risks associated with having liposuction or a tummy tuck done would be worth the outcome... What would happen to you if you put that weight on again?*"

Indeed, the suggestion that embodied selves exceed a culturally inscribed surface is also apparent in instances where the solution to the cosmetic surgery quandary was determined by the conclusion that the surgery should be chosen. However, again in these instances, altering the body was about more than a modification of outside appearance. Instead it was suggested that undergoing cosmetic surgery was about transforming the way in which the body was lived and not how it looked. In most instances the primary concern was about confidence and how changing one's body would allow the self to enter into situations with an increased sense of worth. Even when a marked sense of ambivalence was spoken it was

thought that if cosmetic surgery allowed the older woman in question to live her embodied self differently then it would be an acceptable choice for her to make. As May (age 75) thoughtfully asserted:

> *"It might not be for me at my age dear, but when I was a much younger woman and I had a lack of self-confidence because of hanging skin on my stomach and surgery would make me feel better inside then I would have it done... Why not".*

In addition Alice (age 57) suggested that:

> *"I have not actually been under the knife yet but I have had botox a few times and I have had non surgical face lifts... But after I have lost this weight and if my stomach was still going to affect my self esteem and I could afford the surgery then I would have it done".*

The same view was also aired by Collette (age 55) who told me that:

> *"Since losing this weight I feel I am like a new woman...The old Collette would never have dreamed of having a tummy tuck done because I knew that I would just put the weight back on...This time I am doing it for good and if a tummy tuck boosted my confidence a bit more then I would go for it...I know things can go wrong and you can't put it back to how it was. but if it goes well it's something that's life changing isn't it".*

I went on to ask Collette whether her husband had any thoughts about cosmetic surgery and she told me that:

> *"he said that if that's what would make me happier then I should do it...He doesn't really agree with cosmetic surgery possibly because being a tight arse he would be*

worried about how much it costs [laugh] and also because he says that it creates vanity... But he knows that if I want to do it he will go along with it"

Here Collette makes clear the point that a consistent position for or against cosmetic surgery is too simplistic, and that one's evaluation must take into account more than just appearance for the sake of appearance. She states that there are financial costs involved too and the fact that if it goes wrong then it will affect the whole of your life. The significance of the lived body (the body as a process) was also obvious in the older women's replies to the questions I asked pertaining to their own desires to change their bodies if they could. The modifications desired were about transforming the ways in which the embodied self lived relations within which the individual is embedded. These replies suggest a basis for the relation between self and body that goes beyond the outside appearance of the body. For example, many of the older women stated that the changes they would like to make would result in them having more impact or an enhanced sense of agency. The emphasis is not on 'looking' but on 'doing'. For example, Jane (age 58) told me that:

"*I have only been going on the exercise bike for a couple of weeks while watching corrie and I feel much better in myself...I don't think it's about my body changing its more about the fact that I am doing something more positive...Instead of being sat on my backside on the couch watching corrie I am still sat on it but this time exercising at the same time*".

Similarly Alice (age 57) expressed at the very beginning of this thesis that she attended yoga classes. When prompted about her experiences of yoga she explained:

"*I decided to do yoga because I don't like jogging or going to the gym...I have really picked up the discipline now and I also do it at home every other day because it makes me feel more in control makes me feel better within myself*".

Here, the yoga exercises that Alice describes can open new possibilities and create new capacities without drawing a person more deeply into normalizing discourses that produce self-objectification, fear of deviation, and self-loathing (Heyes, 2007). Disciplines of bodily transformation can transform self-understanding to make us less fearful of bodily difference and failure, less captivated by the images thrust upon us by advertising, fashion, and health industries, less apt to reinforce our society's gender norms in our own lives and the lives of those around us (ibid). But it is not simply a matter of replacing dieting or cosmetic surgery with yoga. It is a matter, first, of recognizing the desire for body/self transformation that regimes of normalization have produced and cultivated and the capacities for sustained self-discipline and self-reflection that individuals caught up in those regimes surely to some extent all of us are developing. And then it is a matter a feminist matter, Heyes (2007) argues, of carefully working through those regimes and discourses to open them up to unanticipated possibility.

I further prompted Jane and Alice for more information with regards to the way their body looks. Both women agreed that they were concerned about the way their bodies look and as discussed earlier the desire for control as expressed here could be read as evidence of Bordo's (1993: 166) "discipline and normalization of the female body" and an "amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control" in which a: "preoccupation with appearance" still affects women far more powerfully than men. Certainly, for some of the older women in this study, a dissatisfaction with the body was experienced as a need to be more self-disciplined and individually responsible for the size and shape of the body thereby indicating that bodily discipline can be about the development of a relation to the body in which agency becomes constrained through repetitive and obsessive practices such as dieting and exercise. Having ascertained some of the reasons for older women's motivations for choosing to join a commercial weight-loss organisation the chapter will

now turn to explore how dieting disciplines the body's hungers. We shall therefore begin the analysis by demonstrating how as willing participants in a disciplinary technology, older female dieters measure and scrutinize themselves far more precisely and conscientiously than those who must be educated into more reluctant self-monitoring behaviours. The organized diet program is thus a particularly extreme version of panoptic culture, which is why it attracts this kind of Foucauldian attention.

Chapter's one and three have suggested that slimming clubs are part and parcel of the contemporary consumer culture that fosters the purchase of body-related goods and services by emphasising the individual's responsibility for her health (Sedgwick 1994) or appearance (Featherstone, 1991). As described in chapters one and two, and earlier in this chapter 'docility' is a major objective of most successful normalised disciplinary practices, thus the chapter will now turn to explore how at the level of the individual weight watcher or Slimming World member it is assiduously cultivated (McWhorter, 1999).

Disciplinary discourses

As detailed in chapter four, during the weekly meetings, the younger and older female members (including myself) were weighed and their progress (or lack of progress) was recorded by the leader. Like Heyes (2006) before me I noticed that the 'weigh-in' caused a great deal of anxiety and frustration (Stinson 2001). Here, the Foucauldian accounts put forward by Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993), and Heyes (2006) in chapter three have demonstrated how 'normalization' is enacted through ever-finer measurement and closer surveillance of the subject population. For example, returning to the standard height-weight tables that are used by doctors and also the weigh-loss organisations are themselves a macro-tool for normalising the population-for taking a vast and diverse group of people

and establishing a 'normal range' to which every individual bears some relationship. Deviation from the norm is then (falsely) read as proof of behaviours that can be pathologized, just as conformity is (falsely) taken as evidence of health and good conduct. Here, biopower operates both at an epidemiological level and at the level of the production of a weight-based moral identity in the individual. During the fieldwork I noticed how all members (and to a point including myself) tended to engage in the following behaviours before stepping onto the weighing scales: they visited the toilet, removed their shoes, removed belts, heavy necklaces, and cardigans/coats etc and even wore flimsy clothing in the winter months. In addition most members admitted that they did not eat their meals until after the weigh in because they felt the food that they had just eaten would affect their weight. As mentioned in chapter four whilst waiting to be weighed I also engaged in some of the absurd behaviours mentioned above because I also desperately wanted to lose weight as a reward for all my efforts during that week (even if it was only half a pound), and would go to any length to do so. During my life I have always been a very competitive person and my competitive streak unsurprisingly reared its ugly head during the course of my fieldwork. For example, during my first week of dieting I was openly elated at losing a total of six pounds in weight and knew that the following week I would be taking part in being congratulated for losing 7lbs (half a stone landmark). This elation was also twofold because I experienced this loss in two different research arenas. However, three weeks into the programme I put on a pound in weight and I could not recall how this could have happened (because I had stuck rigidly to the programme). I therefore challenged the group leader and tried to seek out a possible explanation for my failure that week (for which she told me to keep a research diary). When I sat down to wait for the class to begin other women who I had become familiar with asked me how I had done and I found it somewhat difficult to hide my disappointment (as did other women) and I admit to feeling a few

pangs of jealousy at some of the big weight losses that week. From my own experience I could see why Wolf (1991) suggested that in a cultural context that rewards physical attractiveness, success in dieting has also been described as a source of jealousy and conflict between women. For example, at least three of the older woman in the study lost between 4-5 lbs in weight every week compared to myself who only managed between 1-2 lbs with some weeks remaining the same weight and even putting on weight. I therefore questioned how disciplined these women actually were and their accounts will be presented shortly. However, for now taking on board my own experiences and whilst waiting in the queue I noted how the younger and older women engaged in various linguistic strategies for constructing how disciplined or undisciplined they had been that particular week compared to prior weeks. Yet, I observed that the younger and older respondents talked about these experiences quite differently. For example, I noted how some of the older dieters tended to discount the potential embarrassment of an unsuccessful weigh-in by emphasising the shared experience of disappointment. For example, Thelma (age 65) who is a retired dental technician stated:

> "*If you have put on, it's not the end of the world, and other members don't judge you because they have been there too...I have not lost any weight at all over the past two weeks... but I haven't gained any either, so at least it has stopped me from getting any bigger [laugh]...I want to do it for the leader, but have been a bit lax of late*".

Thelma's amusement suggested that she experienced little guilt or embarrassment about her dieting failure. When pressed about why she had not lost any weight that week in the meeting, the leader made good use of ad hoc explanations and pseudoscience; namely that your body may be holding onto the weight and will come off next week, or have you eaten anything salty that has made you retain fluid? During the weekly meetings I also observed

on several occasions how the leader referred to the challenges that many older women like Thelma face when trying to lose weight, including 'slow metabolism', hormonal changes, medication and the difficulty of exercising after illness or surgery, or due to age. Such explanations not only provided older women with age-specific, physiological reasons for dieting setbacks, but also reinforced the notion that the bodily experiences and goals of 'aging women' are somewhat distinctive. Consequently accounts of 'repentance' figured centrally in the older women's narrative identity work (Gimlin, 2007). During the fieldwork I noted that because the younger members did not have the same organisational resources to draw upon, many of the younger members frequently referred to the shame associated with a failure to reduce weight. For example, I spoke to the following small sample of younger members over a period of four weeks and the following small ethnographic conversations I had with some of the younger members during the fieldwork succinctly exemplify this point:

> "*You try to lose weight because of the weighing scales... You have to go on them, and I sometimes feel ashamed when I haven't lost anything... They know if you've been bad and because of this I don't stay for the class*" (Laura age 25).

> "*I always have some idea of how well I have done so I can prepare myself for the embarrassment of staying the same or putting weight on...If I know I haven't lost I sometimes give it a miss and pretend I am too ill to attend*" (Kelly age 21).

> " *I can't really afford to come here week after week so I do try to lose something which means I have not wasted my money being told I have not lost or put on...I feel ashamed going home and admitting my failure*" (Lucy age 25).

While also recognising the fact that they had done badly other young respondents also related the weigh-in to humiliating body monitoring outside the group. For example, Lisa

(age 24) compared her reactions to the weigh-in to her feelings of self-doubt during an overweight adolescence and stated:

> *"When I get weighed and I've gained, it's like being back at school in the PE class with all the other girls thinner than me with the teacher telling me that I am fat because I am lazy... It's stupid, but I feel like I'm the only one who didn't or can't lose weight".*

Chapter three explored the surveillance assemblage associated with the ways in which health technicians have been recruited to record schoolchildren's weight as part of a monitoring programme (Evans et al, 2008). Here obesity is measured and, ultimately, fought 'for the sake of the children' who are according to Cohen (2002) 'soft targets for moral concern and 'benevolence'. The above account describes how Lisa (age 24) felt the power of the overzealous PE teacher dealing with children he or she deems fat and lazy. When pressed in both the small ethnographic interviews and the biographical interviews I noted how many of the older members rarely associated the weigh-in with past experiences of body-related shame or censure, even though they often recalled being overweight from childhood. For example, Noreen (age 74) claimed:

> *" I had a lot of puppy fat when I was a child and it never went [laugh]...My mum used to tell me that I needed to be built up in case I was ever ill...I suppose in her day she felt it was healthy for children to carry a bit of extra weight".*

On a similar note May (age 75) claimed:

> *"I have always been a bit on the big side from childhood to adolescence and then into adulthood...I could not do much about it when I was a child because my mother was one of those women that demanded you sat down to three square meals a day*

and you had to eat everything on your plate so that you didn't offend her...She was a bit strict in that way, but when I could take charge of the meals I could choose to miss out meals and eat less fatty and sugary foods".

The above accounts from the oldest members in this sample, pointed to both variable social meanings of body size and to one explanation for the different perceptions of the younger and older participants-namely, the historical contexts in which they were raised. As young people during the post war (1945) years of food scarcity, some of the older women explained that "*We didn't seem to face the same criticisms for being a bit podgy in them days as the younger people do today*" (May age 75). In addition May's accounts also illustrates how she only became concerned about her weight in adulthood, while the younger members view themselves as being fat and ugly in childhood and adolescence. What also emerged from these observations and from the accounts of the women interviewed was that there was an over-riding sense that the older women were discursively negated, and positioned as 'other', in relation to body management practices like weight-loss dieting, such that both the meanings that they attribute to their experiences of weight loss and the extent to which they could benefit from organisational resources, varied by their stage in the lifecourse. For example, Dorothy (age 66) attends Slimming World alongside her 22 year old granddaughter and explained that:

"*As you already know I come here every week with my granddaughter Rachel and so far we have both managed to lose a lot of weight...However I have now lost more weight than she has and she has taken great offence at this...She has told me that appearance is not as important for me at my age than it is for her and she accuses me of only coming here for the company...I have told her that that's a complete load of twaddle because age doesn't mean that you give up on looking good*".

In a similar vein Sheila (age 68) described how at times she felt that both the younger members undermined her desire to slim for the sake of her appearance as opposed to matters of health. Sheila explained that:

> "*I nearly stopped coming to Slimming World because a certain click in the group seemed to find it amusing when I spoke about my desires to get into a nice pair of jeans and some nice summer tops that didn't cover up the tops of my arms...I had a go at them and told them that my appearance concerns are just as important to me as they are to them and that age is just a number...I ended up coming to class at a different time because I didn't like their attitude*".

Similarly, Sally (age 61) who is a married nurse and attends Weight Watchers told me that:

> "*My daughter has made a few funny comments about me wearing younger clothes since losing weight...She just says it's not like you mum to wear something like that...I don't think I have ever seen you in a top that low*".

Sally explained to me that her daughter felt that certain clothes are not really appropriate for someone of her age. Her daughter and the younger members involved in Sheila's account felt the pressure to display one's body in revealing clothing decreases with age. This illustrates a point made in chapter two regarding how human beings socially construct an 'other' or 'stranger' who is old and from whom they differentiate and distance themselves. Kosberg (1982: 133) states that ageism: "*allows the younger generations to see older people as different from themselves... [and to] cease to identify with their elders as human beings*". Consequently, some younger members present older females as asexual and thus unconcerned with appearance. Indeed, with the dominant framing of later life as 'asexula' they suggest popular cultural portrayals of sexuality active or engaged older people were generally confined to the humorous greetings cards in which the 'joke' played on notions of older people was that they were not sexually desirable, not sexually desirous

and not sexually capable hence the humorous remarks that Sheila (age 68) received from the younger members. This also resonates with Woodward's (1999) description of how representations of older peoples sexuality were 'essentially taboo' for mainstream culture, thus possessing the notion of unwatchability of images of older peoples naked bodies when applying them to a scene of sexuality. Indeed it would be easy to refute the alleged universality of this and other stereotypes, but the point to be made here is that stereotypes are useful for camouflaging the social arrangements which we impose upon older people in Western societies (Hazan,1994), even through weight-loss dieting practices. Thus Gubrium and Holstein (2000: 18) state: "The unspoken assumptions, upon which scientific theories of aging are constructed, become doubly dangerous, being mindfully or inadvertently employed to determine the fate of fellow human beings". In effect what we witness from this is the idea that biological aging places at risk the ability to control the body, and thus deprives it of its civilised normality. In other words bodies are produced, but their own powers of production, (where they have any), are limited to those invested in them by discourse. As such the body is dissolved as a causal phenomenon into the determining power of the discourse, and it becomes increasingly difficult to conceive of the body as a material component of social action. Here, a Foucauldian discourse analysis has a tendency to privilege representational practices and is thus insufficiently concerned with lived experience (Shilling, 2003). However, while these accounts demonstrate how older woman can be discursively negated, and positioned as 'other', in relation to body management practices like weight-loss dieting I also found labyrinths of more supportive discourses. The chapter will therefore turn to explore these supportive discourses in more detail.

Supportive discourses

In chapter three I staged the argument that commercial weight-loss organisations are opportunists who clearly aim to make money through direct or indirect means (Scambler, 2009). This chapter has already highlighted how these opportunists utilise biomedical claims either to sell their product or champion the cause (Monaghan et al, 2010). In addition they also rely on 'lay' people to espouse the virtues of their weight-loss method, through advertising their success stories through their magazines, cookbooks, and websites to a larger audience. During the fieldwork the leaders in both of the commercial weight-loss organisations always began by asking the present members how their week had gone before commencing to congratulate those who had lost a significant amount of weight and had reached landmarks (i.e. from half a stone weight-loss upwards), or motivate those who have deviated from the plan and put them back on track. Here positive reinforcements were given verbally or materially, in the form of prizes such as a basket of fruit or the ingredients of a recipe to make. Failure to lose weight which was a common occurrence and source of frustration (as experienced many times by myself) was individualized as the member's fault. For example, on many occasions I witnessed members disputing their lack of weight loss or weight gain that week. On one occasion Anna (age 56) explained to the Weight Watcher leader that "*I can't believe that I have put on 2lbs in weight because I have followed this diet to a T and have not even used any of my flexi-points...If I have put on 2lbs then the diet doesn't work does it...I am fed up with this*". Here, as discussed in chapter four any evinced scepticism about Weight Watchers or Slimming Worlds methods, or unchastened confession of deviance from the plan, must be actively suppressed in order for the organisation to keep control of the situation and retain the members custom (Heyes, 2006). Consequently, the group leader attempted to calm Anna down and address her frustrations in a rational manner by going through a series of ad hoc explanations and

pseudoscience such as "*your body is just holding onto the weight this week and it will come off next week*". On this particular occasion, she asked Anna if it was her time of the month, for which she explained that she no longer had any periods. The leader then moved onto suggest that she may have eaten salty foods or possibly that she had not eaten enough food, thus her body would retain fluid and hold onto the weight. When Anna challenged the leader on all these accounts suggesting that she had followed the diet as she should the leader could present no other possible explanations and told Anna that she needed to stay to class this week and gain some tips and inspiration from those members who had lost weight, and for whom the diet works for every week. Here, such exchanges served important functions for both the organisation and the individual dieters. For the former, they reinforced the company's rhetoric about weight loss as a simple matter of 'reasoned eating' that lies fully under the dieter's control. Among the members, they helped to infuse a puzzling and seemingly illogical practice with some degree of order. I spoke to Anna later about this altercation in a small ethnographic interview and she told me "*I am really fed up and she is not going to get another chance of making shallow excuses...I am not coming back to this class again*". I never saw Anna again and when I telephoned her a couple of weeks later she told me that she went and had what she called a "*blow* out" whereby she had ate and drank whatever she fancied without worrying about the outcome (weight-gain). However, she felt that she was unable to continue to diet on her own and had switched to Slimming World to continue some form of a programme (however her membership was not within the group where I was conducting my fieldwork). Anna also informed me that she also had a point to prove with her partner which was another reason for not giving up. When analysing this altercation and the many others I witnessed (including the ones that I had experienced myself, albeit in a more cooled manner) I could see that positioning members in this way could be viewed as a 'stick' for punishing

'miscreants' while simultaneously reinforcing the infallibility of the weight-loss programme (Monaghan et al 2010). One form of motivation utilised by both slimming clubs was the rewards associated reaching landmarks (i.e. per half stone) whereby they received class congratulations and the slimmer of the week often gained a basket of fruit or a recipe and ingredients (A feat that I was unable to achieve). When attaining a landmark the following older women when asked by the leader to explain how they felt told me:

> "I *have been really motivated this week and have followed the programme to a T...I haven't cheated once... I have even started to weigh my jacket potatoes and cereal instead of leaving it to chance and have also stopped eating anything after 6pm...It's paid off and I am really pleased*" (Elaine age 59 Weight Watchers).

Similarly Jean (age 56) who attends Slimming World said:

> "*I have lost five pounds this week because I have been a good girl and this has taken my total weight loss to a stone and a half...It's a case of mind over matter and not giving in to the temptations around you*".

Liz (age 60) who also attends Slimming World explained that:

> "*I think the penny has dropped now...overeating and cheating equals stay fat, whilst limiting food and being good equals a loss of fat...It's easy once you get your head around the diet programme and having a loss each week and reaching your goals spurs you on*".

In a similar vein Diane (age 56) told me that since joining Weight Watchers she managed to lose half a stone in a week because:

> "*I been strict with myself and have followed to the diet plan...The poor dog didn't know what had hit him cause he has never been walked so much [laugh]...I am*

determined to keep it up and try to lose a stone in the first month...that's my goal now... I love my food but now I love being slimmer more".

When pressed about this statement in an interview environment Diane told me that she had lost five and a half stone over an eight month period and explained that:

> *"I feel like a totally different person now and have become obsessed about my weight and what I eat...I am ashamed to say that I have spat food out and have even made myself sick when worrying about the calories...I wouldn't say that I have an eating problem it's just that I am scared to eat the wrong foods in case I put the weight back on...I weigh myself on a daily basis and have even took the scales on holiday with me...I suppose I am scared of putting any back on because I love being thinner...One week I stayed the same so I didn't want to stay to the class because I felt a failure"*

Similarly, Andrea (age 59) told me:

> *"The other week I succumbed to temptation and ate a chocolate éclair...I managed to spit some of it out onto a napkin, but to be safe I went without any more food that day and did a few extra exercises to compensate for my lack of will* power...*Trust me, to do that the day before the weigh-in*".

The above accounts highlight how persons themselves and their bodies are turned into objects and self-surveillance emerges as the practice of self control. In effect they have evaluated their own behaviour and have tended to steer themselves towards absolute conformity as a 'docile subject', which in effect could indicate that the panoptican is most powerful when repressed. It must also be noted that when joining either Slimming World of Weight Watchers you are informed that losing one to two pounds per week is a healthy amount. However, week after week women such as Jean (age 56), Andrea (age 59) and Diane (age 56), are regularly congratulated by the group leader and the some group

members for losing between four and five pounds per week (which is far in excess of their recommended weekly weight-loss). This was obviously a contradiction; yet, the leaders never voiced any concern that they were losing the weight too quickly, or that these women could possibly be engaging in the extreme dieting measures noted by Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993). Yet, when I spoke to Jane (age 56) and Val (age 60), amongst others about their huge weekly weight-losses they both suggested that "*they must be starving themselves*". Val even went as far as to suggest that: "*I have stopped clapping now when they get slimmer of the week because I don't think they are playing the game fair and square...I don't know what they are up to but I am bigger than them and follow the plan but other than my first week I have never lost more than 3lb*". In effect such behaviour surely demonstrates how group leaders can be accused of basically acting opportunistically in the interests of their shareholders rather than acting altruistically in the interests of the members (Monaghan et al, 2010). Congratulating Diane's progress the Weight Watchers leader went on to explain how strict dedication to the eating programme produced the rewards and reminded the members that with the same dedication they could also have bigger weekly weigh-losses. In other words the leader openly demonstrates how 'docility' is a major objective of dieting as a normalised disciplinary practice and then proceeds to discuss with the group the actions of those who have fallen outside of these specifications. The following accounts are from women who have put weight on that particular week at Weight Watchers' and what is presented here are alternative (more angry discussions). For example, Janet (age 59) told me that sometimes the programme becomes mundane and she feels that she has to have a week or two whereby she reverts back to her former self. Janet explained how:

> "*I just told the leader before I got on the scales that I have had a stressful week and have eaten things that I know I shouldn't have. I more or less told her that I was in no mood that week to be so disciplined but I had still come to the meeting when I*

wanted to make an excuse and stay way...I find that having a break from it helps me to keep going".

In a similar way Brenda (age 67) revealed that she was also in no mood to be reprimanded by the group leader and before stepping onto the scales declared that:

"*I am not expecting to lose any weight this week because I have been just plain naughty and have not put enough effort into it this week...one night I just though ah to hell with it and got rat arsed with my daughters [laugh]*".

Brenda continued to explain how her daughters had persuaded her to let her hair down and have a bit of fun like she used to before becoming too involved with her weight loss programme. While her daughters were pleased with her progress because they could see she was much happier in herself, they felt that she still needed to be realistic about it all and to let her guard down now and again. Brenda revealed that:

"*I did consider not coming this week because I knew what the outcome would be and I would be paying to be told off. But I did come because felt that If I started to go down that road I would lose sight of the fact that I desperately want to lose another stone*"

A similar situation arose for many women when faced with the prospect of going away on holiday and facing the weighing scales upon their return. The general consensus of these experiences is reflected by Gillian (age 56) who said:

"*I have been away on holiday and enjoyed myself...I'm sorry but I am not going to do without the same food and drink as everyone else when I am on holiday...I have come back haven't I and have faced the consequences...I could have just given up but I haven't...I am a human being not a robot [laugh]...*" (Gillian age 56)

In a similar way to Brenda and Gillian I also encountered many situations such as attending a BBQ or on an evening out whereby my regime also slipped and I allowed myself to eat and drink what I wanted whilst thinking that I could regain my self control the next day. For example, knowing that I was facing the weighing scales on two occasions I tried to drastically limit my food intake and forego my flexipoints or Syns in order to compensate for my misdemeanours. In order to address some of the above accounts the leader (when conducting the class) continued to probe the challenges that women have to overcome by adopting organisationally legitimised practices, such as avoiding situations that might threaten their resolve or sticking to a pre-planned eating strategy. For example one week at Slimming World Liz (age 60) who once again claimed the slimmer of the week title and won the basket of fruit said:

> *"I try to avoid at all cost those tricky situations when my friends try to drag me out to the social club at the weekend...I know that if I succumb I will use up all my syns and more [laugh] in one go, thus jeopardising my weekly weight-loss target...I am really bad if I go out and can't stick to my limit so I would rather stay in"*

In response to her account other older dieters reacted positively, and commended Liz's commitment to slimming. Here, such exchanges allowed older members to share support and encouragement, thus reinforcing the idea that people can and should control their weight by making the 'right' disciplined decisions. At a weight Watcher meeting Suzanne (age 55) claimed that:

> *"I know it seems a bit extreme but I have even feigned an illness to get out of going to my best friends BBQ garden party...I knew if I went I would get rotten drunk and stuff my face with all the wrong foods...I did the same thing too at a works night out because I am so motivated and committed in getting the next stone off"*

While this story amused the leader and the other members it gave the members the opportunity to define themselves in relation to the organisationally sanctioned behaviour, much of which involved some form of sacrifice, and through this to provide evidence of their 'genuine' contrition. Other older members such as Dorothy (age 66) suggested that:

> "*I have also abstained from social eating and drinking in order to be good...but it has reached the point now where my friends and family think that I am deliberately avoiding them because I have not really told them that I am a member of a slimming club...well my sons would think that I have lost leave of my senses by spending money like this and avoiding enjoying myself, so it is easier to just keep stum [quiet] about it*"

While Dorothy's description evinced her devotion to slimming, it also suggested that dieting created difficulties in her social relationships by excluding her from their activities. Moreover, because Dorothy was unwilling to reveal her involvement in the programme, the social rewards for her repentance were limited to those offered by the organisation and the slimming group, at least until she has lost a noticeable 'a bit of weight'. However, both Weight Watchers and Slimming World did not encourage the members to sever ties with outsiders in the interest of weight loss, but its recommendations for social dining (such as familiarising oneself with restaurant menus in advance) were suited to the ordered lives of older dieters. Here, on many occasions the group leaders reinforced this discipline by testing group member's knowledge of the flexi points/syns (as described earlier) value of certain food products in order to help them choose the right types of food. This was achieved through a food dictionary that displayed the flexi point/syn value of foods in order to keep you on track. In effect this type of discussion reminded members that they would always have to be a weight watcher (even the language of watching in one of the

programmes name implies surveillance). In other words the ascription of being a watcher implies an ontological state whereby they would always have to evaluate their behaviour in terms of what they ate or drank and would always have to be aware of their body weight. In essence it is possible to see how the disciplinary practices of weight-loss groups are concealed in part by one of the most insidious dynamics in 'normalization': the reification and subsequent internalization of subject positions initially defined by mechanisms for the measurement of population (Heyes, 2006). This is especially true when an older woman reaches her goal target weight and is encouraged by the slimming commercial groups to remain on a maintenance plan (usually for a total of six weeks to attain a lifetime membership). The chapter will therefore continue to chart how the diet maintenance plan and the discourses surrounding it are further evidence of the normalisation of weight-loss dieting practices.

Normalising discourses: trying to maintain goal weight

> "*I have recently reached my goal and have lost four and a half stone over an eleven month period...The leader has given me a leaflet to help me stay on track now that I have reached target*" (Margaret age 61Weight Watchers).

Margaret and several of the members in the sample had reached what the slimming clubs refer to as their goal weight. Here, it is necessary to point out that slimming consultants would 'allow' members to choose their own 'ideal' weight (i.e. a loss of 10 percent of their total body weight) rather than rigidly impose the BMI as a measure of success, health and moral worth. Once this is achieved they are put on a maintenance plan whereby they are expected to maintain their current weight (not put any weight on or lose anymore), and are absolved from paying anymore fees. As a participating observer I

became aware that the group leaders in both the Weight Watchers and Slimming World clubs I attended have reached their goal weight in order to become leaders but were themselves quite substantially overweight/ bordering on 'obesity'. In other words they were not practicing what they preached and it appears that they must have let their own maintenance plans slip, thus let their hard work go to 'waist'. Once a member has reached their target weight Margaret went on to describe how she was given a leaflet containing tips on how to stay motivated. Margaret showed me this leaflet from Weight Watchers which stated:

> "*Your mind often has to play catch-up with your body, particularly if you've lost a significant amount of weight, to realize that you're now a thin person. This means that you not only need to look and dress like a thin person, but you have to think like one also. The great thing is, you've been rehearsing for this part during the past few weeks of maintenance instruction, and now it's time to perform. And the best part is that there's no need to be nervous since the only audience is you.*

Having read the leaflet Margaret understands that:

> "*Now I have lost all of that weight I have to start thinking like a thin person because the Margaret with the old lifestyle has gone and in its place there is now a new Margaret with a new lifestyle... Because of my past experiences of putting the weight back on I know that only permanent dieting and discipline can give me the permanent slenderness that I want...I am staying on as a gold member to achieve this*".

Observing what happens when a person reaches their goal weight, it appears that the person will always need to pay attention to weight: "*a once-fat person who has confessed her past sins and decided to reform, but who can never forget that her new, slim persona is a construction that may slip at any moment*" (Heyes 2006: 134). In other words thin people

share more than just a body mass index-they also have a whole relationship to the world, a newer way of thinking (ibid). Heyes suggests that this idea of playing a part, alone, to oneself, in order to consolidate an identity perfectly exemplifies Butler's (1999) performativity theory. The account made by Margaret (age 61) above illustrates a tension between fluidity and the preservation of identity. Here, Butler suggests that identities acquire stability through matrices of expected behaviour that define the space in which they can be enacted, for example, a binary distinction between masculine and feminine, to the exclusion of other possibilities. Following Lacan (1994), Butler (1999) argues that in such spaces one's 'inner' sense of self is often filled by what it is not, an opposite that is externally defined. The performative element of identity, however, injects elements of creativity and transgressive freedom into that same space. Butler portrays performance as a means by which personal identity can be celebrated in an act of reflexive self-creation, even though it is contained within an otherwise hostile environment. Whilst Butler's perspective has been criticised by Nussbaum (1999) as unambitious and overly linguistic as a program for feminist action, it does shed light on the complex issues of how to take an oppositional stance, which itself is deeply implicated in the very power relations being opposed (Disch, 1999). If there is an element of inevitability in this approach, it lies in the assumption that the problems that identity poses between personal expression and social construction can never be fully shaken. This view closely parallels Calasanti's (2003) observation that just because age categories are subjective and constructed does not make them and their consequences less real. Here, a similar distinction could be argued to exist between fatness and thinness as has been proposed for masculinity and femininity. Older women's slim identities might easily become stuck in the contradiction that Butler (1999) describes, in the sense that we are the same people who we were when we were fat, and yet we are encouraged to think of this continuum as a binary opposition. We are left with

little option but to identify with and simultaneously resist being overweight. Here, Butler's (1999) work is useful for informing the debate on the fat self versus the thin self through the perception that identity is becoming increasingly fluid and that being fat or thin can be viewed as a performance, in ways similar to the view taken of gendered identities.

However, according to Budgeon (2003) the implication of these suggestions is that attempts to do away with notions of an authentic female body or identity and the rhetoric of alienation that accompanies many feminist anti-representational critiques. As Biggs (2004) notes, the implication that such fluidity increases choice has been championed to a far greater degree than the point that there is an underlying shallowness to this experience of self. Biggs continues to suggest that what is even more problematic for champions of immediate and performed identities is a timescale that encompasses a whole life course. As demonstrated Butler (1999) arguably privileges fluidity in contemporary space but as a by product introduce fixity in time. Performances appear to take place in a sort of unending present and paradoxically, may be a way of trapping identity in the here and now. Slimness then becomes the ultimate 'other' for the postmodern fantasy of an unending present. Fatness is avoided through a concentration on the 'here and now' and an absence of anything beyond managed appearances. However, as described in chapter two Brown (1995) argues that contemporary feminism should be wary of both identity politics and the 'politics of resistance' associated with the work of Foucault and Butler. Brown argues that identity politics entails a commitment to the authenticity of women's experiences which functions to secure political authority. At the same time, however, most feminists wish to acknowledge that feminine identity and experience are constructed under patriarchal conditions. Brown suggests that this inconsistency in feminist political thought-acknowledging social construction on the one hand and attempting to preserve a realm of

authentic experience free from construction on the other might be explained by the fact that feminists are reluctant to give up the claim to moral authority that the appeal to the truth and innocence of woman's experience secures.

There are obvious parallels here when feminised identities and age meet, as in Furman's (1997) study of beauty shop culture, as discussed in chapter two when exploring the importance of appearance in the social worlds of older women. However, in contrast to these theorists, the older women in this particular study can be seen as engaging a deception that is knowingly undertaken. For example, Margaret (age 61) has been in this position before when reaching her goal weight three years previously. Margaret recalls how: "*the thin person in me that is always screaming to get out does not appear that often...Like I said I lost a lot of weight three years ago which gave me the opportunity to become a normal person*". I further probed Margaret with regards to what she interpreted normal to be and she explained:

> "*By normal I mean being thinner and not obese anymore...being able to buy a dress in a normal shop and being able to wear it without fat hanging over the sides that people find disgusting...being able to move around better without getting too breathless...Agreeing to have your photo taken on holiday because you don't look as bad as usual...You know what I mean [long pause] it just feels good not be ashamed of the way you look*"

Margaret went on to say: "*When I put the weight back on I went back to thinking like a fat person and went back to feeling ashamed*". In essence Margaret is demonstrating a psychodynamic understanding of the relationship between depth and surface through the use of language games, body language and forms of personal adornment that contribute to the performance of herself. Here, Woodward (1991, 1995) and Biggs (1993, 1999)

exemplify this relationship and utilise the notion of Masquerade because it is, in this sense, an arbitrator between the inner and outer logics of this experience. Woodward (1991) is particularly interested in youthfulness as a masquerade in old age and the paradox that masking both conceals and reveals the marks of age. Thus Woodward (1991: 148) asserts that:

> "*Masquerade has to do with concealing something and presenting the very conditions of that concealment. A mathematics of difference is posited between the two terms–an inside and an outside, with the outside disguising what is within...A mask may express rather than hide a truth. The mask itself may be one of multiple truths*".

Woodward's mask is therefore useful for this study because it would appear from Margaret's reading above that a masque conceals signs of her life experiences of being both a fat and a thin person and the very act of hiding alerts the performer and audience that something is being hidden. It therefore tells us something truthful about an act of deception. Its power lies in that very social convention which varies depending upon the intended audience and this is what makes Woodward's (1991) description of masking both subtle and complex. Masking becomes a bridge between inner psychological and external social logic. According to Woodward (1991) and Biggs (1999) masquerade becomes part of a coping strategy to maintain identity and a means of keeping one's options open. It is a device through which an active agent looks out at and negotiates with the world, leaving the viewer to unravel fact from fiction. Masquerade thereby allows some control of the distance between oneself and other people.

Returning to the leaflet that Margaret (age 61) and others received from Weight Watchers we can see how the leaflet is clearly centred on notions of individual responsiveness and self-regulation, or governmentality and the embodied (ethically framed) obligation to 'take

care of the self' (Foucault, 1986). In order to achieve this we are now sold long established dieting practices under new descriptions, such as 'lifestyle change' or 'healthy eating programme'. For example, by the time Carol (55) finally reached her goal at Weight Watchers she told me that:

> *"I was so used to following the plan that it no longer felt like a diet, it felt more like a change of lifestyle that involved eating more healthily in order to stay in good shape...I was told by my GP to lose weight for the sake of my health, so it was up to me to do something about it...I am glad he did now because I feel so much better and have a far more positive outlook".*

In effect Carol as a 'good citizen' has felt obliged to work on her body and health as a moral imperative (Lupton, 1997b). Here, slimming typically constitutes and defines the entrepreneurial cum responsible self, and the streamlined body is an index of self, health and moral worth. Carol has identified that she had a weight problem and actively sought to reshape or transform her body by submitting herself voluntarily to the care of a commercial weight-loss organisation. In doing so, her lifestyle change with its aura of enlightenment, progress, and self-improvement is her 'passport' to a better life and more positive identity (Featherstone, 1991). Carol went on to further explain that:

> *"I have been on a diet practically all of my life and have tried every diet in the book [laugh]...Some have worked and some have not, and I have lost weight and slowly put it all back on again...This time round though I have put so much effort into it and I am determined to stay slim because it has given me a new lease of life and people have told me that I now look ten years younger...I never want to go back to being my old self because I am loads happier now".*

In a similar light Margaret (age 61) told me:

"Since going to Weight Watchers I have met some nice people who have now become my friends and being in this group has also been good for business too because those who have cats now bring them for me to take care of when they are away on holiday".

In addition Jane (age 58) explained that:

"Remaining fit and healthy is important for me and because I have put so much time, money, and effort into this I don't intend to stop eating healthily and taking up exercise...My kids don't know it yet but the exercise bike is not going in the loft or on ebay because its useful for making me change".

From these accounts we can see that the social rewards that accrue to being slim are very real and that and it takes a tough mind to reconcile itself to the knowledge that this ideal is unattainable and bad for women when so much points in the other direction. It is therefore crucially important for feminists to understand these practices as something other than merely repressive and to see how the older women caught up in them as something other than mere dupes in need of rescue.

Conclusion

This chapter has critically engaged with Foucault's technology of power in order to present discourses employed by older women to expose and explore the ways in which older women come to discipline and survey their own bodies through weight-loss practices which are seen as producing their own 'docile bodies' according to the dictates of idealized constructions of aging feminine embodiment. The chapter has demonstrated how weight-loss disciplinary practices aim to produce a woman with uniform shape, comportment, and ornamentation: "against the background of a pervasive sense of bodily deficiency" (Bartky 1990: 72). The chapter has explored the normalising role of weight-

loss dieting and exercise through analysing popular representations through which older women's cultural meaning is crystallized, metaphorically encoded, and transmitted. Specifically, the chapter has interpreted the physical body as representative of the social body in order to show how some dominant meanings are connected to the imagery of slenderness. Here, it was argued that the slenderness ideal embodies moral judgments of the proper management of impulse and desire, with body shape and size increasingly being read as a visible indicator of the inner moral self (Bordo 1993). In doing so the chapter has tended to privilege representational practices in the constitution of the body which as stated in chapter three is a problematic tendency which results in the disappearance of the material body behind layers of representation, becoming only that which can be 'spoken or readily put into words' rather than a lived body (Radley 1995: 7). Consequently, the body presented in this chapter tends to be lurking behind these social constructions and is: "conceptualized as an inert mass controlled by the mind, which is seemingly abstracted from an active human body" (Shilling, 1997: 79). However, as demonstrated towards the end of this chapter we can see that bodies cannot simply be treated as though they are the 'natural' foundation or passive surface upon which culture overlays a disciplinary system of meanings. In other words Foucault's version of social constructionism utilised by Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) denies the body as a lived entity by capturing: 'the body only insofar as they show how its functions, its movements, its "inner" and "outer" workings, have been shaped by social structures and discourse' and leave the body as flesh marginalized (Radley 1995: 7). In essence, there is much less sense of the body as an integral component for human agency (Shilling, 2003). Indeed, as demonstrated from the accounts presented by some of the older women the rewards and the pleasures associated with weight-loss practices and support received from these commercial organisations may often lie elsewhere, but they do exist. As illustrated earlier I spent six months immersed in

this diet culture and only then as a participant myself did I begin to understand the satisfaction many women found not only in losing weight, but in working on themselves in however circumscribed a context. Some of the older women found the practice of dieting both empowering and it was also viewed as a means of self-discovery. In other words, there were real pleasures to be had in a practice that has often been construed as completely repressive and dehumanizing. The next chapter therefore engages with Foucault's technology of the self in order to demonstrate how the normalising body altering practice emerges as a site where a desire to care for the self is expressed and concentrated and where capacities for reflection, patient labour, self-control, and new forms of pleasure are produced, even as rigid norms are enforced and the pain of failure is intensified and reinvested in renewed efforts to conform. Agency not only persists within this set of regimes, but in some significant respects it is magnified and cultivated through them. Indeed, if the relationship between older women's self-identity and the body is one in which both are increasingly indeterminate and open to choice then it becomes important to ask what choice means in relation to one's body and, therefore, the processes which constitute embodied identity (Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 1993: 5).

Chapter Six: From 'docile bodies' to the 'active self' (the use of pleasure and care of the self)

> "As disciplinary practices seep into the minutest habits and strategies of (self-) management proliferate, we do not cease to act, or feel repressed-politically or psychologically. Quite the contrary: with the intensification of power relations comes the increase of capabilities often interpreted by a liberal political tradition simply as the increase of autonomy (Foucault in Rabinow1997: 317).

Introduction

As already described in chapter three it was ascertained that in his later works from the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* (1981) onwards, Foucault (1988:19) became concerned that he had 'emphasized technologies of power at the expense of technologies of the self'. Consequently, in volumes two of The History of Sexuality, namely *The Use of Pleasure* (1987) and three The *Care of the Self* (1988) Foucault offers a framework for theorising the self which allows for the exercise of individual agency (McNay, 2002). In the concluding comments in chapter four I revealed how the literature review I conducted in chapters one, two, and three has exposed me to a world of discursive constructions surrounding aging and weight-loss dieting relating to 'docile bodies' that I had not previously been aware of. I felt this advantaged me in that it helped to contextualise and expose me to the role of a commercial weight management organisation and women's use of biographical accounts to negotiate identity in light of their ageing and the negative social and personal meanings of being overweight. However, in this chapter it must be noted that little attention has been paid to Foucault's latter work and has received almost no feminist attention at all especially with regards to older women as a marginalised group (McNay, 1992). Consequently there is little in Foucault's (1988) final work that helps feminists identify how disciplinary practices that travel under the sign 'care of the self'

might constitute practices of freedom, and how they (sometimes simultaneously) cultivate docile bodies (McNay, 1992). I therefore fully acknowledge that apart from the work conducted by Heyes (2006) there has been little literature available to frame my understanding of these issues. However, I do fully acknowledge that my ability to engage with the discourses presented by the women I interviewed could potentially have been skewed, with me privileging certain discourses over others. In line with chapter five extracts from interviews and fieldwork notes are used throughout this chapter and all participants are protected in line with the BSA ethical guidelines (http:// www.britsoc.co.uk).

In effect the following chapter through a very careful and creative analysis will project how this normalizing body-altering practice emerges as a site where a desire to care for the self is expressed and concentrated and where capacities for reflection, patient labour, self-control, and new forms of pleasure are produced, even as rigid norms are enforced and the pain of failure is intensified and reinvested in renewed efforts to conform. Agency not only persists within this set of regimes, but in some significant respects it is magnified and cultivated through them.

In this chapter I present discourses employed by the women interviewed to expose and explore the ways in which older women find weight-loss practices as not only repressive but also as enabling. The chapter will illustrate how these moments exemplify Foucault's thesis that the growth of capabilities occurs in tandem with the intensification of power relations. In doing so the main aim of both of these analysis chapters is to show that freedom is not impossibility for the normalised older subject and hopes to reveal some impressive evidence to convince the reader that this is a possibility.

The chapter will therefore commence by relating back to the points made in the final section in chapter three with regards to Nikolas Rose's (1996) three ways of relating to the self namely: epistemologically (knowing yourself), despotically (mastering yourself), and attentively (caring for yourself), each of which is a different kind of technology of the self. Here, as detailed in chapter three the central medium transmission of asketic advice about diet is according to Foucault in Rabinow (1997: 273) the hypomnemata, a word that in its original context has: "a very precise meaning: it is a copybook, a notebook". This chapter aims to carefully scrutinise how Weight Watchers' and Slimming World make use of the hypomnemata (leaflets handed out at meetings, magazine articles, website materials, and even cookbooks) in order to excavate how they carefully exploit key ascetic themes from a popular culture preoccupied in more or less ethical ways with care of the self. Here, as a starting point the underlying premise is that Weight Watchers' and Slimming World are using this rhetoric to deepen its member's dependence on the organization and, by implication, on the docility the organization cultivates. At the same time, the discipline of weight loss generates real capabilities, and fosters a kind of attentiveness toward the self. The analysis therefore begins by focusing on how getting to know oneself is central to weight loss and helps prevent a dieting relapse.

Self-transformation Building on your strengths and addressing any limitations

> "*I have lived with this body for the last fifty seven years and I know every square inch of it...I have noticed that since my mid forties I have seemed to put weight on a lot more easily and I now have more cellulite...My arms and legs are particularly bad and my whole body has gradually changed in shape*" (Alice age 57).

Similarly Carol (age 55), Joanne (age 57), and Andrea (age 59) echo the point made by Alice and Carol explains that:

> "*Eating all the wrong types of foods and not doing enough exercise has given me this disgusting body...I can't bear to look at it sometimes because I have rolls of fat and lumps and bumps everywhere. God only knows how much fat there is around my internal organs...I watched a programme on 'obesity' once and they were doing gastric surgery on a woman and the fat inside here was horrendous...It finally catches up with you when the fat gets in your way and starts damaging your health and wellbeing...I felt it was time to do something about it*" (Carol age 55).

Similarly Joanne (age 57) became disgusted at the sight of her fat body and stated: "*As a gifted baker I like to try the fruits of my labour too much and I know that I am responsible for making a mess of my body*". Joanne told me that the temptations at work proved far too much for her and she covered up the body she no longer liked with unflattering cloths and would not allow anybody but herself to view it. Joanne informed me that fat had now become an enemy that was preventing her enjoying her life as much as she wanted to and from recent photographs had decided only she could alter her body surface so that she could feel better. In effect the above accounts reveal that the mind is also a target. In a similar way to Alice and Joanne Andrea (age 59) expressed how she knew her body well and was also aware of the reasoning behind her gaining a considerable amount of weight. Andrea told me that:

> *I just wanted to enjoy myself in my retirement and I only have myself to blame for getting this size...However, I am now ruining my retirement because I am depressed about my size and don't want to go out and do anything...I don't even want to go on holiday despite dreaming of having the freedom from work to go when I want...At least I can do something about it, and since losing weight I am getting there*".

A similar point was also voiced by Julie (age 63) who joined Slimming World after becoming more concerned about her changed body shape and explained that: "*I complained to my husband and my family that I have got fatter and fatter as I have got older and that my body has got* worse". Julie told me how she hated getting in the bath or having a shower because she could feel her excess fat. She told me: "*it's gross because my fat seems to bob on the surface of the water when I am in the bath and I lie there wishing that the hot water could just melt it all away*". Julie continued to explain that being fat was constantly on her mind because it made her feel uncomfortable in her clothes and also she had started to feel uncomfortable at work (as a veterinary assistant) in case people felt she was too fat to do the job properly. Julie told me her husband was unsympathetic and got annoyed about her moaning about her weight because she never did anything about it. She told me that:

> "*my husband says to stop making excuses and get a grip and that I should take back some control of my eating and stop over indulging myself...He said that If I do this then I will feel healthier and get my self-esteem back...I joined Slimming World to help me do what he suggested*".

The above accounts show illustrate that weight loss is a continual process of knowing and learning (epistemic) about the changes to your body, your relationship to food, and the environment you live in. They illustrate how dieting may allow a kind of embodied self-care (attentitive) that recognised the acceptance/denial of one's habits or status that is often deeply internal and privatized (Heyes, 2006). As Julie's (age 63) account shows the process may involve new ways of relating to others that permit the unspoken to be voiced, or change to be debatable. This was captured when she described her weight gain as a catastrophic event which disrupted her biography and identity. Julie found that she had to lose weight in an attempt to recover and maintain identity. In this context, the self to be

known is not a static, essential one, but rather ever transforming (i.e. following Slimming World's advice on their website "*she can be the person she really wants to be, now and forever*" (www.slimmingworld.co.uk). What is apparent here is that the transformed self is not just a goal, because the process of transformation itself invents new capacities and invites reflection on a post-asketic self that is not yet known. For example, Foucault (1983:237) argued that "the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence, we have to create ourselves as a work of art". The older women who engage in weight-loss dieting uses her body to recreate/ master (despotic) herself as a work of art whose bodily form is so confronting that it cannot be, and is not ignored (ibid). For example, Turner (2001, 2003) has made a convincing case for a better articulation of social constructionism and phenomenology suggesting that the sensate experience of the body (in this instance in its fat and thin state) is both embedded in discourses which dictate what is a socially and culturally acceptable body and intimately linked to selfhood. As Heyes (2006) asserts we become ourselves in the process of embodying ourselves, that is of equipping ourselves with the 'body techniques' deemed appropriate for qualifying as fully integrated social actors. According to Turner (2001) embodiment and enselfment are life-long processes, primarily because the body is unfinished and their achievement needs a constant labour of maintenance. Turner adds that we are embodied and enselfed in specific loci, or, to borrow from Bourdieu's theory, in habitus. Thus embodiment and enselfment are also processes of 'emplacement'. These insights can be applied to older women's experiences of their self-transformation through weight-loss dieting practices in a commercial weight-loss management setting because of the close connection between embodiment, identity and the habitus can help us theorize the aging female body from the perspective of cultural change. In other words we should not understand ourselves as seeking to liberate a self that was always there, but rather to invent ourselves as something

new that is not yet imagined (Foucault, 1983). Here, Heyes (2006: 141) notes how the weight-loss discourse is particularly:

> "*insidious, sometimes invoking the authentic self, while other times turning back on itself to claim that the self we seek to liberate is always developing-always, of course, positing the telos of weight loss and thinness in a way that sets bodies into a hierarchy: You may be surprised by the changes you've made and what you've learned so far*"

In chapter five I presented some of the pathways which led older women to enter the research arenas with the sole purpose of weight-loss. Becoming a weight-loss dieter in an attempt to obtain a slimmer body is a highly structured process, rather than one which should be understood only from the perspective of self-motivation and willpower. The latter and their deployment are in fact socially located. I will show in what follows how the structural forces which enable entry in to the research arena, and how the personal qualities essential for the development of a thinner being and a more positive identity, self-motivation, willpower etc become embodied and realized in the process of induction into the research arenas. In other words this chapter will show how aging is played out in the research arenas which enable them as social actors, armed with distinctive dispositional tools, to refashion the mind/body relationship in such a way that an alternative construction of the ontology of self-transformating weight-loss dieting practices may emerge. Here, as demonstrated above the target of intervention was not just the body but also the mind.

At Slimming World the changes associated with the body and mind are referred to as taking small steps to begin a journey of changing one's lifestyle and body shape for good. Just changing a few aspects of your life according to Slimming World is empowering and

can improve one's life. As detailed in chapter five becoming a weight-loss dieter and retaining the slim ideal entails the achievement and maintenance of high levels of performance (Butler, 1999). To make this happen the older women have to orientate their lives towards this goal. This is facilitated by joining either Weight Watchers or Slimming World in order to gain a structure in which to organize their eating, drinking, and exercising regimes and as detailed already the labour involved in these activities are considered sometimes to the extreme (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993, Heyes, 2006).

As chapter five strongly revealed the older female members focused exclusively on the achievement and maintenance of losing weight to achieve the slim ideal, and therefore self-discipline consumed a significantly high proportion of their everyday lives. As detailed in chapter one, here the problem is not with the discipline, rather the problem lies with the goal of these particular disciplines and the fact that they tend to have a single, rigid goal, that of conformity to an ideal bodily appearance and comportment. In chapters three and five I have identified this goal (and the penalties associated with failure to attain it) as oppressive, and from the evidence presented I still whole heartedly agree. But in this chapter I will show that practices of body transformation are not always inevitably oppressive because they can open new possibilities and create new capacities without drawing a person more deeply into normalising discourses that produce self-objectification, fear of deviation, and self-loathing that Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) talked about. As Heyes (2006) pointed out, disciplines of bodily transformation can transform self-understanding to make older women less fearful of bodily difference and failure, less captivated by the images thrust upon them by advertising, fashion, and health industries, less apt to reinforce our society's gender norms in our own lives and the lives of those around us. The point to be made here is that as a participator I observed that by

joining either Weight Watchers or Slimming World, the older women could continue to grow and change and that they could regularly refer back to the changes made as a reminder of what they have learned from the process so far. I observed how weight-loss diet organizations actively cultivate progressivist discourses that inhibit this realization. For example, Stinson (2001: 146-47) described the alleged gradual 'improvement' of diet plans and states how:

> "Occasionally ... a member or leader would come across old organizational materials ... and share with the group various taboos, restrictions, or requirements. At one time, potatoes could only be eaten early in the day, and liver had to be eaten once a week. Although members found the stories funny, leaders used them to emphasize how much the program had changed and especially how much more freedom members now had to eat what they wanted. Taboos are associated with 'the old days', and are presumably no longer necessary as we have become more enlightened".

In this popular account, Heyes (2006) notes how the organization exploits the sovereign power model: through investing in progressive nutritional science and removing archaic manacles on member's choices, the program has become more modern and its adherents more free. In other words we need to be liberated from the picture of power as sovereign that holds us captive and renders invisible the biopower that narrows behavioural options and possibilities for flourishing. All of the older women who join Weight Watchers and Slimming World have recognised that they have a problem with their weight and embarked on a journey to change their life and correct this negative position from their first week onwards. The chapter will therefore move on to explore how Weight Watchers and Slimming World's hupomnemata encourage reflections on everyday accomplishments and the evolution of new capacities.

Replacing negative discourses with positive discourses

So far this thesis has staged an argument that a lack of scholarly interest has been shown in older women's dieting practices (Tunaley et al, 1999). The following analysis addresses some of these omissions in order to show how older women are able to replace the negative discourses with more positive ones in relation to the social costs of fatness measured by education, dating, income, employment, marriage and divorce (Gortmaker et al. 1993; Rodin 1992; Sargent and Blanchflower 1994). For example, Judith (age 64) told me that joining Weight Watchers and losing weight has been very important to her because it has not only made me look better, she has also achieved a goal that she set herself which has made her feel better about herself. Judith revealed that: "*I have learned something new...that I actually have some will-power [laugh]*". Similarly, Diane (age 56) declared that: "*This time I have not given in to temptation and have actually achieved what I set out to do*". In addition, Collette (age 55) told me that one of her strongest motivations for joining Slimming World was because:

> "*I swore I was not going to be a fat nan when my daughter was pregnant...I didn't want my granddaughter to go through what my own daughter had gone through...Being teased at school for having a really fat mum and her disappointment at me never being able to join in on sports days and play physical activities with her...I don't want my granddaughter to ever be embarrassed about having a fat nan. This dream spurred me on and now I am a slim nan...This was very important for me*".

The following account raised by Collette demonstrates how losing weight enables older women to undertake activities they may have supposedly been unable or unwilling to try. The analysis begins by building on Collette's (age 55) account with regards to physical

play with one's grandchildren. In doing so these examples show how losing weight can make one into a new person with new capacities.

> "*After losing four and a half stone I was able to play on the floor with my two grandchildren. I wasn't able to do this before because I struggled to get up...I also struggled to play with them because I got out of breath quickly and this has improved also since losing weight...I am due to go on a family holiday in six weeks and am looking forward to it because I feel so much better in myself and will actually be able to play with and keep up with my two boisterous granddaughters*" (Dorothy age 66 Slimming World).

In a similar vein Val (age 57) explained that:

> "*I have always felt a bit guilty that I have not been adventurous in taking my grand kids out for outdoor activities...Before losing weight I felt ashamed of my size and inability to look after them in the park or swimming...Now that I have lost weight I can push them on the swings and take them to Adventure Land without feeling uneasy...I have benefitted from this and so have they...They think it's hilarious when I kick the ball to them and chase them now...Happy days*".

In addition Jenny (age 55) who is single mother and works as a support worker told me that:

> "*I am now thinner than my daughter and am more able to play with the kids than she is. Because of my dieting success and seeing the rewards I am trying to bring her to her senses and encourage her to lose weight for the sake of her kids...I think they are getting skitted at when in school because she is a big girl*".

As detailed in chapter's two and three feminists have recognised how many women's achievements tend to go unrecognised or are invisible. This is especially apparent when exploring the achievements of older women. As already noted this negligence is often attributed to the broader constructions of ageing that define older females as sexually

ineligible (Arber and Ginn 1991; Bernard and Meade 1993; Calasanti and Slevin 2001). Consequently, most studies of weight management among females have focused on adolescents (Field et al. 1999; Nitcher and Vuckovic 1994) and young adults (Lee 1993), thus old age provides a degree of detachment from beauty imperatives (Apter, 1996; Daniluck, 1998). The following account made by Carmel (age 64) illustrates that like younger women older women are also concerned about their weight and that they are not sexually ineligible. Carmel described how:

> " *Until my retirement last year I have enjoyed a career in bar work...I have always looked after myself and have aspired to remain sexy as long as I possibly could...Don't get me wrong I am not mutton dressed as lamb but I do still like to wear short skirts and revealing tops. Why shouldn't I? I have always had a good figure too which I relate to being sexy, so when I put weight on I joined Slimming World to get rid of it...Being voluptuous is ok for some but being slim suits me and I never want to get fat again*".

Similarly, Grace (age 72) a retired legal secretary told me that she joined Slimming World because:

> "*I have always been a smartly dressed woman for the sake of my profession and I have always watched my weight so that I looked good too...I am now 72 years of age and nothing has changed...The weight has just seemed to creep on me and has gone relatively unnoticed. But when my sister came over to see me from Canada she couldn't believe how portly I had become. Well I didn't like this so I joined this club to gain some tips about what to eat and how I could do some exercise...Since losing the weight I have gained I feel more like my old self and I now aim to take care of myself in this way forever*".

In addition to her account above Carmel (age 64) went on to tell me that:"*I have been single now for a couple of years and since losing weight I hope to get myself back out*

there to get myself a new fella...I have to like myself again before I can like anyone else". As demonstrated above losing weight provokes ready congratulation, their experiences are tangible and they can be tracked and graphed to assess their setbacks and successes. Both Weight Watchers and Slimming World use its materials well to connect diverse accomplishments to weight-loss, which can then become an outward and visible symbol for other successes (Heyes, 2006). For example, on one occasion the slimming world consultant relayed her own personal story to members of the group and explained that:

> "*I first joined Slimming World when I was 38 years of age because I became increasingly worried about my weight...I happily followed the programme which was a bit different then to how it is today and I was successful...However, when I left I did put the weight plus a bit more back on...I rejoined Slimming World again in 2005 when I was 49 and reached my target weight by sticking rigidly to the programme and monitoring everything that went into my mouth. This gave me the will-power that I needed and because of this I was invited to become a consultant. The point that I am trying to make here is that I am far happier now because being slimmer works for me and gives me the confidence to succeed in other areas of my life*".

After listening to the consultant's symbol of success (and noticing that she was still quite overweight) some of the other members reiterated their accomplishments to weight-loss. For example, Collette (age 55) noted how she wishes to shed not only the pounds, but also a stressful and unrewarding career. She explained that:

> "*This may sound a bit corny but I feel like a totally different person now and want to move away from catering to do something more exciting. As a catering supervisor (before losing the weight) I always felt physically lethargic and constantly stressed. Because of this I couldn't resist picking at the food and I felt my life was totally out of control. Now that I have lost such a lot of weight I want a new job to go with the new body*".

Here we can see how Carmel and Collette, amongst others are trying to develop new pleasures which are an ascetic practice that Foucault sanctioned in volumes two and three of *The History of Sexuality* (even if he was more interested in drug use and sado-mosochistic sex than weight loss). The point to be made here from these accounts is that working on oneself requires working not just to conform behaviours and second order desires, but to transform the self at a level of first order desires too. Indeed, some of the oldest members in the sample such as Grace (age 72) suggested that she had joined Slimming World to gain some tips on what to eat and when I further pressed Grace about these tips she said that:

> "*The most important tip that I received from the leader was how to go about choosing salad and vegetables as opposed to chocolate and cakes...She was good at getting her point across that salad and vegetables are the healthy option and will get us to a point whereby we will feel good about ourselves again...I pretended to myself that chocolate which is my one true indulgence was poison to me and had to be avoided at all costs*".

Similarly, Collette (age 55), and Sam (age 58) suggested that the leader also gave them some useful tips on how to stop becoming hungry. For example, Sam expressed how: "*the key to success is to never feel hungry. Therefore I always make sure that I have my free foods and Muller Light yoghurts at the ready*". Collette also told me that: "*I have become so disciplined that when I have a craving for anything sweet especially after six o'clock at night I usually save up my milk allowance and make a hot chocolate*". Both Sam and Collette are able to discipline the body's hungers and monitor their appetites at all times with what appears to be an iron will. Both recognise that at any time if the: "innocent need of the organism for food will not be denied, the body becomes ones enemy, an alien being

bent on thwarting the disciplinary project" (Bartky, 1990: 66). For example, Brenda (age 67) explained: "*I find it difficult to restrict my bread intake so one night I cut the end of a fresh French stick and popped it into my mouth...after getting a taste for it I thought ah to hell with it and ended up eating half of it lathered in anchor butter*". Brenda said that she did feel guilty but felt that if she ate hardly anything the next day then this would compensate for this misdemeanour. The majority of the sample had also succumbed to temptation at various times in the day. However, in order to keep members on track to accomplish a better life, one that was more useful and happy Weight Watchers and Slimming World placed great emphasis on the importance of making one's choices, initiating transformation, and approaching food (and other things) with wisdom and flexibility. Indeed the new flexipoints addition to the Weight Watchers plan conveys the slogan: "The real world is full of choices. Weight-loss should be too" (www.weightwatchers.co.uk). The chapter will therefore turn to analyse how older women adjust their behaviour to fit the circumstances.

Points and Syns: Your flexible friends

Chapter five has demonstrated how as willing participants in a disciplinary technology, dieters measure and scrutinize themselves far more precisely and conscientiously than those who must be educated into more reluctant self-monitoring behaviours. The organized diet program is thus a particularly extreme version of panoptic culture, which is why it attracts this kind of Foucauldian attention. Both Weight Watchers' and Slimming World's current program is exemplary in this regard, requiring that one evaluate the Pro Points and Syns values of everything consumed. Members must write down in a food journal everything they eat, along with its Points value and are actively encouraged to constantly

revisit and reread the literature in order to achieve this. Indeed, citing Socrates Foucault (1985:108) wrote that:

> *"To become an art of existence, good management of the body ought to include a setting down in writing carried out by the subject concerning himself; with the help of this note-taking, the individual would be able to gain his independence and choose judiciously between what was good and bad for him".*

Members are regularly issued with small leaflets, recipes, and replacement dieting diaries that are conveniently designed to be carried in a pocket, purse, or handbag. In addition, Weight Watchers and Slimming World produce websites that continually evolve and offer something new to the repeat visitor[12]. Slimming World and Weight Watchers' members are instructed to write down not only what they eat, but also how they feel in order to help them in their weight-loss goals. For example, when invited to write in a Weight Watchers leaflet reflecting on her continuation of such phrases as, 'Losing weight has enabled me to...' Brenda (age 67) asserted that:

> *"I took me ages because I didn't know what to put down at first...When I eventually did start to write I produced a flippin great big essay [laugh]...I haven't got it with me now but I just wrote down things such as it has enabled me to meet new friends, gain some support, take some control of my life, get advice on what to eat, try out some of the recipes and foods that I don't like.. I have never really been that interested in cooking before but now I have a go to keep up with everyone else...Most importantly I said how happy I felt to see the fat disappearing each time I go and I also measure myself to see the inches disappearing from my waist"*

[12] Rebecca Coleman (2008) presents a good overview of dieting temporalities: interaction, agency and the measure of online weight watching

Here, this type of leaflet is designed to provide an interactive moment, where the older member is able to engage with the hypomnemata and thus make some tangible connection with the programme and its role in herself development. Similar points were also displayed when I probed members to reveal their usage of the food diaries and how they went about recording their personal thoughts and setting themselves the next goal (i.e. how much weight they would like to lose the following week. The following replies beginning with Diane (age 56) illustrates this point. Diane told me that:

> "*At first I didn't want to bother with the weekly food diaries because I am not that keen of filling forms and stuff in...However, when I hit my plateau and couldn't regain my huge weight-losses I could not remember what I had eaten to make it go wrong...That week the leader decided to tell us the importance of doing this and she said that the people who do it religiously have a better chance of weight-loss than those who don't bother*".

In addition Jane (age 58) explained that: "*I have had a go at filling in the diary and was more keen when I first started...I still do it but I never have a full week written down*". Similarly, Jean (age 56) found the food diary provided by Slimming World good for her because she explained how:

> " *I have kept a diary all of my life...I like recording my thoughts and feelings and a lot of my diet loss experiences have also been recorded in my main diary...I think it's a good idea to see what you have eaten so you can add up your syns for the week...I save mine up and have them at the weekend and sometimes I set myself the goal of having none, it depends how I feel...getting back to expressing my thoughts and feelings I don't want to say too much other than I find the programme both frustrating and also rewarding at times*".

However, on the other hand some older women have shown little interest in this procedure for various reasons; for example, Rosie (age 69) said that: "*It's all a bit too regimental for me and I feel a bit embarrassed having to write down how I feel...I suppose I don't so much mind filling in what I have eaten but I find it difficult to express myself with words*". Rosie continued to tell me how she had also had to fight her corner with regards to being told what to do and explained:

> "*One day the leader got a bit cross with me because I don't always do the diary business and she was actually a bit ageist...She insinuated that at my age I could be quite forgetful and If I didn't record what I have eaten she would not be able to help me see where I had gone wrong with it...I never forget anything my mind is a sharp as a razor and I objected at being treated in that way...My friend told me to just forget about it because she knows I enjoy coming here too much*".

At one point towards the end of my fieldwork when I failed to lose any weight on two consecutive weeks I was also told by the Slimming World leader to keep a diary in order to stay focused and to keep on track. Like most of the older members I found that writing down ones thoughts and feelings and recording the daily food, and goals provide members with an interactive moment, where the older member is able to engage with the hypomnemata and thus make some tangible connection with the programme and its role in self development. The motive for the organisation centred on the provision of proof with regards to the amount of discipline and commitment shown to the dieting programme. The following accounts continue to highlight the flexibility and choice afforded to them by the programme and how this enables them to remain focused on the task ahead without the possibility of a lapse. For example, Collette (age 55) suggests that

> "*As a cook I like to try out all of the new recipes that come through and I sometimes bring food that I have cooked to show the group how they have turned out...I have*

purchased some of the cookbooks and go to a butchers by me that does all the slimming world meat and sausages that we are allowed...My favourite thing is when the leader cooks us a recipe in class and lets us try it...last month it was these lovely syn free burgers".

Overall most of the older women in the sample appeared to enjoy it when the leaders brought in *new products for them to try like crisps and fat free yogurt.* Val (age 57) explained that she also liked it when the leader: "*tests us on the point's value of food because I am really good at knowing the diet programme inside out now*". In addition, Jenny (age 55) found it helpful when the leader at Slimming World reiterates what the speed foods are and explains how grapefruits, pineapples, and blueberries etc can speed up the metabolism which for Jenny was:"*Especially helpful when reaching a plateau and staying the same weight for three consecutive weeks*". She went on to say that: "*to kick start the weight-loss again I ate pineapples till they come out of my ears*". Occasionally, some of the older members as well as the younger members found that the most challenging aspect of the programme was their restriction of food and drink (alcohol) when on a night out. For example, Denise (age 58) claimed that: "*I am a bit of a night owl and like to get out and about to different social events...I used to drink lager but by coming here I have learnt to change my habits and now I limit myself to the odd Bacardi and diet coke of gin and slimline tonic which has less syns.* The point that Denise was trying to emphasise is that because she has had to restrict her alcohol as part of the programme it has made her realise just how much she has been drinking in terms of units. Denise said that "*Even if I give up the programme now which I very nearly have a few times I will not go back to my old ways of drinking because I really do feel better in myself for cutting down*". Most of the accounts presented above feature regularly in the weekly discussions and one of the things that struck me during the field work was the friendships that were created amongst the older women. Their enthusiasms for the programme and their

successes were often relayed through a Slimming World group facebook (social networking site) page designed to further enhance their capacities to lose weight and remain on track. Here, both older and younger members were able to communicate and further support each other's progress outside of the meeting environment. Here, Alice (57) told me that:

> "*Its great using facebook because you can still keep in touch with people who have dropped out and its good fun...I have arranged to go out for a meal with some of the other members a few times which is a hoot because we were all counting points and discussing what was best to eat and drink...I like the classes and I also like going on facebook now for an extra bit of banter*".

Similarly, Denise (age 58) told me that:

> "*I also joined facebook so I could chat on the Slimming World page...My husband thought I was taking it too far and I said to him well you have your golf and your fishing don't you and I have this so what's the difference*".

The above two accounts clearly relate to both Foucault's *Use of Pleasure* (1987) and also his *Care of the self* (1988). What we are clearly witnessing here is how both Weight Watchers and Slimming World cleverly deploy the discourse of self care that feminists have long encouraged. So far the analysis in this chapter has gone some way to recognising the power of this discourse in order to better understand the perennial appeal of a self disciplining practice that always fails its ostensible goals. Just reiterating a point I made earlier I was quite surprised to find that so many of the older members enjoyed such a regime and gained pleasure from caring for the self in some of the ways that Foucault predicted. The following accounts demonstrate how some of the older members have

joined and rejoined these slimming clubs and have engaged in their practices as a means of a social life. For example Irene (age 59 Weight Watchers) stated that:

> *"I have got used to coming here now on a Thursday evening and look forward to seeing all of the members old and new and staying for class... We are lucky because our leader has a really good sense of humour so I tend to have a good laugh...Some people think I am mad spending money each week to come and get weighed and I just laugh at them and say well I enjoy going even if I put weight on [laugh]".*

In a similar way Brenda (age 67) told me how her husband as a saboteur has:

> *"been trying to get me to leave here for months because he finds my fussing about food irritating...I like coming because it gets me out for a few hours and I have a bit of company other than looking at his ugly miserable mug...I suppose I do come to get up his nose and to his annoyance I have made a good friend who I go round and seen now on other nights...He doesn't like it because he likes to be the centre of attention".*

The following account made by Janet (age 59) demonstrates how losing weight has not been an easy thing to achieve and explained:

> *"getting this weight off hasn't been an easy ride and I have had my ups and downs...I left once for a couple of weeks and then decided to come straight back...The leader was made up that I had not given up and she has now taken me under her wing more than ever...I have now lost over two stone and I feel fantastic...Being slim feels lovely and I particularly like to be congratulated by the other members at how well I now look...I suppose I am in my comfort zone being here and I know that If I leave I will not only miss the people and the staff but I will put it straight back on".*

The important point to be made here so far, is that, whatever skills and capacities dieting may enhance are immediately recycled back into a field of meaning internal to weight loss (McWhorter, 1999). Only losing weight, they would have us believe, can lead to true self-knowledge, self-development, self-mastery, and self-care (Rose, 1996). In order to conclude this chapter I must return to explore deficiency discourses again in order to underpin how the weight that is lost is almost always regained, and show how much is at stake for older women due to this failure.

A return to deficiency discourses

As described in chapters one and three it was argued that 98 percent of diets will fail (Thompson, 1997), in a sense that even those who succeed in losing weight in the short term will regain it in the medium to long term (Hesse-Biber, 1996). Indeed, when exploring the Weight Watchers website we can see how they openly sell the company as a good investment by saying that: "*meeting members typically enrol to attend consecutive weekly meetings and have historically demonstrated a consistent re-enrolment pattern across many years*" (www.WeightWatchers.co.uk), while it is a standard trope of published 'success stories' that one may join and quit and rejoin a diet program many times-always, of course, before it finally works (Heyes, 2006). Indeed, evidence of this 97 percent recidivism rate was apparent by the amount of people who seemed to drop out within the first couple of weeks. When conducting the fieldwork of those who joined in my first weeks (identifiable by the week by week leaflets they clutched during meetings), I could identify only one or two six months later. From the sample it was ascertained that all 36 women interviewed had engaged in weight-loss dieting at some point in their lives (even when not overweight) for various reasons. A total of 32 had been members of a commercial weight-loss organisation before and most of the sample had tried both Weight

Watcher's and Slimming World's methods. The analysis will therefore continue to illuminate some of the possible reasons for the 98 percent failure rate (Thompson, 2007), and why such organisations have a 97 percent recidivism rate (Orbach, 1993). The first point to be made here is that most of the sample had made some attempt to diet alone, but this had been unsuccessful for the following reasons. For example, Noreen (age 74) told me that "*When I diet myself I cheat all the time because I don't have to be weighed each week and show accountability...I need the discipline to be able to do it and I also need the support from Slimming World and the other women*". Similarly Grace (age 72) who has been recently widowed explained: "*I am not that keen on forking out the fee each week to be honest but I am desperate to lose some weight and cannot do it on my own*". In addition Alice (age 57) expressed how:"*I have tried to diet at home in order to save me joining a club and paying for help... but I just can't seem to stay motivated and I fall off the wagon all the time...I need that extra motivation and discipline*". Finally, Sheila (age 68) argued that: "*When I diet at home I tend to tamper with my scales to make me feel better [laugh]...I am kidding myself so it is pointless...I can't argue with their scales*". In addition the following accounts also show how restrictive dieting when practised alone or in groups rarely produces long-term weight loss (Hesse-Biber 1996). For example, Joanne (age 57) said:

> "*I am one of those yo yo dieters who loses the weight and then puts it all back on again...However, as I have got older I put more and more back on...it's a vicious circle really which makes me think that if I want to remain slim then I need to be on a diet forever*".

Some of the older women in the sample also only rejoined because they were motivated by some sort of special occasion, be it a milestone birthday, a holiday, a wedding, or because

of health issues. For example, Liz (age 60) described how she only joined Slimming World because:

> "*I am going on an expensive cruise for my 60th birthday...At first I was really driven and lost the three stone quickly over a four month period...Since going on the cruise I have put 12 pounds back on and do not seem to have the same motivation because the goal is no longer there...I know that I can just leave the programme for a bit and then come back to it again when I get fed up and want to lose some weight again*".

Interestingly, the following account from Sally (age 61) demonstrates that: "*When I lose the weight it makes me feel fantastic and I feel proud of all the hard work I have put in*". She also went on to describe how she was very proud of the fact that she could get a favourite pair of Levi jeans on and said:

> "*Getting those jeans on was a great achievement for me and has made me believe that your body can go back to how it was when you was younger... I know I still have wrinkles now and some sagging skin that need toning up with exercise...But by getting those jeans on it took me back to my youth and for a while I was on cloud nine*"

In a similar way to Sally I was also pleased at being able to revisit a vintage pair of favourite jeans that hung idle in my wardrobe for years and like Sally I experienced a flashback to the times when I was a younger woman. However, like myself Sally's experience of the slim ideal was also short lived and she described how she went on to regain the weight that she had so fought to lose and described how this: "*makes me very depressed because I feel a* failure*...I just can't stick at it for the long haul*". From my own experiences as described in chapter four and from Sally's account we can see that with weight-loss as the synecdoche for multiple forms of working on oneself, recidivism is

therefore likely to be particularly crushing, with regained weight standing in for ethical weakness, a return to old habits, and failure to care adequately for the self as well as to be responsible to others (Lupton, 1997 b). From this account and from many other of the older women's accounts it would be fair to suggest that the streamlined body is indeed an index of self, health and moral worth. For those social actors such as myself who identify with 'weight problems' and actively seek to reshape their bodies, such entrepreneurial action hopefully represents a 'passport' to a better life (Featherstone, 1991). Consequently, I further pressed Sally and some of the other older women for more information in this rather sensitive area. Before continuing with this analysis I would just like to point out that the ethical considerations have been stringently followed throughout the life of this process and when approaching a sensitive area which can incur some form of harm I tentatively asked the right kind of questions and each participant was informed that if they felt uncomfortable answering a question they could stop and move on and in the worst case scenario they could end the interview (this never happened). Having clarified this importance Sally continued to emphasise how:

> "*Nobody wants to appear to be a failure and go back to old habits...I just couldn't keep going because of the money and also I got really bored of it in the end...I am one of those who thought I have done it now and I can do it on my own from now on, but I couldn't unless I stayed a member of the club forever...I am back now as an older woman to try again because my GP has told me that I need to lose weight to prevent any more health risks...I think the health risk as opposed to my appearance has made me come back and try again...So far so good*".

In a similar way Brenda (age 67) a habitual weight-loss dieter who has been on both programmes, amongst others, but who favours Weight Watchers' described how she had

three different size sets of good clothes hanging up in my wardrobe which at the moment don't fit her. Brenda told me:

> "*I have been up and down and up and down for years and have felt good and bad and good and bad again...After the last episode when I put the weight plus more back on [laugh] I gave it up as a bad idea and decided that I was always going to be fat and that I would eat what I liked without being told off about it ... However, I was only kidding myself and I am back now though because I got bigger than ever and the doctor told me it was affecting my aching knees and my breathing*".

In a similar way Irene (age 59) told me that since being at Weight Watchers she has lost over three stone in weight but was worried about leaving the programme because she knew from past experiences that she would put the weight back on and: "*will have to go through all this pain again... I feel really positive at the moment because I am lighter and I know if I become heavy again it will make me miserable and affect my self esteem*". Several of the other women in the sample voiced the same concerns and the general consensus amongst them was that losing weight and regaining it is an ignominious defeat for one's efforts to create an art of living. Here, compared to some of the younger members these older women related weight-loss to a sense of achievement and also the passport to a better life (i.e. in terms of health) and a more positive identity in old age. This partly explains why they appear to become yo yo dieters and diet over and over again in order to regain the sense of reincarnation that the process is designed to cultivate. These women grieve for the loss of the thinner self and even if this is not really attained they can always look forward to doing it again and regaining the forum in which to take care of themselves. As detailed in chapter three the corporate Weight Watchers' website even candidly sells the company as a good investment by saying: "Meeting members typically enrol to attend consecutive

weekly meetings and have historically demonstrated a consistent re-enrolment pattern across many years" (Weight Watchers 2002), while it is a standard trope of published 'success stories' (relayed in magazines and online) that one may join and quit and rejoin a diet programme many times-always, of course, 'before it finally works'. Indeed, when my fieldwork came to an end and despite the fact that I gave each leader an explanation for my exit I still received a generic letter in the post from them trying to encourage me to return to the programme. The Weight Watchers letter was quite quirky and suggested that I "*should not let my hard work go to waist*", whilst the Slimming World letter referred to my absence as being a temporary setback in the journey that I have undertaken. The letter stated: "You took the first step of your journey when you walked through our door in order to transform your life and be whoever you want to be...You need to come back and continue your journey in order to change your life forever". In other words following up those women who quit these commercial weight-loss organisations invite their members to rejoin the programme and pick up where they left off. Indeed, these letters did have a positive effect on several of the older women who fully believed that different behaviours this time around will put them into the magic minority of success stories. As detailed in chapter three most health-care practitioners and policy makers tout the claim that weight loss in and *of itself* is good for one's health, and the diet industry funds research, lobbies medical providers, and advertises assiduously (Monaghan et al, 2010). Given the intensity of the pressure to conform to beauty ideals, of fat phobia, and their beliefs about health and weight, much is at stake that may inspire even the most cynical dieter (such as myself) to try another plan. Finally, the common knowledge that diets don't work has also been obscured by the new linguistic conventions diet vendors favour. As demonstrated in chapter five and this chapter older women see dieting practices as being '*life changing*' and associate themselves as being on a '*healthy eating plan*'. Indeed, if slimming or

reducing body size does not capture the contemporary older female's imagination, then '*lifestyle change*' with its aura of enlightenment, progress, and self-improvement surely does. But what happens when their healthy eating plans and lifestyle changes are taken too far. For example, in these analysis chapters it was mentioned that some members of the group were having big weight-losses of between 4-5 lbs on a weekly basis as opposed to a more healthy 1-2 lbs and these women were never challenged by their leaders as to why. For example, Diane (age 56) told me that she had lost an incredible five and a half stone over an eight month period at Weight Watchers in order to fit the slim ideal and when interviewed she told me that she had become obsessed about her weight and had started to engage in some worrying behaviours with regards to managing her food intake such as binge purging and self starvation. Diane informed me that she has even gone as far as to take her weiging scales on holiday with her to reinforce her strict regime. In chapter five I utilised Diane's account to illustrate how Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) and Heyes (2006) have drawn on and extended Foucault's account of disciplinary power in order to analyse the disciplinary practices that engender specifically feminine 'docile bodies' through dieting practices. These authors have expanded Foucault's analysis of the panopticon to illustrate how the panopticon's potential for surveillance nurtures self-discipline (causing older women such as Diane to gaze upon themselves), and self-discipline replaces torture as the paradigmatic method of social control. Thus, a person like Diane and her body are turned into an object and self-surveillance emerges as the practice of control. As demonstrated in chapter five when individuals such as Diane are treated as objects they see themselves as objects and as demonstrated above they torture their bodies and desires to fit instructions and specifications. However, the form of social constructionism utilised in chapter five denies the body as a lived entity because I have captured the: "*body only insofar as they show how its functions, its movements, its "inner"*

and "outer" workings, have been shaped by social structures and discourse' and leave the body as flesh marginalized" (Radley, 1995: 7). Indeed, I have experienced weight-loss myself in the past and that I had also lost weight during my fieldwork, thus I fully understand how the inner and outer workings of my own body have been shaped by the social structures and normalising discourse. Yet, I also experienced the changes to my body in terms of how the surface (the fleshiness of my body felt when fat and when slimmer. In other words I wanted to move the analysis on from my tendency to privilege representational practices in the constitution of the body which results in the disappearance of the material body behind layers of representation. Consequently, I asked Diane about the massive changes she had experiences in terms of her inner (mind) and outer (fleshiness) workings of her body. The chapter will therefore turn to present her own accounts of these experiences.

Don't let all your hard work go to 'waist' at Weight Watchers

> "*I used to be able to grab hold of my spare tyres and double chin to show people how fat I was and this made me feel ashamed...Now I don't have them... but what I do have left is some sagging skin and stretch marks as a permanent reminder of my once fat body...I have gone to the gym religiously to try to tighten up my stomach, arms and legs but it's just not happening...I have visited my GP about it and am now waiting to see if I can have a tummy tuck done on the NHS and if I can't I will just have to save up to get rid of it*".

Diane's account clearly demonstrates how she has moved from experiencing her body as object to a relation in which the body is lived in terms of what it can do. As has been argued throughout the examples presented in both of these analysis chapters, if the accounts of the relation between the self and body rendered in the accounts of the older

women in this project are to be more fully understood then the starting point for such an analysis must break free from the constraining influence of the mind/body dualism and the Cartesian tradition. As argued in chapters two, three, five and this chapter this is a problem which continues to concern many of the attempts made by feminists such as myself to think about embodied identity in critical yet non-deterministic or reductionist ways and in ways which grant older women agency. As Budgeon (2003), amongst others, asserts, one possibility for a feminist reconfiguration of these problems is to begin from a radically altered ontological position. Budgeon notes how the use of such an ontology would deliver a plan for exploring the mind and body, representation and materiality, and corporeality in non-dichotomous and non reductive ways. As we can see from Diane's account this is a fluid process of transformation which can be seen as a process of connections, extensions, reformations and a process of becoming. For example, Diane's epistemic (knowing herself), attentitive (self-care) and despotic (mastering herself) knowledge was acquired over time as part of the culture associated with weight-loss dieting. Becoming competent at managing ones food/drink intake and exercise regime also included interrogating her body in order to decide whether to stop eating and training and when to start eating and training again. In effect Diane had to develop cognitive resources that enable her to read her body and control bodily dispositions, thus, the relationship between bodily capital and internal dispositions is in constant flux. In terms of addressing the issue of voluntary self starvation and binge purging Diane told me that she has used her body to recreate herself, but the problem had now become so confronting that cannot be, and is, not ignored. Diane told me that:

> *"I know I have taken my obsession too far with regards to making myself sick and starving myself for days on end and I am at present getting some counselling to help me to stop it...The counsellor advised me to give up going to Weight Watchers*

immediately so that I could break my rigid disciplinary regime and begin to read my body in a more rational way".

Here, being able to read her own body and knowing how to deal with her perceived and medically confirmed problematic bodily dispositions, Diane illustrates the complex and rich relationship between her body and mind. On the one hand, when her diet and exercise regime results in a weekly weight-loss she found that her mind and body to be in perfect harmony. However, on the other hand, Diane reveals how this symbiotic relationship can be disrupted when the body starts to hunger for food and when her body starts tiring through lack of sustenance the regime becomes more difficult. For example, Diane explained:"*When I am starving and longing to eat something I usually have two options. I can either binge purge or I can eat and step up the exercise regime in order to compensate*". At this point, the mind can be allowed to take over to push Diane's body along. In addition Diane can also take advantage of the ability of the body and mind to be handled separately and she explained how she sometimes uses exercise as a time to solve other problems. In effect Diane uses dieting and exercises as a way of disciplining the body's hungers and she has taken this to the extreme in order to strictly monitor her food intake at all times which she governs with an iron will. As demonstrated since the: "innocent need of the organism for food will not be denied, the body becomes one's enemy, an alien being bent on thwarting the disciplinary project" (Bartky, 1990: 66). Consequently Diane utilises exercise as a way of dealing with the body's hungers in order to keep the regime going. Turner (1992: 221) succinctly captures this dilemma in suggesting that:

> "The anorexic avoids the shameful world of eating, while simultaneously achieving personal power and a sense of moral superiority through the emaciated body. Their attempt at disembodiment through negation becomes the symbol of their moral empowerment".

So far, from this account I have shown that the achievement of weight-loss dieting competence (in this case to the extreme) involves an apprenticeship which embraces a large proportion of the dieters everyday life, the nurturing of a new set of dispositions of the body and managing of the resources of body and mind, and the link to identity, which is crucial. In other words, what is achieved here in some of the older women's accounts presented in this chapter is the incorporation of a new set of dispositions which provide the framework for agency (Heyes, 2006). This self-transforming of the body is underpinned by the instrumental rationality informing the contemporary tendency to self-regulate in the search for appropriate forms of identity (ibid).

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how many older women in this sample found the practice of dieting empowering, and also a means of self-discovery. In other words, there were real pleasures to be had in a practice that has often been construed as completely repressive and dehumanizing. The chapter has unearthed how this normalising body altering practice emerges as a site where a desire to care for the self is expressed and concentrated and where capacities for reflection, hard work, self-control, and new forms of pleasure are produced, even as unyielding norms are enforced and the pain of failure is intensified and reinvested in renewed efforts to conform. Agency not only persists within this set of regimes, but in some significant respects it is magnified and cultivated through them. From the older women's accounts this chapter has demonstrated how discipline does produce a diversity of new capacities for pleasure as well as pain, capacities that may open up all kinds of new possibilities for the exercise of freedom. According to Rose (1996:

141) "human beings are not the unified subjects of some coherent regime of domination that produces persons in the form in which it dreams". Rose asserts that techniques of relating to oneself as a subject of unique capacities worthy of respect: "run up against practices of relating to oneself as the target of discipline, duty, and docility" (ibid). As mentioned in chapter one at the place where self-discipline into the world of dieting meets the new capacities that the practice generates is a gap that feminists needed to exploit. As demonstrated in this chapter in the scripted examples of website testimonials or advisory pamphlets, every askesis is turned back on itself, and fully recruited again to the service of dieting. In the world of meetings, however, the real older women that I encountered were aware that they could learn from Weight Watchers and Slimming World without becoming the projected unified subject of its regime. Central to this awareness is the possibility of disconnecting new capacities from 'docility', and of employing those capacities to gain pleasure and to take care of the self. For example, the importance of method, structure, and consistency to any disciplinary project became clear to me and, as Foucault (1988) pointed out, achieving greater freedom often involves discipline. Following Heyes (2006) example, I realized that strategies for observing and documenting self-limiting and self-destructive behaviours could be very useful as an awareness practice. Here, I witnessed how communities of older women could be mobilized in face-to-face meetings, online, and through facebook that plead to be imitated by a diet-resisting not-for-profit feminist organization. Ultimately, these are insights into dieting askeses that exceed 'normalising' goals and expand, rather than reduce, my possibilities for being in the world. Thus, finally, feminists should understand the needs of contemporary older women (including ourselves of course) for sites in which we can develop care of the self and an aesthetics of existence, without further entrenching our own 'docility'.

So far we can see that this thesis has consisted of a feminist Foucauldian reading of the phenomenon of weight loss as pursued by women of middle age and above. The main theme for exploration has been the orthodox feminist position of viewing weight loss practices as ultimately reflective of oppression and the extent to which they might provide tangible rewards for the older women emgaged in them. In doing so, the thesis has critically engaged with the underlying tensions between repressive and enabling understandings of power. In order to present a clearer map of how this journey has unfolded as a particular strength and intervention of the thesis chapter seven will firstly, summarise the tensions evident between Foucault's work on disciplinary practices and his later work on 'technologies of the self'; between understandings of 'docile bodies' and bodies/selves with capacities of self transformation. Secondly, I shall further discuss how these methodological tensions get played out in the empirical data on the older women's partners, and their on their experiences of failure and recidivism. In doing so this will link into presenting a clearer discussion of how the empirical findings on recidivism and failure constitute a particular gendered form of embodiment. Fourthly, I shall present a much clearer discussion of the impact and consequences of marrying Bourdieu's toolbox with Foucault's toolkit to further enhance some of the theoretical incompatabilities in Foucault's work on discourse analysis presented on pages 156-158. In doing so I will present a clearer account of how I attempted to resolve the tension between the habitus and the 'docile body'. Finally, this summary chapter will also present a clearer account of how the conceptual tools of symbolic violence and false consciousness get played out in relation to class, gender, and sexuality. I shall therefore reconnect with feminist literature on class and self improvement, sexuality and food, as well as Bourdieu's valuable work on distinction, food and class.

Chapter seven: Conclusion

Poststructuralism and contemporary feminism have emerged as two of the most influential political and cultural movements of the late twentieth and early twenty first century (Diamond and Quinby 1988). As discussed in this thesis the recent alliance between them has been marked by an especially lively engagement with Foucault's earlier work on 'technologies of power' (1977, 1978) with his later works on 'technologies of the self' (1987, 1988). From the perspective of contemporary social and political theory, the originality of Foucault's genealogies of power knowledge resides in the challenge they pose to traditional ways of thinking about power. In this thesis I have presented a feminist Foucauldian reading of the phenomena of weight loss as pursued by older women and have engaged with the tension between repressive and enabling understandings of power – broadly speaking a tension evident in Foucault's earlier work on disciplinary practices ('docile bodies') and his later work on 'technologies of the self' (bodies/selves with capacities for self-transformation). The affinities and tensions between Foucault's thought and contemporary feminism are therefore summarised below in order to present a clearer map of how this journey has unfolded as a particular strength and intervention of this thesis.

Addressing the tension in using 'Foucault's toolbox' when exploring older women's weight loss practices in a commercial weight loss organisation

For many feminists, weight-loss dieting has long been associated with the tyranny of slenderness and the enforcement, by patriarchal disciplinary practices, of an ideal body type that carries a powerful symbolism of self-discipline, controlled appetites, and the circumscription of appropriate feminine behaviour and appearance (Heyes 2006). These

existing accounts of dieting typically rely on the central explanatory concepts of either 'false consciousness' or 'docile bodies'. In the first case, critics suggest, people diet because they act on false beliefs about the possibility and desirability of losing weight for the sake of their health (Gaessser, 2002). In a feminist variant, women also diet because they have been ideologically duped by an oppressive set of beauty ideals: being thin will make us (hetero) sexually desirable, aesthetically pleasing to ourselves and others, and better able to build an image that is appropriately feminine (Heyes, 2006). In the second 'docile bodies' account Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993), its best-known advocates, suggest following Foucault's earlier genealogies (which emphasised the process through which individuals were subjected to power), that weight loss dieting is one of a number of patriarchal disciplinary practices played out on the body through forms of subjection, the process of at once becoming a subject and becoming subjected. It is to this body of work that we shall now turn in order to reveal why there was a need to supplement these existing critical accounts of 'docile bodies' with another feminist philosophical direction that helps us to understand its more enabling moments.

'Technologies of power': 'Docile bodies'

Essentially, in Foucault's earlier works such as *Discipline and Punish* (1977) his concept of discipline is concerned with forging the 'docile body'. Here, Foucault (1977: 136) asserts: "A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved". In focusing on the body, Foucault traces the workings of power at a micro-level to illustrate how in its dense web of disciplinary coercions the prison created and implemented procedures which could be adopted in other fields with some modification. In this thesis I have therefore shown that commercial weight loss dieting clubs are forcing houses for people whose project is to improve and transform themselves as part of the construction of

identity (Giddens, 1991). These forcing houses are explicitly aimed at making people lose weight, but their agenda is part of a broader ideology of behavioural modification that relates this transformation to a radical change in the person by means of control. Directing her attention to the creation of a specifically female 'docile body' Bartky (1990) draws heavily upon Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) in order to present a detailed examination of the subjection of the female body to disciplinary practices such as dieting, exercise and beauty regimens that produce a form of embodiment which conforms to prevailing norms of feminine beauty and attractiveness. In her influential essay entitled '*Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power*', Bartky (1990: 63-82) gave a detailed account of how these disciplinary practices subjugate women, not by taking power away from them, but by generating skills and competencies that depend on the maintenance of a stereotypical form of feminine identity, which in this case is the slim ideal. For example, Bartky (1990: 72) argues that gendered disciplinary practices aim to produce a woman with: "uniform shape, comportment, and ornamentation against the background of a pervasive sense of bodily deficiency". Capillary power is "everywhere and nowhere," its effects supported by hundreds of everyday actions, yet systematically organized and enforced by no one. In a similar vein, Foucault's emphasis on the sexual body as a target and medium of this new form of power-knowledge was of particular interest to Bordo (1988, 1993), who conducted a cultural analysis of anorexia nervosa to expose how the body is a product of cultural practices that shape and manipulate not only the physical body but also women's lived experiences of their bodies (ibid). According to Sawicki (1990), the manipulation of female bodies has been a key strategy for maintaining power relations between the sexes for over a century. However, Bordo (1993) does not suggest that cultural practices have been imposed in a conscious or conspiratorial way by men. Rather, she argues that in advanced consumer capitalism: "an unstable, agonistic

construction of personality is produced by the contradictory structure of economic life". Here, Bordo (1993: 199) illustrates how the failures and contradictions of the management of appetite symbolize the unstable tensions in consumer capitalism: "As producers of goods and services we must sublimate, delay and repress desires for immediate gratification, thereby cultivating the work ethic". However, as consumers we are expected to maintain a "voracious appetite for constant and immediate satisfaction" (ibid). In chapter five I presented evidence showing that all of the older women in this sample found control of their desire for food and drink to be a persistent tension, because they found themselves besieged by temptation on a daily basis, whilst being simultaneously condemned for our overindulgence. For example, most supermarkets dictate our eating patterns to a considerable extent, which is seen most accurately at Christmas when the temptation to overeat via relentless advertising becomes irresistible, only to be barraged with campaigns to lose the excess pounds a week later, necessary due to our self-imposed over-indulgence. In addition, interpreting the physical body as representative of the social body Bordo (1993) argues that the slim ideal was also crystallized, symbolically encoded and transmitted by the media who perpetually reinforce unobtainable ideals of the young slim, 'desirable' body, through airbrushed photographs, to which they were all invited to aspire. As Bordo (1993: 201) points out, the slender body: "codes the tantalising ideal of a well-managed self in which all is kept in order despite the contradictions of consumer culture".

The theoretical framework Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) advance therefore offered me a number of more specific insights into the local practices of weight-loss dieting. In chapter five following these two authors I observed how two leading commercial weight loss clubs as disciplinary institutions circulated their power, shaped their organisation, and

regulated the older women's thoughts and behaviour. I therefore demonstrated how the older female members worked their bodies through their disciplinary routines and programmes, regulating them by methods of 'normalisation' and surveillance (adherence to the slim norm). For example, in chapter five I observed how older women were advised (in their own and the organisations interests) to stick closely (if not rigidly) to a regime (deemed as repressive and dehumanising), that typically involves close monitoring, measuring, restricting, and the recording of everything you eat and drink, and perhaps how much you exercise, or even what your mental habits are. All this is done in the name of physical health, because the goal is (almost always) weight loss, which is assumed to be a good for almost all of us. Here, body fat is commonly understood as a sign and symptom of some negative mental state whether it's greed, or lack of self-discipline, or low self-esteem (to name three quite different models). If you lose weight, you'll both demonstrate and improve your mental health, too (Heyes, 2007). Overall from Bartky (1990) and Bordo's (1993, 1995) 'docile bodies' thesis we can see how acceptable forms of female deployment are tightly disseminated through discourse and position the older women who enrol in these organisations for the purpose of weight loss as passive recipients of standards rather than agents of production who deploy the acceptability of their own bodies. Here, subjectivity according to Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) is constituted only in the relations of power, thus, there can be no characteristic of an individual that is given prior to the subject's constitution within power relations. In other words one of the underlying tensions with this kind of feminist appropriation of Foucault is its inability to account for effective resistance to, or freedom from disciplinary practices like weight loss dieting. Like Foucault, Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) envisage modern disciplinary power (that insulates itself within subjects so profoundly), as repressive, ubiquitous and inescapable; we cannot escape because there is nowhere that is external to relations of

power. As Foucault (1978: 93) emphatically stated in his earlier genealogical texts: 'Power is everywhere', and not only are our identities constituted within relations of power, but this power also marks our bodies (which in this instance are rendered 'docile').

Many feminist theorists such as Sawicki (1988) and Hartsock (1990) have therefore criticized Foucault for putting us in a situation in which we can do nothing but express bewilderment at an overwhelming world around us, a world in which the potential for human agency (resistance and freedom) seems to have vanished altogether. Because power is inescapable, omnipresent and constitutes our subjectivities the view that agency is absent within Foucault's characterizations of power is perhaps understandable (ibid). But, the underlying tension that agency is absent in Foucault's thought is premised on modern notions of agency. Thus, Foucault's earlier genealogical texts successfully undermine such a notion of agency. However, in order to fully address this tension I argue that a notion of relational agency (or what Heyes 2006 refers to as enabling power) is implicit within Foucault's descriptions of power relations. That power is precisely a relationship means that it is always possible to act in other ways and, therefore, an omnipresent power does not entail stasis. Rather, agency is refigured as an aspect of power relations. Indeed, Foucault pointed out that there are always risks imposed by power relations because the result of any action can never be guaranteed. Yet, it is because there are risks that I argue a relational agency, or in this case a more enabling understanding of power is generated in the utilisation of Foucault's later texts. For example, although the older women in this sample are evidently constituted within the very limits of power relations as described earlier, self-transformation through weight loss dieting practices can be theorised as a way for these older women to reconstitute themselves given the corrupted materials given to them. As described in chapter one I wanted to approach weight loss dieting not only as a

quest for the ideal body, but also as a process of working on the self, marketed with particular resonance and sold to older women, that cleverly deploys the discourse feminists have long encouraged. My argument was that until we recognize the power of this discourse, especially as cultivated by commercial weight loss programmes, feminists will be ill equipped to understand the perennial appeal of a self-disciplining practice that almost always fails its ostensible goals. My aim was to supplement as opposed to challenge Bartky (1990) and Bordo's (1993) endless parsing of the 'docile bodies' thesis, because the possibility of self-transforming oneself intuits the more enabling power that exists within omnipresent power relations (Heyes, 2006). In other words such moments exemplify Foucault's thesis that the growth of new skills and capabilities occurs in tandem with the intensification of normalising disciplinary power relations. For example, on the one hand, deliberately losing weight by controlling diet involves the self-construction of a 'docile body' through attention to the minutest detail as described above. On the other hand, becoming aware of exactly how and what one eats and drinks, realizing that changing old patterns can have embodied effects, or setting a goal and moving toward it, are all enabling acts of self-transformation. This component of dieting in part explains its popularity and function, and why simply purveying information about the invidiousness of dieting without offering substitute activities to fill the same needs is bound to fail as a feminist strategy (ibid). This concluding chapter will therefore turn to show how I was able to offer something better and will further discuss this tension in Foucault's toolbox between his 'technologies of power' as described above and his 'care of the self' which will be described below. In doing so I will show how I have addressed and resolved this tension (and others) in order to explain exactly how his later work can marry legitimately and successfully with the feminist epistemologies of the 'docile bodies' described by Bartky and Bordo.

'Technology's of the self': The use of pleasure and care of the self in a weight loss organisational setting

The idea of practicing freedom is central to Foucault's (1987, 1988) exploration and analysis of the ethical practices of Antiquity. It refers to the ways in which individuals in Antiquity were led to exercise power over themselves in the attempt to constitute or transform their identity and behaviour in the light of specific goals (Rose, 1996). In arguing for the practices of self care Foucault suggests that: "one might be able to recreate oneself as a work of art". He asserted that: "art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life ... But couldn't everyone's lives become a work of art? (Foucault in Rabinow 1984: 350). What interests Foucault about these ethical practices and ancient 'arts of existence' is the kind of freedom they presuppose. He suggests that the freedom entailed in practicing the art of self-fashioning/transformation consists neither in resisting power nor in seeking to liberate the self from regulation. In her reflections on Foucault's positive account of freedom, Sawicki (1998: 104) notes that it offers a more "affirmative alternative to his earlier emphasis on the reactive strategy of resistance to normalization". For the late Foucault (1977, 1978) individuals are still understood to be shaped by their embeddedness in power relations, which means that their capacities for freedom and autonomous action are necessarily limited. However, in his later work 'care of the self' Foucault (1988: 291) suggests that by actively deploying the techniques and models of self-formation that are 'proposed, suggested, and imposed' upon them by society, individuals may creatively transform themselves and in the process displace the normalisation operating in harmful modern technologies of the self. In other words, Foucault's later genealogical work helps us to see how 'normalising' power produces capacities as well as timidity and obedience. Thus, the subjects of normalising disciplinary practices really are empowered at the same time that they are disempowered.

They become subjects, and agents, within these practices, and the failures they may well lament (a point I will discuss shortly) are also moments of excess in relation to the norms and rules that feminist critics of those practices might find lamentable. The older female self caught up in networks of gender normalisation is not, or at least not merely, a victim without hope of extrication as Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) would have us believe.

As described in chapter four, it was not until I had spent some time in both Slimming World and Weight Watchers', engrossed in a diet culture from which my earlier feminist politics had kept me far away, that I began to fully comprehend the satisfaction that many of the older women in my sample found not only in losing weight, but in working on themselves, in however circumscribed a context. In chapter six I demonstrated how the central medium for the transmission of asketic (the art of living) advice about diet was (and is now again) the hypomnemata (a word meaning notebook). Indeed, commercial weight loss groups have understood the kind of working on oneself that dieting provokes and have produced their own hypomnemata accordingly. Both Weight Watchers and Slimming World's hypomnemata in the form of leaflets handed out at meetings, magazine articles, website materials, and even recipes and cookbooks carefully exploit key asketic themes from a popular culture preoccupied in more or less ethical ways with 'care of the self' (Heyes 2006) . In the conceptual underpinnings in chapter three and as a way of illustration in chapter six I drew four parallels between the forms of 'care of the self' that Foucault described and endorsed, and the rhetorical strategies of Weight Watchers' and Slimming Worlds hypomnemata. From the unfolding observations and empirical evidence it became clear to me that these organisations utilised this rhetoric to deepen it's older members dependence on the organization and, by implication, on the 'docility' the organization cultivates. In other words their dieting hypomnemata are cleaver at touching a

cultural nerve, are quite clearly manipulative and self serving, and I knew that I should never lose sight of the fact that my focus is on two commercial groups whose primary goal was always profit. Yet, at the same time, the discipline of weight loss does generate real capabilities, and fosters a kind of attentiveness toward the self in the following ways.

Firstly, I noted how the hypomnemata suggested that successful dieting could improve the older women's self knowledge because getting to know yourself is central to weight loss. For example, both the written materials, and the group leaders suggested that the key to avoiding a diet lapse is to know yourself well enough to take action before your personal temptations takeover. Indeed, this process can be recycled back into the disciplinary practices mentioned earlier by Bordo (1995) with regards to how the failures and contradictions of the management of appetite symbolize the unstable tensions in consumer capitalism. When exploring self- knowledge I came to the conclusion that the self to be known is not static, but is ever transforming. For example, the goal described on the homepage of the Weight Watchers' website (www.weightwatchers.co.uk), suggests that you need to learn how to eat well, feel full, and control your cravings, even when you are bored or stressed. So you lose weight week after week and discover a brand new you. In addition, the proliferation of 'success stories' featured on television, online, in leaflets, and in their magazines describe how women have seriously tried to lose weight in the past, but once they had made a commitment to either Weight Watchers or Slimming World they completely embraced their new lifestyle. For example, all of the women in my sample mirrored the examples set in these stories and told me how they loved the flexibility of the programme whether it is the points system, or syn's and liked the responsibility that the programme asked of them. These women told me that they were encouraged to learn new habits and to really think about what foods they were eating. In effect these testaments

demonstrate how the transformed self is not just a goal, it is a process of transformation which invents new capacities and invites reflection on a post-asketic self that is not yet known (Heyes, 2006). Obviously in these circumstances the goal was always weight loss and the ultimate goal was reaching your target weight in order to be who you really want to be. Once this has been achieved you are instructed to follow a maintenance plan which reminds members that: "Your mind often has to play catch up with your body", particularly if you've lost a significant amount of weight because you have to realize that you're now a thin person. This means that you not only need to look and dress like a thin person, but you have to think like one also. From this it would appear that thin people share more than a BMI, they also have a whole relationship to the world, a way of thinking.

The second point regarding the hypomnemata is that it invites reflection on everyday accomplishments and the evolution of new capacities and pleasures. Here, many of the older women in the sample found that losing weight not only made them look better, it also made them feel like they had accomplished something. As described in chapter two older women were often made to feel invisible and their accomplishments often went unrecognised. Some of the older women in the sample suggested that by losing weight they were able to undertake activities that they might previously have allegedly been unable or certainly unwilling to try. In this category, when they had lost weight some felt more able to engage in physical play with their grandchildren. Losing weight therefore made the practice of dieting empowering with regards to the fact that they felt like they were a better person with new capacities, and that they were also a conventionally better caregiver and grandmother. In addition, the transitional period of losing weight (that is tangible and can be graphed) is also represented as temporally significant, as women

allegedly use the processes of self-discovery and transformation it cultivates to reassess the ethics of their own existence. For example, Collette (age 55: 266-7) credited Slimming World with giving her not just a new body but a more rewarding job and a new life. In other words, being thinner can often increase class mobility and economic rewards, and if you are stuck in a pink-collar job that has little space for personal accomplishment, then setting your own goal and taking action to achieve it can also feel especially empowering (however over determined by disciplinary technology). Indeed, there may be class politics here (a point I will return to shortly), but the point I am trying to make clearer, is that, these accounts can be seen as marrying legitimately and successfully with the feminist epistemologies of the 'docile body' because these new capacities and pleasures hinge on one's obsessive adherence to a regime that involves close monitoring, measuring, and restricting of everything you eat and drink, how much you exercise, and breaking of her old mental habits.

The third point made when exploring the hypomnemata revolves around meeting normative gendered roles. For example, Foucault (in Rabinow 1997: 287) fully supported the positions that care for others should not be put before the care of oneself. [...The...] 'care of the self' is ethically prior in that the relationship with oneself is ontologically prior'. Dieting is equated with taking care of oneself in the face of the gendered exploitation that characterizes many women's lives (a point I shall come back to in the next section of this summary). For example, some of the older women in the sample described how they gained weight because like a lot of people, they didn't realise that to be there for others you have to take care of yourself first. However, there is a tension here because Foucault's take on the individual orientation of self-transformation appears strange given that such an agency is generated as an effect of a relational power. In other

words I will argue that the very idea of relationality indicates that isolation is not possible because a relation implies more than one participant. Furthermore, because self-transformation always entails the re-fashioning/transforming of identities and relationships within the limits of a relational power as described above, it cannot be an explicitly isolated process.

The final point to be made about the dieting hypomnemata hinges around the importance of being able to make one's own choices, initiating transformation, and approaching food (and other things) with wisdom and flexibility. The new 'flexipoints' addition to the Weight Watchers plan carries the slogan: "The real world is full of real choices. Weight loss "should be too" (www.weightwatchers.co.uk 2010). Indeed, Heyes (2006) suggests that when Foucault (1985: 106) comments of the ancients that: "regimen should not be understood as a corpus of universal and uniform rules; it was more in the nature of a manual for reacting to situations in which one might find oneself, a treatise for adjusting one's behavior to fit the circumstances" (1985: 106), he could be running a Weight Watchers or Slimming World meeting. Here, I found the importance of writing in the meetings and the programme (a panoptican on paper), to be quite remarkable. This can be partly explained by the current influence of cognitive behavioural and motivation theories. The latter have recourse to daily writing in order to foster awareness of behaviours, to materialize commitment towards oneself and others and to provide a basis for the therapist's work. I observed how group members were very frequently reminded of the necessity of writing, and on several occasions the leader at Slimming World suggested that: "when holding a pen in your hand you are potentially losing a pound in weight". In other words the leader encourages members to write down and count everything, every food intake or activity, and also includes keeping track of resolutions or self-commitments

in accordance with behavioural prescriptions (as a dieting profile). In essence I found that these methods provide an interactive moment whereby older women can engage with the hypomnemata and feel more connected to the programme and its role in their self development.

Indeed, the way the members 'think in points, and eat in points' can therefore be explained by the existence of a very explicit work on dispositions, relying on the writing, reading, and counting trinity, which effectively produces the incorporation of a specific practical sense. However, in addition to this function of self control and of substitute for practical sense, the trinity plays a second role, more inconspicuous but no less significant: that of an instrument of external control and of a substitute for the panopticon (Foucault, 1995). I found this to be very much the case with food journals, which are used by the leader to control the members' food intake directly or indirectly (through the threat of control, and aforementioned injunctions such as 'show me your journal'). More generally, the written word works as a keystone of the surveillance system and is so ubiquitous that one no longer notices it. Returning to the notion of 'docile bodies' we can see how the older women were under constant surveillance and regulation in ways that are often subtle and thereby seemingly invisible, leading to 'normalisation' and acceptance of such systems (Foucault, 1977). Indeed, from the very first day, and from my own experiences I observed how members are snowed under with written words and numbers. There are things written everywhere in the meeting room: on walls, panels, posters (testimonies or rules) and on the board, or in books, brochures and information sheets handed out to members. This inundation of writing continued with a flow of written materials from the meeting room to the members' homes, which become extensions of the meeting room and places of writing. In my own home during the data collection I had to manage the weekly

food journal, the weight tracker which charts the progress in weight loss from week to week according to the target set, I studied various companion books such as the *Food Companion* and the *Dining out Companion.* In addition I also utilised an electronic calculator, cooking books, brochures, and kept my old journals as reference for filling in new ones. The point I am trying to make here is that this paper surveillance was a constant one, insofar as the ubiquity of writing creates continuity in institutional action that goes far beyond that of the interactions between members, the leader's gaze and physical co-presence. This mass of paper may be stored at home (the complimentary bag given to members upon joining is visibly meant to be used for that purpose and quickly overflows with papers), but much of this written material must be used frequently if the program is dutifully followed, and I was informed by the leaders that we should not simply tuck them away in a corner and forget about them: we need to keep them at arm's length, where we can see them, and so they work as reminders of the authority of writing. The written word, much like the panopticon analysed by Foucault (1977), therefore intensifies the institution's power over a persons conduct, and seeks to induce in members a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning, and the de-individualized functioning of power, so that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action. It creates a field of visibility in which members locate themselves and use the constraints of power to their own advantage, make them spontaneously work on them, and carve in themselves the balance of power in which they play both roles simultaneously, the member and the leader (Foucault, 1995).

A substitute for practical sense and for the panopticon, the written word is, on an even more fundamental level, the backbone of the production of a new world for members. For example, the purchase of cookery books and free recipes given out in meetings help

members to learn to cook again, that is, cook in a different manner. Here, the written word is meant to make members acquire new skills, and give them access to another culinary world, one that is entirely controlled by the institution. In addition to these new classification systems and new skills, there is also a process of definition of the members' world through the delimitation of a space of possibilities. At home, when you don't know how many points a given food or meal is worth you don't eat it. In other words members are taught that if it is not written down it does not exist. Consequently, in chapter's five and six I have demonstrated how the delegation of control is particularly radical in this respect, insofar as it can come to a total control of the members world.

So far in this summary chapter, I have suggested that there are real pleasures to be had in a practice that has often been construed as completely repressive and dehumanising. I have described how this 'normalising' body altering practice emerges as a site where a desire to 'care for the self' is expressed and concentrated and where capacities for reflection, patient labour, self control, and new forms of pleasure are produced, even as rigid norms are enforced and the pain of failure is intensified and reinvested in renewed efforts to conform. Agency not only persists within this set of regimes, but in some significant respects it is magnified and cultivated through them. In other words I have attempted to argue that Foucault's later works have made a more promising turn to a more active model of subjectivity in order to offer something better so I can identify why weight loss practices and their popularity have the cultural resonance that they do. However, as noted earlier I am making a clearer account of the tension in Foucault's toolbox and I can only argue that a more active model of subjectivity still leaves critical issues unresolved. For example, in Grimshaws (1993: 66) formulation, Foucault evades the vital question of:

> "When forms of self-discipline or self-surveillance can … be seen as exercises of autonomy or self-creation, or when they should be seen, rather, as forms of discipline to which the self is subjected, and by which autonomy is constrained".

In addressing this tension following Lloyd's (1988) example I have suggested that it is Foucault's earlier notion of genealogy as critique (the 'docile body') which allows us to distinguish between autonomous practices of the self and technologies of 'normalisation'. In other words the Foucauldian practice of critique, a practice which involves the effort to recognize, decipher and problematize the ways in which the self is produced generates possibilities for alternative practices of the self and, thus, for more autonomous experiments in self-formation. As Lloyd (1988: 250) strongly asserts:

> "It is not the activity of self-fashioning in itself that is crucial. It is the way in which that self-fashioning, when allied to critique, can produce sites of contestation over the meanings and contours of identity, and over the ways in which certain practices are mobilized".

With the introduction of a notion of freedom in his later work, Foucault (1997, 1988) has clarified the normative grounds for his opposition to certain forms of power. As discussed above, these older women are not limited to reacting against power, but they can alter power relationships in ways that expand their possibilities for action.

In a similar way to Heyes (2006) the arguments presented above may seem provocative because it may seem too much like an endorsement of commercial weight loss programs as capacity enhancing activities, especially for women. As discussed in chapter four before I began the data collection, I was much more familiar with an image of the beaten down, obsessive, and oppressed dieter as the irrefutably 'docile body' (and still am). However, by

articulating in some detail how dieting discourse appropriates and exploits the language of 'care of the self', I have attempted to demonstrate its function as both disciplinary and enabling, in ways feminists have largely ignored. I must admit that while these texts may provide a way into an ethical world of self-development and new capacities, they are ultimately immobilizing as much as enabling. The crucial point made here is that whatever skills and capacities dieting might enhance are, in the rhetoric of the commercial programs, immediately co-opted back into a field of meaning internal to weight loss. Only losing weight, they would have us believe, can lead to true self-knowledge, self-development, self-mastery, and self-care. Consequently, we can therefore see that failure is indeed a practice of pleasure and self care, and the corporate Weight Watchers' website candidly sells the company as a good investment by saying: "meeting members enrol and attend consecutive weekly meetings and have historically demonstrated a consistent enrolment pattern across many years" (www.weightwatchers.co.uk). In other words they openly admit in their success stories that one may join a diet programme many times before it finally works. Yet, research has shown that restrictive dieting when practised alone or in groups rarely produces long term weight loss (Hesse-Biber, 1996). Most women who try to lose weight are therefore left feeling both dissatisfied with their body and ashamed of their failure and presumed lack of self control (Rodin, 1992). The concluding chapter will therefore turn to present a clearer account of how the methodological tensions described above get played out in the empirical data through focusing on the older women's partners and their experiences of failure and recidivism. However, before moving on to the next section it is necessary to raise a further point with regards to the tension associated with the structure of this thesis. For example, in chapter one I began the thesis by using a narrative from Alice (age 57) in order to make clear the need for social sciences to take my area of enquiry – aging and embodiment (as intersecting with gender) more seriously. Yet,

the reader does not get to hear about anymore data until page 198. As detailed in chapter one this thesis is weighted more towards its conceptual underpinnings because I have had to grapple with the many tensions involved when using Foucault's toolbox in order to explore some of the dynamics of older women's engagement with weight loss practices. The empirical findings are therefore an illustration of the many concepts discussed.

Older women's experiences of body image, partner appraisal, and failure and recidivism

From the theoretical underpinnings provided in chapter's two and three, and as a way of illustration in chapter's five and six I have argued that slimming groups are not experienced in the same way by all members because age affects the meanings of body size in different contexts. For example, I have demonstrated through an analysis of biomedical discourses how some of the older women in my sample viewed their weight gain as a consequence of the inevitable physical decline and deterioration bound up with stereotypes of old age, rather than as a marker of personal failure (Gimlin 2007). Such age specific accounts were clearly endorsed by the organisation, at least by the group leaders. During several of the weekly lectures, the leader in both organisations referred to the 'challenges' that many older women face when trying to lose weight, including 'slow metabolism', hormonal changes, and the difficulty of exercising. Such explanations not only provided older women with age-specific, physiological reasons for dieting setbacks, but also reinforced the notion that the bodily experiences and goals of 'aging women' are somewhat distinctive. In chapter five when analysing relational discourses I have illustrated how accounts of failure and recidivism and the impact of pressure from partners and family members figured centrally in the older member's narrative identity work, both during the interviews, in which many spoke about their dedication to weight management and in the weekly meetings. During the participant observations I observed how frame

alignment within Weight Watchers and Slimming World occurs through the storytelling and emotion work of group leaders, consumption of Weight Watchers literature by clients, and narratives of established members. Here, both organisations strongly assert that the members are active agents for change, and are able to transform themselves through strict adherence to the programme. Indeed, weight reduction is a confessional discourse (self surveillance is a relation of power) and in response some members (both young and old) appeared happy to confess to some of the recent challenges that they had overcome by adopting organisationally legitimised practices, such as avoiding situations that might threaten their resolve or sticking to a pre-planned eating strategy. From my observations it seemed to me that although discussions concern day to day life, they also mentioned more private things than the taste for chocolate or cooking tips, one's occupation or marital status being the most probable personal elements to appear when discussing constraints to the diet. For example, using Joanne's (age 57: 217-19) story as a case study she revealed how she joined Weight Watchers after enduring pressure from her husband (a pressure mirrored by many other women) to lose weight. Joanne described how her husband felt (in stereotypical terms) that she had become fat, lazy and frumpy, that she had let herself go, which made her feel more self conscious about her body image. Joanne admitted that gaining weight (which she attributed to the menopause) in the true spirit of the 'tyranny of slenderness' could be understood as a sign and symptom of her negative mental state because of greed, lack of self-discipline and low self esteem. In other words for Joanne like many others, their emotions are attached to their body size whereby the slender body becomes a sign that they have a proper relationship with the self. In order to achieve the slender body and overcome this negative mental state (self judgement), as well as addressing the conflict that this created, she joined Weight Watchers and became actively complicit in her own subjectification as a weight watching-person. Since joining Weight

Watchers' Joanne revealed that she has already lost over two stone in weight through the close monitoring , measuring, and restricting of everything she eat and drank. She also joined yoga classes and openly admitted that through sheer hard work, perseverance and determination she had addressed and changed her old mental habits. In essence against the background of a pervasive sense of bodily deficiency, Joanne utilised this gendered disciplinary practice in order to regain a more uniform shape, comportment, and ornamentation (Bartky 1990: 72). Here, as Bartky suggested her appetite had to be monitored at all times and governed by an iron will, and since the innocent need of the organism for food will not be denied, the body becomes her enemy, an alien being bent on thwarting the disciplinary project. Indeed, there is a tension surrounding the conceptualisation of the body as the enemy. For example, we can see how Joanne has alienated herself from her body because she has harshly judged her body against cultural standards of body size, weight, health, and beauty which has led her to almost condemn and disown her overweight body. The weight reduction practices that demand abstinence and disciplinary regimes reinforce that self hatred and body alienation until of course the desired weight loss is attained.

As a weight watcher Joanne had to learn to listen to her body to become attuned to its signals of need and become actively involved in the production of the self-knowledge in order to comprehend the self and meaning surrounding eating and excess weight. In other words she had to know herself in order to assert herself to become slim. In order to do so Joanne described how she became completely focused on her strategies to delay and repress the desires of food and drink (which was difficult being a baker) in order to reach her target weight. Joanne claimed that her adherence to this disciplinary regime had enabled her to gain a sense of self development, mastery of her own body and a sense of

skill. She said how she had learnt to eat better in order to feel fuller and this helped to control her cravings (i.e. desiring carrots over chocolate). As the weeks went by Joanne said she started to feel like a new person, thus the process can be conceived as an expansive process of transformation as well as a disciplinary and regulatory process (Heyes, 2006). However, while echoing Joanne's story Diane (age 56: 233-4) said that in her quest for the slim ideal she had taken the disciplinary action of monitoring, measuring, restricting, and recording too far, and the practices had become obsessive-compulsive, thus she become too thin. As Bordo (1993) argued, anorexia commonly starts as a successful conventional diet, which then turns into a runaway train. In effect we can therefore see that wanting to look good and engaging in 'technologies of the self' to do so is 'normatively' feminine and thus indicates mental health (on the logic of this model), while 'going too far' and developing anorexia crosses a line marked more by degree than kind of symptom. Thirty years ago someone like Sarah Jessica Parker would have been seen as repulsively, pathologically thin, whereas today she's a fashion icon that people like Joanne and Diane look up to. In these circumstances the problem is not discipline *per se*, because discipline does in fact produce new capacities of a variety of sorts, capacities for pleasure as well as pain, capacities that might open all sorts of new possibilities for the exercise of freedom. The problem lies, rather, with the goal of these particular disciplines or, perhaps more specifically, the fact that they tend to have a single, rigid goal, that of conformity to an ideal bodily appearance and comportment. Here, the size and shape of women's bodies reflect the changing historical and economic trends (Chernin 1981; Orbach 1986). As Orbach (1985: 87) asserts: "It's as though they were hemlines that could be shortened or lengthened seasonally, the current aesthetic of women's bodies has been changing yearly". When analysing the older women's biographical accounts it was possible to see that the female body does have a long history reflecting not only the economic climate but also the

preferred fashion of various periods. In chapter three I have demonstrated how the growth of competing industries in contemporary western society has resulted in the creation of slimming and leisure industries juxtaposed alongside expanding food industries. By way of illustration there is empirical evidence suggesting that while once being seen as an inverted reflection of wealth, fatness now symbolises downward mobility. In contrast, slimness is no longer associated with poverty but higher social status. This trend to slimness, even underweight, has continued in Britain since Victorian times, whereby women have become targets for advertisers' messages to eat less and exercise more (Bordo, 1995). At the same time, women are also the key addressees for marketing campaigns to buy and prepare food, and most importantly, to spend more time and money than is necessary for this purpose, in the guise of 'doing the best' for their families (Chernin 1981; Orbach 1985). In essence these two authors argue that women need to look right for the part, in whichever clothes the fashion industry currently deems suitable for the roles we take up in contemporary western capitalism's long-running production of the story of the young, white, able-bodied, fit, slim, heterosexual, married woman; the content may change but the play rarely varies.

Returning to the idea of the saboteur, Joanne told me that she enjoyed the classes because as a forum she could engage well with other members in order to address any concerns she had on recidivism. On one particular occasion Joanne (age 57: 217) revealed to the leader and the class that she was in a no win situation because on the one hand her husband encouraged her to join Weight Watchers in order to lose weight and regain her attractiveness, whilst on the hand he complained about her becoming too thin, and also because of her strict adherence to the regime and change of old habits he accused her of spoiling his social life. She described how her husband was constantly pressuring her to

give up attending and put some of the weight that she had lost back on because she had lost too much. Joanne revealed how she had always failed to keep the weight off in the past once she had left the slimming club and that this had made her feel a failure. When talking about failure she said that she went straight back to being the unhappy, unloved, disempowered person (in conflict with her body) and grieved for the slender happy, loved and desired former self (who was more at peace with her body). Like so many other older women, we can see that with weight loss as the synecdoche for multiple forms of working on oneself, recidivism is likely to be particularly crushing, with regained weight standing in for ethical weakness, a return to old habits, and failure to care adequately for the self (as well as to be responsible to others). Losing weight and regaining it is an ignominious defeat for one's efforts to create an art of living. This partly explains why women like Joanne diet over and over again, seeking to regain the sense of reincarnation that the process is designed to cultivate. In addition we can also see that yo-yo dieting and incidences of repeated failure indicates that there are many different types of bodies.

Returning to the notion of partners as motivators as well as saboteurs Joanne's story was mirrored by many other women (mostly those age between 55-60) who were also motivated by the norm of the slim ideal, and confessed how they had to give up drinking alcohol of an evening, going to the pub, having takeaway meals, and socialising at BBQ's etc.. in order to remain disciplined. Upon listening to these accounts other dieters responded positively and commended the women's commitment to slimming. Such exchanges allowed members to share support and encouragement (member solidarity) and were used to explain and address occurrences of failure and recidivism. In addition, they also reinforced the idea that people can and should control their weight through skill cultivation and by always making the right decisions. Earlier in this conclusion I noted

how the dieting hypomnemata emphasised the importance of making one's own choices, initiating transformation and approaching food (and other things) with wisdom and flexibility. However, it was around the topic of food that some of the older women further exposed the saboteur and considered possible methods for coping with the threats they posed to their dieting success. For example, Brenda (age 67: 217) identified her husband as being a saboteur and said:

> *"he hates it when I rejoin a slimming club because he says the whole thing bores him and he thinks it's ridiculous that I cook us both different meals... I have given up going in the past because of this...this time I am determined to ride it out*".

Brenda and many other older women in the sample found some resistance at meal times from their partners who complained that they were putting more effort into cooking their ownhealthy meals and less on the traditional meals that they were used to. In addition, as described above many women also described how their partners attempted to make them relapse into their previous undesirable type of behaviour by suggesting that they have already booked a table to go for a meal, have ordered a takeaway for two that would go to waste if not eaten, and encouraged them to have alcohol or supper in the evenings. These accounts are therefore some of the reasons why older women experience failure and recidivism. These situations created real tensions for the women involved because of the threats they posed to their dieting success. Indeed, Brenda told me that in the past her husband had worn her down and she had simply given up (because she knew she had put weight on), thus had failed to achieve the goal that she had set herself and all her hard work had simply gone to waist through recidivism. During the weekly meetings I noticed that the emotional significance of meal preparation was never acknowledged. Similarly,

neither the dieting hypomnementa, nor the group's leaders addressed the symbolic meanings of shared meals, or how those meanings vary across the female lifecourse.

Fortunately, the older women in this sample are not unified subjects of some coherent regime, thus their motivations to lose weight and experiences of failure and recidivism differed quite significantly. While some of the older women (such as Joanne) have been in direct conflict with their own bodies and have been enticed into dieting due to the 'tyranny of slimness', others do not appear to be mere victims of patriarchal oppression (Davis 1995; Grogan 1999). In fact, some of the older women suggest that as they have aged, the pressure from partners with regards to weight has been minimised. For example, Kath (age 64: 217), and Rosie (age 69: 217) suggest that their partners do not take much interest and have not really noticed their weight loss. Here, Kath said that my husband thinks I treat Weight Watchers as a social function (and I probably do). He doesn't care about the way I look and says that: "*he loves me just the way I am and would rather I didn't have to deprive myself by going on a diet*". Many accounts as demonstrated on (page 220-21) suggest that aging may actually increase women's ability to accept their weight and reduce their guilt about eating, failure and recidivism. For example, Sheila (age 68) and Dorothy's (age 66) partners both argue that: "*You are what you...you look fine as you are and it's ok to put on weight at your age...just concentrate on enjoying yourself and give up this nonsense*". In addition, the unfolding evidence suggests that even though many women over the age of 60 or more years want to lose weight their weight loss goals are more realistic than those of younger women (Allaz et al, 1998).

In chapter six I presented evidence demonstrating how some older women laughed off a weight gain, and when pressed by the leader to confess their lack of commitment to the

programme they often said in a whimsical way "*oops have I not lost anything, it must be because I have been a bit lax this week...I will try a bit harder*". Indeed, it appeared that the socially constructed nature of what we eat and how we eat it is imbued with numerous and particular cultural, religious, economic and moral values. Foods are always seen as being 'naughty and nice', 'tempting', 'healthy', and 'unhealthy'. The point I am making here is that the older women in my sample demonstrate the multiplicity of meanings that they project to food and eating. For example, when gaining weight that particular week Brenda (age 67) dramatises her fear of the scales by confessing to the leader; "*I'm sorry but it is like the biscuit tin's shouting what about me, and the wine in the fridge says drink me*". Brenda explained that she sought comfort for a couple of days and felt guilty about it later. As detailed in chapter five the meeting is the time to evaluate, the moment of truth, and it is the leader (as the cop or judge behind the table) who exerts the most explicit form of control and this materializes most notably at the weighing scales which induces a scene of fear and suspense. When observing the weigh in I can honestly say as an ethnographer that I have never been in another adult milieu where discipline was applied to such tiny behaviours and deviance greeted with such serious and inflexible responses from the staff. Yet, at the same time the 'normalisation' the institution exerts on its members and the 'docility' it implies are however balanced by the potential empowerment of the 'care of the self' inherent to the programme. In effect Brenda (age 67) and many other older women in the sample told me that they were less fearful of the weighing scales than some of the younger women because they had more realistic weight loss goals that younger women, were more accepting of a wider range of body shapes (whether it be pear, apple, rectangle, or triangular shaped). In addition, they also explained that they are also less likely to undergo cosmetic surgery procedures to reduce body size, such as liposuction and 'tummy tucks (Throsby, 2008). Such findings may reflect cohort effects, but nevertheless have led

researchers (including myself) to argue that old age can sometimes provide a degree of detachment from beauty imperatives (Apter 1996; Daniluk 1998). In other words some of the older women in this sample argued that "*as we go into the menopause we are meant to put on weight and because of the changes in hormones this is the natural body that you get*". Consequently, some of the older women were less inclined to be in a state of alienation from their bodies (accepting middle age spread) and were less likely to harshly judge their bodies against the cultural standards of body size. They were less concerned about failure and recidivism and were more inclined to espouse a resistance to gendered norms around beauty, sexual attractiveness and an ideal body image. In chapter one I described how my focus on women did not mean that the current ideals and imperatives for a weight controlled slender body do not pertain to both male and female bodies. The chapter will therefore turn to present a clearer description of how and if the empirical findings on recidivism and failure constitute a particular gendered form of embodiment.

Gendered embodiment: Resisting the negative cultural meanings of fatness

In chapter one I have argued that the weight loss industry does focus more on women than on men, and that weight loss organisations are predominantly female spaces. For example, the gender bias within the discourse of weight control is immediately evident in the weight watcher literature through the use of female images and terminology such as 'drop a dress size in a month' which constructs the audience as female. Here, the male body accentuates bulk, masculinity, and breadth of size to indicate strength while dominant images of the ideal female body emphasises slenderness, daintiness, curves, and fragility (Bordo 1993). Consequently, tensions exist in images of male and female in general, but substantial research conducted over the last two decades has demonstrated that women are more at

risk than men are for problems related to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviour (Bordo 1993; Hesse-Biber 1996). Indeed, most empirical studies have revealed that, when compared to men, women are more concerned with their bodily appearance, thus most women want to be slimmer, including those who are not overweight (Allaz et al, 1998). For example, most men are dissatisfied with their upper and middle torso (shoulder and chest measurement) because they desire to be broader which equates to being more masculine (Grogan 1999). Weight control therefore continues to (re)produce sex difference through guidelines that redress distinctions between the male and female body according to body shape (ibid). Many theorists therefore see gender differences in body satisfaction and disordered eating behaviour as the result of sociocultural pressures to be thin and attractive that is more heavily applied to women than to men (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993; Hesse-Biber, 1996). Although men also face sociocultural pressures regarding appearance such as culturally defined standards of masculinity that emphasize the ideal male physique as muscular, toned, and firm body (Monaghan, 2008), those pressures do not result in the same weight-loss goals that women report (Connor-Greene, 1988).

As discussed above in this summarising chapter, where there is power, there is resistance. For example, as demonstrated above Joannne's (age 57) embodied regulatory ideals have become internalized, thus they have become part of her lived experience. However, in order to construct a sense of self that is not dominated by the negative cultural meanings some of the older women found ways to resist them by actively participating in the construction of their identity by reorganising the categories made available into alternative 'conceptions of self ' (Cordell and Ronai, 1999: 30). To reiterate a point made earlier, although these older women are constituted within the limits of power relations, self-

fashioning is theorized as a way for them to re-constitute themselves using those corrupted materials given to them. Thus, the possibility of refashioning oneself intuits the relational agency that exists within omnipresent power relations. The concluding chapter will therefore follow the accounts framework provided by Cordell and Ronai (1999) and will compare and contrast women's resistance to the stigmatisation of fatness against Lee Monaghan's (2007) further development of Scott and Lyman's (1968) accounts framework when exploring men's resistances. In order to assess the growing tendency to take up a rejection to weight loss I have identified three strategies that the older women in my sample have used in their narrative resistance. First, we have 'exemplars' which suggest that the older woman lacks traits associated with the stigmatised group. For example, while admitting to self indulgence some of the older women described that 'unlike other fat women, I am not ill, and I am not lazy'. Second. We have 'loopholes', which deny responsibility for norm violation. For example, many older women have used biomedical accounts to describe how they have become fat (i.e. after the menopause because it's natural for your body to gain weight during this process). Lastly, we have 'continuums', in which the older woman locates herself closer to the cultural ideal than the stigmatised. For example, some older women suggest that they are much healthier than most fat people. Here, this resonates with Gaessers (2002) arguments in his book *Big Fat Lies*, whereby he argues that one can be fit, healthy, and heavy. While these discursive techniques enabled some of the older women in the sample to reject the negative identity implications of fatness, they have simultaneously perpetuated anti-size bias. That is that she was a rare exception to the rule (of the lazy, unhappy, unloved, disempowered, self-indulgent and unhealthy fat person), and therein reinforced both negative constructions of being overweight and the discriminatory practices they promote. Indeed, Cordell and Ronai's (1999) analysis drew from the literature on deviance disavowal, including Scott and

Lyman's (1968) work on 'accounts' or 'socially-approved vocabularies' for lessening the negative meaning of untoward acts. They identified two types of accounts: 'excuses', which deny responsibility for wrongdoing (e.g. by blaming someone else), and 'justifications', which accept responsibility for behaviour while discounting its pejorative status (e.g. by asserting that it caused no harm). In order to clarify whether my empirical findings on recidivism and failure do constitute a particular gendered form of embodiment I shall now compare the accounts framework utilised by Monaghan (2008) to contrast the male and female motivations for engaging in or denying the need for weight loss practices.

To Diet or Not to Diet?

In chapter five when analysing the older women's biomedical discourses there was a general consensus that most of the women in the sample attributed their dieting primarily to concerns about the health implications of being overweight. For example, Alice (age 57), Pat (age 59), and Collette (age 55: 200-227), amongst others all cited that: '*whenever they visited their G.P's they were always told that they needed to lose weight*', because these biomedical accounts appeal to obesity as a chronic disease. When challenged by the G.P some of the older women denied the responsibility for their failure and blamed their weight gain on the following factors: untreated depression and imposed physical inactivity; medication for conditions such depression; insatiable appetite; hypothyroidism (slowing of metabolic rate) etc. As detailed other naturalistic accounts included how the aging process has reduced metabolism, hormonal changes, and in some cases their obesity had genetic links. Here, Shilling (1993: 41) describes naturalistic views as those that conceptualize the body as the presocial and biological basis on which the 'superstructure' of self and society is founded. Naturalistic views: "hold that the capabilities and constraints of human bodies define individuals and generate the social, political, and economic relations that

characterize national and international patterns of living". The pervasive references that the older women in the sample make to their bodies might therefore be interpreted as evidence of the essential biological basis for age and aging and of the validity of a naturalistic perspective or, in Turner's (1992) terms, a 'foundationalist' view. In addition other excuses hinged around social pressures. For example, the tensions of modernisation and its impact on production and consumption as described earlier by Bordo (1995), the social pressures associated with gendered role obligations, boredom, family problems and the associated comfort eating. Other considerations included smoking cessation, crash diets, local drinking cultures and the weather. Indeed, similar patterns of excuses were found in both male and female accounts. The second account hinges around the notion of justification which involves accepting the responsibility for the behaviour while discounting its derogatory status. As described earlier in Joanne's (age 57) account women weight watchers are understood as being someone who is in conflict with their own body, and upon accepting the medical definitions of being overweight the body is rendered as the enemy (i.e. as creating low self-esteem, illness and self indulgence), conspiring against the more rational self (who wishes to be healthy, in control, and regain beauty). However, when exploring an embodied masculinity (i.e. be more of a man), Monaghan (2008) found that men as opposed to women denied causing themselves any injury (i.e. the Winston Churchill effect or the fat, fit and healthy). In essence these arguments suggest that men are brought up to take pride in their bodies, whereas many women are socialised to dislike theirs and frequently become obsessed in the quest for reduction (Chernin 1983). Consequently, men were often more likely to make humorous justificatory appeals to sexual capability and the love of alcohol and condemn the condemners by saying: '*I'm fat but you're ugly*', and some men would wear a T shirt citing how: '*it's not a beer belly it's a fuel tank for a sex machine*'. In addition Monaghan (2008) also suggested that by

overeating or drinking many men described how they were doing themselves no real harm. As demonstrated above all of the older women in this sample found the control of their desire for food and drink to be a persistent tension, because they found themselves besieged by temptation on a daily basis, whilst being simultaneously condemned for their overindulgence. However, in comparison, men viewed the love of food as an expression of unbreakable affection. Finally, Monaghan suggests that repudiation is exemplified by size activists who challenge the negativity of fatness and who deny full responsibility for their weight. Compared to women men are more inclined to reject the biomedical accounts of obesity (reject the BMI), and are more challenging in terms of responsibility. When considering the accounts framework illustrated by Monaghan I would argue that while there are clear tensions with regard to gendered forms of embodiment, compared to men women are less challenging in terms of responsibility for their failure and recidivism, and are thus, considerably more likely to diet and use drastic weight loss measures including appetite suppressants, laxatives and surgery (Grogan 1999). In effect Chernin (1983: 62) therefore suggests that the growing number of fatalities that stem from the pressure women face to lose weight is testament to the fact that: "women suffer more from living in their bodies than men do".

While working less explicitly in the 'accounts' tradition, many other authors such as Gimlin (2007) have addressed the narrative aspects of identity management. For example, Gimlin noted that the narrative construction of identity is not solely a matter of self creation, but also a group production of the symbolic resources for individual presentations of self. The characteristics of commercial weight management organisations, including their formal structures, informal hierarchies, profit motive, their rhetoric about the causes of weight loss and gain, and the emotional labour performed by their personnel, are all

reflected in the vocabularies that their clients use to understand and describe both the embodied self and their own weight loss efforts. Indeed, this point was illustrated by some of the older women who simply renounced the weight loss diet saying with a greater or lesser degree of sophistication that "*I just don't care anymore...I'll just eat what I like...It doesn't matter so much at my age*". Here Brenda (age 67: 241) confessed to the leader before stepping onto the weighing scales that: "*I am not expecting to lose this week ...I have not put enough effort into it because one night I just thought ah to hell with it and got rat arsed with my daughters*". In effect Brenda typified some of the accounts of resistance noted above and told me that she often considered giving up the programme because of the constant state of anguish she felt through continued failure to lose weight and maintain weight loss. When considering Brenda's anguish it would appear only natural for authors such as Bordo (1993) to condemn these industries and argues that what these industries produce is not weight loss, let alone health; what they produce is self-loathing that makes women (and in many cases men too) willing and even eager to spend large sums of money and devote substantial amounts of time and energy in pursuit of a goal that is at best elusive. They captivate people, bring them suffering, and impoverish them in a sad but all too familiar spectrum of ways. Yet, while I agree with Bordo I have to insist, that is not the full story. Even if it fails to produce the desired outcome (as it does in 98 percent of cases), weight loss dieting as a practice is self-transformative. And Weight Watchers and other commercial diet plans emphasize this aspect of what they sell, precisely because their creators know, and they know that their customers know that weight loss is unlikely to be a permanent result of their product. Indeed, when analysing the biographical accounts I became aware that many of the older women in my sample are well aware of the contradiction in this ideology, yet try diet after diet and yo-yo their weight (which, there is very sound evidence to show, is bad for your health Gaesser (2002: 144-50). They

understand that the books, websites, magazines, and weekly meetings are their false friends, and they also resent the profits made by corporations selling diet services or products, and many women especially will agree that a diversity of body types ought to be celebrated and that the fashion for thinness is deplorable and oppressive (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993; Hesse-Biber 1996; Wolf 1990). The sheer magnitude of the contradictions generated by our access to information about the failure rates of dieting implies that counter discourses ought to be more successful than in fact they are. While it is true that being thin (or at least less fat) will, generally speaking, work to one's advantage in the employment and dating markets, it is clearly false that anyone can become and remain thin (or even not fat). However, when they leave they not only mourn the loss of the thin self that even if not attained can always be looked forward to, but also the loss of a community forum in which however conditionally they might be helped to take care of themselves. Indeed, as demonstrated in the empirical illustrations presented in chapter six, the rewards and pleasures might lie elsewhere (i.e. of making new friends, networking, and using the club as a social event etc) but they do exist. As described earlier despite the pain associated with failure 34 members of this sample (including Brenda) always go back and rejoin time and time again in order to chase the slim ideal. The two older women in this sample who have not tried it before have every reason to believe they will succeed in losing weight and keeping it off, while those 34 who have previously tried and failed believe that different behaviours this time around will put them into the magic minority of success stories. Given the intensity of the pressure to conform to beauty ideals, of fat phobia, and of false beliefs about health and weight, much is at stake that may inspire even the most cynical dieter to try another plan. Finally, the increasingly common knowledge that 'diets don't work' has also been obscured by the new linguistic conventions diet vendors favour. We are now sold long established dieting practices under new descriptions, such as 'lifestyle

change' or 'Healthy eating programme'. If 'slimming' does not capture the contemporary (female) imagination, then 'lifestyle change' with its aura of enlightenment, progress, and self-improvement surely does. In this thesis I have presented real accounts of the ways in which older women can learn from Weight Watchers and Slimming World without becoming the projected unified subject of its regime. In order to achieve this I have presented a clearer analysis of how these methodological tensions are played out in the empirical data in order to show the possibility of uncoupling new capacities from 'docility', and of recruiting those capacities to 'care for the self'.

So far in this summary chapter, I have exposed some of the underlying tensions when utilising Foucauldian scholarship to explore the institutional control of older women. For example, I have utilised Foucault's (1977) work on discipline to show how the older female body was not a natural entity but was socially produced through regimes of knowledge and power. In chapter five I have used Foucault's work on biopower in order to present an analysis of the discursive constitution and regulation of the older female body. Here the notion of 'docility' (the point at which the analyzable body and the manipulable body are joined) is employed to illustrate how older individuals within their bodies are subjected to institutional regulation through weight loss practices. I have illustrated how power is internalised by the older women, and becomes ingrained in their thoughts and behaviours that becomes part of the context in which they live, breathe and know themselves. Thus, in chapter five I have demonstrated how some older women feel marginalised and learn what is acceptable and what is not through interactions with agents who impose disciplinary discursive practices. Here, Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) have argued that disciplinary discursive practices can be used to oppress, and they can support the cycle of victimization that can permeate the thoughts and actions of marginalized

women. Yet, I was also aware that discursive practices also have a potentially duel character because power can be repressive and liberating at the same time. Consequently, I drew on Foucault's later works about 'technologies of the self' in order to supplement the discursive determinism found in his 'technologies of domination', by a voluntarism of consciously changed self-practices. In chapter six I have therefore presented evidence to show how the very means, through which the individuals are controlled through discursive practices, also provide the foundation for autonomous action. However, McNay (1999: 96) argues that:

> "This insight into the capacity of dominatory relations to fold back upon themselves creating spaces of autonomy is undercut by Foucault's failure to think through the materiality of the body. There is a tendency to conceive of the body as an essentially passive, blank surface upon which power relations are inscribed".

As such the body is determined by the power of discourse, thus, it becomes very difficult to conceive of the body as a material component for social action. Consequently, as a result of Foucault's neglect of an elaboration of the body's materiality, and because of his unresolved hesitancy between determinism ('docile bodies') on the one hand and voluntarism ('reflexive selves') on the other, I have encountered an underlying tension. In order to address this tension I will therefore combine Foucault's idea of discursive regulation with Bourdieu's notion of habitus as an embodied social structure. Indeed, while I am aware that Bourdieu's concept of human agency has also been broadly criticised for its determinism, I still think the notion of habitus as an embodied generating structure of schemes of perception and action can help us to understand the specificity of human agency.

Marrying Bourdieu's toolbox with Foucault's toolkit

Foucault's theory of disciplinary power and Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power are amongst the most innovative attempts in recent social thought to come to terms with the underlying tensions existing around the increasingly elusive character of power in modern society. Both theories are based on critiques of subject centered analyses of power and offer original accounts of modern social institutions. As demonstrated in chapter three some feminists such as Sawicki (1988) have argued that Foucault's critique of the subject is so radical that it makes it impossible to identify any determinate social location of the exercise of power or of resistance and freedom to its operations. In other words power is seen as being ubiquitous and is somewhat beyond agency and structure. While Foucault has provided me with a toolkit to gain fascinating insights into the various practices (such as weight loss dieting) that a critically self reflexive subject may use to transform themselves within power relations, I have not had all of the tools to understand weight loss practice as the interplay of structural forces and human agency. Consequently, in light of the tensions that hamper Foucault's conceptualisation of embodied existence I have utilised some tools from Bourdieu's toolkit in the form of his habitus as lived bodily practice, because it opens up more theoretical space for: "complex understandings of the interplay of social structures (fields) and individual agency, and elucidating the variability and creativity evident in reproductions of identity" (McNay, 1999: 101). For Bourdieu (1990) practice is not determined by the agent's conscious and rational discursive evaluation and enactment. Rather, practice is generative of a historically constructed habitus that is the product of the choices that have been made for and by social agents over time. Habitus ensures the active presence of past experiences, as well as the appropriateness and cohesion of practice over time. It enables the free production of thoughts, perceptions, and actions within the socially situated boundaries that originally

were set for its creation (Bourdieu & Waquant 1992). Hence, practice is strategic rather than rule based, and strategy presupposes a capacity for innovation and invention that is indispensable if one is to adapt to change in a myriad of situations. Of course I am fully aware of the consequences of bringing two competing and contrasting methodologies together because both have their strengths and shortcomings and are thus, always open to debate. Indeed, on page 156-158 of thesis I have addressed some of the theoretical incompatibilities between Foucault's method and discourse analysis, yet I have not fully addressed the consequences of bringing two competing and contrasting methodologies of discourse analysis and ethnographic practice together. This chapter will therefore turn to summarise Bourdieu's methodology.

Bourdieu's, habitus, capital, and field

As stated above I have borrowed some tools from Bourdieu's toolkit because he provides the potential to see power as culturally and symbolically created, and constantly re-legitimised through the interplay of agency and structure. The main way this happens is through what he calls 'habitus' or socialised norms or tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking. According to Bourdieu (1990) the habitus as the feel for the game is the social game embodied and turned into second nature. The habitus, as society written upon the body, into the biological individual, enables the infinite number of acts of the game written into the game as possibilities and objective demands to be produced; the constraints and rules impose themselves on those people, and those people alone who, because they have a feel for the game, a feel, that is, for the immanent necessity of the game, are prepared to perceive them and carry them out (ibid). The habitus thus serves as a strategy generating principle which drives thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions enabling individuals to decide about diverse tasks in their daily lives (Bourdieu 1990). We can therefore say

that the habitus is situated intersubjectivity, and that this intersubjectivity is a precondition for practice. According to Bourdieu (1977), discourse is a social practice in which language is used to create, interpret, categorize, appropriate, negotiate, challenge, disseminate, and realize various experiential, social, and cultural meanings. In fact, Bourdieu describes discourse as a structured structuring structure through which social actors use language to construct a social reality in agreement with the shared social, historical, and cultural structures that embody the habitus. Here, it is discourse that constructs the rules of the game. By rules I mean a generative scheme that functions as formal codes that govern the prescribed outcomes and uses of weight loss practices. It motivates older women to believe their bodies to be problematic and in need of improvement/modification that requires their engagement in weight loss practices in order to partake in the game. This discourse cultivates a taste for weight loss dieting and guides the older women to act responsibly by adopting these practices. These rules are codified as strategic plans, marketing materials, web sites, and the curriculum used to inculcate members who will become contenders in the weight watching game. A second important concept introduced by Bourdieu is that of 'capital', which he extends beyond the notion of material assets to capital that may be social, cultural or symbolic and plays a central role in societal power relations, as this provides the means for a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy, as classes distinguish themselves through taste (Navarro, 2006). The shift from material to cultural and symbolic forms of capital is to a large extent what hides the causes of inequality (ibid). These ideas are elaborated at length in Bourdieu's (1984: 471) classic study of *Distinction*, in which he shows how the social order is progressively inscribed in people's minds' through 'cultural products: "including systems of education, language, judgements, values, methods of classification and activities of everyday life". These all lead to an unconscious acceptance of social differences and

hierarchies, to 'a sense of one's place' and to behaviours of self-exclusion (ibid: 141). A third concept that is important in Bourdieu's theory is the idea of 'fields', which are the various social and institutional arenas in which people express and reproduce their dispositions, and where they compete for the distribution of different kinds of capital. A field is a network, structure or set of relationships which may be intellectual, religious, educational, cultural, etc. (Navarro 2006: 18). Here, people often experience power differently depending on which field they are in at a given moment, so context and environment are key influences on habitus (ibid). Having summarised Bourdieu's methodology I shall move on to show how I have resolved the tension between Foucault's discursive analysis (the 'docile body') and Bourdieu's ethnographic practice (the habitus). In order to achieve this I will treat the commercial weight loss area as the gym studied by Wacquant (2004) because it is also a school of morality. In other words using Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984), and the empirical evidence found in chapters five and six I will summarise how the Weight loss industry is more than just a thinning machine (as arranging bodies into a hierarchy), it is also an industry of conversion of lower class habitus into a middle class one.

Fighting it out in the weight loss arena

In chapter's three, and five I have demonstrated how Weight Watchers' and Slimming Worlds' patent function revolved around mainly women's eating and bodily deviances. Indeed, the ways we think and talk about a subject influence and reflect the ways we act in relation to that subject is the basic premise of discourse theory. As stated in chapter one in Western liberal societies, our discourses of power are almost exclusively conflictual or adversarial. Power tends to be associated with competition at best, coercion or domination at worst. As discussed at length in chapter's one, two, and four, discourse comprises

linguistic forms that convey ideas and allow the ambiguity of language to create ambiguity of intent and intention. This ambiguity comes from the weak and arbitrary links between signifier and signified. Discourses constitute individuals relationally, that is in our interaction with others (Katz 1996). Katz continues to note how discourses have a structure that forms a network of communication between us and allow us to talk to each other in agreement or disagreement. We can slip between discourses, which thereby have a degree of flexibility. Discourse is the domain of struggle, and all interactions, talk, and argument take place at the level of discourse. The dependence on linguistic and symbolic forms always open up the possibility for ambiguity and divergence of activity, yet such divergence draws on more stable ideological foundations (ibid). In chapter three I indicated how ideology describes the structure of ideas, linked to relations of domination and the nature of human interaction and nature of society. Ideological ideas advantage some at the expense of others, and they have an external reference therefore to social organisation and structure. The ideological component relates habitus and discourse to social norms, social organisation and power. It is the dynamic interaction between these three elements which moulds and position us in a social field, and which consequently inform, create and constrain our activity and interaction (McNay, 1999). In terms of this thesis I have focused predominantly on the ways in which older female bodies are inscribed in discursive practice which provides a framework in order to understand the dogma of weight reducing discourse (which is legitimated in public health campaigns). According to Foucault (1988) the first step in a 'technology of the self'involves the individual gaining an ability to problematize their identity and the codes that govern them. Here, codes are coded activities that are temporarily established for the body to follow (prescribed movements and schedules that are often corrupted). For Foucault, it is only after such questioning that one can engage in ethical conduct or practices of freedom. In

chapter's two, three, and five I have therefore argued that the growth in the ubiquity of media and advertising images of young slim beautiful women, coupled with the 'war on obesity', has problematized the female body, which is then seen as being in need of alteration by both the owner of the body, and by the medical and public health institutions through the medical gaze (Spitzack 1987: 357). Foucault (1977) introduced the concept of 'gaze' to his writings as a means of referring to the way people and populations are constituted and objectified. The 'observational gaze' explains the practice of scrutinizing individuals and groups based on particular dominant disciplinary discourses. Here, Foucault (1977: 146) states that: "Discipline is an art of rank, a technique for the transformation of arrangements. It individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations". Foucault (1977) revealed that these observational gazes are not mere passing looks but 'normalising' practices that assess their object according to some evaluative standard. Some of the characteristics of the object are then defined as deviant or are devalued in comparison to the implicit norms embedded in the disciplinary discourse. That is, the dominant discourse ultimately adjudicates what is normal and what is not. Foucault (1977: 186) points out that:

> "Power cannot be understood except in relation to the establishing of a power exercised on the body itself... There is a network or circuit of bio-power, or somato-power, which acts as the formative matrix of sexuality itself as the historical and cultural phenomenon within which we seem at once to recognize and lose ourselves".

In chapter five I have demonstrated how 'Surveillance of the self' plays a central role in domination strategies (Spitzack 1987) which constitutes weight reducing discourse. Here, the older woman views her body as ultimately untrustworthy and its desires as capable of

taking her over, and as a consequence of a pervasive sense of bodily deficiency most women (including those who are not overweight) want to be slimmer. In fact when exploring the 'normalisation' of dieting within everyday Western cultures, Orbach (1993: xxiii) has argued that: "[n]o one is much more disturbed by statistics which show that 80 percent of women in countries like the... UK... are dieting at any given moment". Because slenderness is synonymous with health, self control and beauty, while fatness implies low self esteem, illness and self indulgence (Oberg and Tornstam 1999), many older women feel compelled to join a slimming club in order to climb up the hierarchy in the social space of bodies.

As already stated above discourses produce bodies and bodies only exist through the articulation in discourse and representation. Consequently, the body disappears as a material and biological phenomenon. In other words poststructuralism has a real problem with the body because we can only look at the body as a construction of discourses, but cannot see how the older women's bodies can be materially damaged by the oppressive structures of a patriarchal society. In order to attempt to transcend the objectivism–subjectivism dichotomy I have therefore drawn on Bourdieu's habitus as a lived practice to help me to understand the interplay of the organisation (as field) and individual agency in order to clarify the variability and creativity evident in the older women's reproductions of identity. I shall therefore continue to outline how my feminist syntheses with Bourdieu's relational concept of field and habitus can highlight the uneven and discontinuous nature of changes in the gender identities of older women in contemporary culture. Thus, I will summarise how gendered readings of capital, field and habitus have the potential to offer me a fresh insight into how the feminine subject is "synchronically produced as the object of regulatory norms by phallocentric symbolic systems and formed

as a subject or agent who may resist these norms" (McNay, 1999: 105). In other words, I want to show how the older women's identity in physical cultures, such as the weight loss dieting culture is "not a mechanistically determining structure but an open system of dispositions, regulated liberties, that are 'durable but not eternal'" (McNay, 1999: 105).

I shall begin this journey by suggesting that a discourse of bodily appreciation opens up and closes down certain possibilities for the re-valuing of the older subjects within what Skeggs (2001) calls a scopic economy. Drawing from Bourdieu's model of class, based on the interplay of four different forms of capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic), which are tradable according to their exchange value, I can argue following Skeggs (2001: 303) that older women invest in the body as a form of cultural capital which signals her worth. Within the inescapable scopic economy, in which some bodies and appearances are valued more highly than others: "we enter and know our positioning in relation to others via their bodily and visual value". So far in this chapter I have suggested that the weight loss industry's patent function has hinged around 'normalising' women's eating and bodily deviances. I have therefore shown that for many women thinning means climbing up the hierarchy in the space of social bodies, since the higher one's social origin and occupation, the lower one's weight. Indeed, in chapter's five and six I have presented evidence to show that women's efforts to be thin are understandable given the significant sanctions for deviating from appearance standards (Sobal, 1999). Evidence suggests that the social costs of fatness measured by education, income, employment, dating, marriage and divorce were particularly profound for some of the older women in my sample. Indeed, on page 269 in this thesis I have depicted how some of the older women's public and private desires for social mobility and intimacy (i.e. get myself a new 'fella', I want a new job to go with the new body) hinged around the hierarchy described above. It is therefore necessary at this

stage in this summary chapter to introduce the tools of false consciousness and symbolic violence in order to show how they get played out in relation to class, gender, and sexuality. In chapter one, and as an illustration in chapter's five and six I have argued that women diet because they have been ideologically duped by an oppressive set of beauty ideals: being thin will make us (hetero)sexually desirable, aesthetically pleasing to ourselves and others, and better able to build an image that is appropriately feminine (Hesse-Biber, 1996). In its Marxian formulations, the concept of false consciousness implies that certain social realities are systematically obscured by an initially coherent ideology whose propagation has material benefits for a dominant group. A systematic set of beliefs about health, beauty, and weight would indeed appear to conspire to induce a state of false consciousness, especially among consumers who are less knowledgeable about the inner workings of the diet industry and medical management (Heyes 2006, 2007). In a similar way to Foucault, Bourdieu claims that large scale inequalities are established not at the level of direct institutional discrimination, but through the subtle inculcation of power relations upon bodies and dispositions of individuals. This process of corporeal inculcations is an instance of what Bourdieu (1992: 167) calls symbolic violence or a form of domination which is exercised upon the social agent with her complicity. I shall therefore turn to discuss how the incorporation of the social into the corporeal is captured in the notion of Bourdieu's work on distinction when applying it to food, social class and self-improvement (McRobbie 2004), and sexuality and food (Chernin 1981; Orbach 1986).

When discussing my methodology in chapter four, I noted that while many of the older women in my sample appeared to be diverse, a significant part of the sample was from working class backgrounds. Indeed, while my approach to the commercial weight loss

group as a site of control has been analysed exclusively in terms of age and gender, and the imposition of gender norms I am also aware that its social class dimension is also an important feature of the way it works. From the conceptual underpinnings described in chapter three, I have suggested that obesity is inversely associated with one's socio-professional category, and women from working class backgrounds are more widely affected. For example, when analysing the biographical interviews, I found that working class women appeared to be more tolerant about weight gain than upper or middle class women, and they generally took longer to embark upon a slimming diet once a weight gain has been observed. For example, Jean (age 56) who is a court clerk told me that when gaining weight she felt uncomfortable when wearing her suit for work. In addition Jean described how she felt more confident in herself when slim because she felt conscious of her age and body image when operating a field of work that was predominantly made up of men, and younger female members of staff. When I prompted Jean for more information with regards to food gender and sexuality she told me that her relationship with food and with her weight had been an ongoing struggle for most of her adult life. Jean told me that she was a 'compulsive eater', whereby she engaged in a self perpetuating cycle of binging and starvation. According to Chernin (1981) women engage in compulsive eating because their natural hunger is distorted by their desires to be thin. This process occurs as a result of women's oppression and the tyranny of slenderness restricts their physical growth and expression. In other words Chernin suggests that women's bodies are damaged by a patriarchal society. Here, from the unfolding evidence Jean's (age 56) habitus is deeply gendered and has developed through the socialisation process built around the social sanctions discussed above. Of course during many periods throughout her life Jean has often rebelled against these pressures (the place of resistance is welcome in Bourdieu's work), by allowing her natural body to become fat. However, by

attending Slimming World she has once again become alienated from her body in order feed into the arguments around the tyranny of slenderness. According to Chernin (1981) and Orbach (1986) understanding women's relationships with their bodies and food requires a twofold perspective. First, it must be feminist, incorporating an awareness of the social conditions for current forms of femininity; second the perspective must be psychodynamic, comprehending how social processes influence older women's mental and emotional processes. Continuing with Jean's story she described how she felt elated when met with phrases such as "*you look nice today Jean*", " *you've lost weight Jean*", and "*losing weight has made you look ten years younger*". Here, the focus of attention was on bodies being smaller, more pleasing to the eye, and sexier, which in some cases made women believe that they would encounter more success in the dating market. For example, Carmel (age 64), believed that her slim line body would enable her to get herself a new 'fella'. From this we can see that Carmel may have been ideologically duped by the oppressive set of body ideals described above: being thinner will make Carmel more (hetero) sexually desirable, aesthetically pleasing to herself and others, and better able to build a feminine image. When dealing with the arguments put forward by Chernin and Orbach I am aware that their arguments do suffer from essentialism because they both posit the unchanging natural body, an ontological state, with its affinities with sexist views on women's bodies as limited in capacity because of its natural function. However, these arguments have been useful for my social constructionist approach to the female body because they help me to understand how women define and manage their own sexuality when discussing the fat/thin dilemma. Of course, my aim using Foucault's and Bourdieu's work is to offer conceptions of the self that attribute a degree of agency and self-determination to the older women without discarding and abandoning their anti-essentialist view of the subject (McNay, 1999). I fully comprehend that similar to Bourdieu's notion

of regulated liberties, Foucault does not believe that engaging in technologies of self necessarily transforms power relations or discourses. Rather, individuals attempt to minimize harmful modes of domination within relations of power.

Returning back to the idea of social class and transformation, I am strongly arguing that the slender body is a sign of social distinction that appears to be more common among the higher social classes (Bourdieu, 1979). Using Collette (age 55: 266-8), as a case study I shall compare and contrast the research processes used by Foucault and Bourdieu in order to clarify and demonstrate how my research attempted to resolve the tension between the habitus and the 'docile body'. When I interviewed Collette she was already on her maintenance plan (meaning that she had reached her goal weight), thus she had already fully worked through the whole weight loss process. In charting Collette's weight loss experiences, there was evidence to suggest that she had embarked on a journey which has had an upward trajectory within the: "*food space and the universe of class bodies*" (Bourdieu, 1984: 182). For example, when joining Slimming World Collette described how as a willing participant in a disciplinary technology she became obsessed with self monitoring behaviours by measuring, recording, and scrutinizing everything that she eat and drank. As described above the organised diet programme is a particularly extreme version of panoptic culture, which is why it attracted my Foucauldian feminist attention. Here, the ultimate paradox of these practices of self-management is that 'normalising' disciplinary practices may tremendously enhance Collette's ability to perform certain kinds of functions or accomplish certain kinds of task, but they decrease the number of different ways she might be able to respond in a given situation; they narrow behavioural options. As described above I am aware that discursive practices have a dual purpose because whilst they can be repressive and render a person 'docile', they can also be

enabling of a more 'reflexive self'. From the unfolding evidence Collette described how she found the practice of dieting empowering, and found it to be a means of self-discovery. In other words, Collette suggested that there were real pleasures to be had in a practice that has often been construed as completely repressive and dehumanizing. So far when exploring this process we can see that discourse is the generalised position of the subject, the way in which she experiences the world (judgement of the self). Here Collette (age 55) is positioned and positions herself within a wide range of different discourses, which place her questions and problems into different orders which in this case is the desire to achieve a body that is considered to be 'normal' (slim ideal). In other words discourse in a sense constructs the rules of the weight loss dieting game. By passively positioning herself in certain discourses Collette has been motivated to believe that her 'docile body' needs to be subjected, used, transformed, and improved which has motivated her to believe in weight reducing practices and thus willingly partake in the game. However, as described above by suggesting that Collette's body is more or less a passive blank surface, in which discursive practices are inscribed, I have ignored the materiality of her body and have therefore denied her body agency. In order to resolve this tension I will continue to summarise how I have utilised Bourdieu's habitus in order to help explain the decision making strategies that Collette has employed as she struggles to make sense of the contradictions inherent in the discursive constitution and regulation of her body. Here, I am arguing that these discourses do not determine human action but are understood as generating structures, in which human agency is performed. Remaining with Collette (age 55) as a case study and mainly using Bourdieu's (1984) work on *Distinction* I shall therefore continue to describe how this process works.

During the early entry into the weight loss dieting field Collette experienced the socialization process (the practical transmission of weight loss dieting knowledge) via the leaders, peer comments, observation, and through the dieting hypomnemata described earlier which become embodied. Collette described how weight loss is something you have to figure out, you have to earn it, and you have to make it over many different hurdles before it reveals its soul. And when that happens, its soul becomes part of you. The soul of weight watching constitutes what Bourdieu (1990: 182) calls "cultural unconscious" and it comes via "attitudes, aptitudes, knowledge, themes and problems, in short the whole system of categories of perception and thought" acquired by a systematic social apprenticeship. Simply put, in weight loss practice terms, the habitus or "cultural unconscious" derives from a systematic cultural apprenticeship, and the longer Collette spends immersed in the weight loss culture, the more ingrained this habitus becomes. The socially constructed habitus of many weight watchers' like Collette is also generative, that is, it is a primary influence on their weight loss practices. For example, choices of equipment (i.e. measuring scales, point calculators, cooking equipment, and books), are made on the basis of practically oriented dispositions that have already been inscribed in the body and subsequently take place without overtly direct conscious awareness of the principles that guide them. The weight loss dieting culture is, therefore, a productive locus of a particular habitus which gives rise to, as Bourdieu (1990: 194) says: "patterns of thought which organize reality by directing and organizing thinking about reality". Importantly, habitus not only helps reveal how the weight loss dieting culture is embodied, but also how taken for granted social inequalities are embedded in everyday practices. Indeed, since losing weight Collette went on to describe the changes to her body which she said had given her the confidence to change what she considered to be an unrewarding career. Here, Collette's story was echoed by many other older women in the sample, and I

found clear evidence to suggest that being thinner does often increase class mobility and economic rewards. In other words, the weight loss group is more than just a thinning machine (an enterprise of normalisation of corporal deviances that create 'docile bodies' or reflexive bodies), it is also an industry of conversion of lower-class habitus into a middle class one.

Weight loss and class conversion

According to Collette (age 55: 269-70), and many of the other older women in my sample, dieting practices relate constantly to the issue of food, thus cooking provided the key to understanding their relationship to food and dieting. It was through cooking that Collette (like many other older women) managed to reappropriate and implement some of the information they received during the sessions. With regards to cooking Collette described how she evoked the culinary legacy of her mother and grandmother, both in her taste for cooking and in her culinary repertoire. Collette explained that her repertoire was outmoded in terms of nutrition and claimed that Slimming World had helped her to convert to a type of cooking more in line with dominant nutritional standards. For example, Collette described how she has always cooked with butter and lard, like her mother and grandmother used to, until she realised that it was much healthier to convert to olive oil, low fat margarine, and oil sprays. As demonstrated above habitus refers to our dispositions and habits, which are created both through the objective social structures and our own personal history and upbringing. Dispositions are acquired through our social positionings. Here, we can see how the habitus allows individuals like Collette to engage in discourses and in turn, engagement in discourses becomes constitutive of the individual habitus (Shilling 2003). Habitus operates on the level of structured lived experience, whereas discourse operates more on the level of language. Of course, the habitus is never merely an individual response but is

enhanced and routinised through the variety of discursive formulations we engage in as members of the social world. Bourdieu (1977: 72) describes the nature and importance of the habitus as follows:

> "Through our dispositions, the most improbable practices are excluded as unthinkable, which inclines us to be predisposed to act in ways that we have done in the past. The habitus produces practices that reproduce the regularities of experience while slightly adjusting to the demands of the situation. In practice the habitus is history turned into nature. Our unconscious is therefore the unforgetting of our history turning our actions instead into second nature.... It is through this that objective structures and relations of domination reproduce themselves"

The point that I am making here is Collette's 'docile body' has entered into the production of the habitus as it is implicated, inexticably connected to the mind in mediating between structures and individual action, being shaped by the former self and itself regulating the latter (Bourdieu 1978: 834). Compared to the 'docile body' the habitus is embodied, and the way that Collette treats her body reveals the deepest dispositions of the habitus. While Collette and many other older women in the sample were able to cultivate new skills with regards to cooking, I was also able see on a more latent level, how these institutions also work as venues of moralisation (Lupton 1997). In other words I have presented evidence to show how these institutions aim at regulating their member's lives, far beyond weight issues, even though this is presented as the main aim in its various fields of action. As far as class values are concerned, it upholds self-restraint and abstinence as a way of life, as well as compliance to the diet and independence from family or collective rules that could prevent it. As described earlier in this summary chapter, in doing so, it works hard to transform members' working class dispositions into middle class ones, and it displays 'the break' of middle-class sobriety defined by Bourdieu (1984: 199-80) as: "abstaining from

having a good time [as an] ambition of escaping from the common present', abstinence over intemperance, and individual salvation over collective solidarities". Drawing on the work of McRobbie (2004) I will remain with the idea of class and self-improvement by illustrating further how the 'success' of the body transformation is largely credited to the skill of the experts. In doing so, I will expose how symbolic violence or a form of domination is exercised upon the social agent with her compliance.

In her feminist analysis of the media and consumer culture McRobbie (2004) refers to programmes like *What Not to Wear*, in order to show how dominating experts are concerned with teaching compliant women how to display and perform the right kind of femininity. In chapter's three and five I have argued that by being overweight/obese we are able to see the construction of what McRobbie (2004: 102) refers to as an: "abject person with a mismanaged life", whose very appearance marks their own culpability. Indeed, evidence of this can be found in the proliferation of makeover TV programmes such as *Fat Families* in which consensus over the problematic nature of the participants' appearance is constructed using a discourse of mockery or humiliation. Influenced by the work of Bourdieu, McRobbie argued that the mockery and humiliation frames utilised by these kinds of programmes operate within the processes of class distinction (in this case obesity is aimed predominantly at white working class families). Evidence of the symbolic violence operating within these processes of distinction can be seen by the disgust and contempt that the middle classes show for the lowly 'other', distinguishable by the images of their bad taste in food and lifestyle. The point that I am trying to make here is that some of the older women in my sample could relate to the participants in *Fat Families* because their mismanaged life also hinged around their working class relationship with food. In chapter six I therefore described how the action of the institution on the members eating

practices goes further than the injunction to lose weight; members are also urged to cook for themselves more, to try varied recipes with the help of the books sold to them. During the meetings I observed how the leaders (as the experts) talk about recipes that they have tried, 'tested and approved', and encourage members to do the same. Officially, the reasons for these injunctions have to do with the pleasure one gets from enjoying dishes that are tasty, and yet completely point or syn efficient. By doing so, the leader and the programme also introduces members to new food and tastes, such as exotic fish, seafood, fruits and vegetables, which are seen as being middle and upper class food. In these instances, the weight loss programme (similar to the presenter on *Fat Families*) plays the role of a reform institution, designed to promote official and legitimate definitions of well-being, definitions and practices that are also located within the social space of social classes. It also fascinatingly encourages members to resemble a portrait of the good middle class housewife that I shall now outline.

From my weekly observations I noted that the leaders in both organisations constantly referred to the need for members to be organised. As described above, all of the older women in my sample (including myself), were snowed under with the paper panoptican that spilled over into the home. This literature constantly reminded women to plan when grocery shopping (selecting purchases on the basis of the basic products needed and the recipes scheduled), doing the shopping in advance, preparing meals in advance, cooking large quantities of food and deep freezing them, and making sure they are never unprepared. Being organized and planning for everything is therefore necessary as far as foods is concerned, and once again reiterates how 'docility' is a major objective of most successful 'normalised' disciplinary practices, and at the level of the individual weight watcher it is assiduously cultivated (McWhorter 1999). In addition, one of the key

mechanisms used to promote the model of the good housewife lies in the explicit or implicit injunctions to follow the example of the leader and her lifestyle. This is a common principle of support groups and in this case the leader in both organisations have been through the same process and whose biographical experience gives her competence and legitimacy, is always likely to work as a mode of moralization and imposition of a class based outlook. For example, at Weight Watchers the leader often presented details of her everyday middle class life and was vocal in telling women 'what they should do' (implying in order to lose weight, but also to lead a 'good' life). In addition, the leaders in both groups also encourage members to save or bank points and syns. In terms of diet, this means banking points or syns during the week (by not spending one's entire daily points allowance and saving some for 'weekend treats'). But clearly the program also encourages members to manage their lives like good, sensible housewives. Interestingly, on many occasions the leader at Weight Watchers suggested you save your points, like you save money in your bank account. Here, the leader advises that one should not eat on credit because one will pay the price at the scales. In other words we can see how members are therefore supposed to be shaped into women who save, which echoes the 'propensity to accumulation', the asceticism, and even 'the almost insatiable thirsts for rules of conduct which subjects the whole life to rigorous discipline' of once again middle-class taste (Bourdieu 1984: 330). Since it teaches cooking and obeying lifestyle standards defined by public health policies, and while following the example of the leader, including her deviances and weaknesses (page 268), and ceaselessly emphasizing the virtues of anticipating and saving, I contend that the weight loss group is an enterprise of moralization and conversion from lower class to middle class.

Final thought

In this thesis I have made an important argument regarding feminist theory and strategy. The thesis has also addressed many of the tensions that I have encountered throughout the research when applying a feminist Foucauldian reading to the phenomenon of weight loss as pursued by women of middle age and above. Indeed, many scholars have when seen a radical break in Foucault's work from the genealogies of power networks in the mid-1970s (*Discipline and Punish, The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*) to the last two volumes of the mid-1980s (*The Use of Pleasure, The Care of the Self*). In those last two works Foucault turns his attention away from the vast networks of biopower that produce subjectivity as subjection and toward the lives of free individuals and their life shaping ethical choices. Some commentators have seen this shift as a radical departure, a retreat, or a betrayal. However, after carefully working through these conceptual tensions (which I consider to be a particular strength and intervention of the thesis), and borrowing tools from Bourdieu I contend that there is no discontinuity here at all. On the contrary, I suggest that Foucault's account of subjectivity has always included the possibility of resistance and uncertainty of outcome. As demonstrated in this thesis, Foucault maintains that power networks are always unstable, and subjects are almost always in a position to alter those networks to some degree by failing or refusing to repeat the patterns that define them. Foucault does not therefore implicitly reject his work on biopower, and his later work constitutes an effort to find ways in which subjects within regimes of power engage in self-transformative disciplines such as weight loss dieting. Had Foucault not died at the age of fifty-seven, he might well have moved beyond the study of subjects in the ancient world to subjects in contemporary biopolitical networks. This is what I have attempted to do here. By bringing together Foucault's work on biopower and 'normalisation' with his work on ethics and 'care of the self' I have refused to believe that freedom is an impossibility for a

.normalised' subject, and I have marshalled some impressive evidence to convince the reader that I am right.

APPENDIX A

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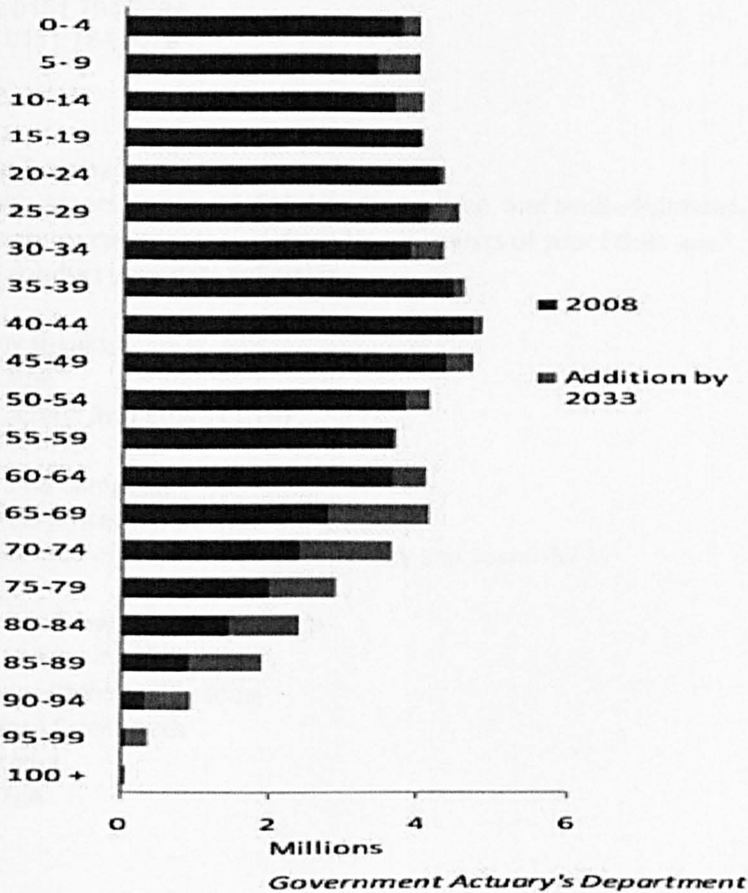

Source The Governments Actuary's Department (2009) [www.parliament.uk

APPENDIX B: Confirmation of Ethical Approval

UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL

Professor Louise Ackers
Chair in European Socio-Legal Studies and Director
European Law and Policy Research Group
School of Law and Social Justice
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Liverpool
L69 7ZS
Fax 0151 794 2884
Tel 0151 794 3679

Dear Barbara,
Louise Ackers, Chair of SLSJ Ethics Committee, and Louise Hardwick, Vice-chair has now received favourable comments back from the reviewers of your Ethics application. You may now go ahead and conduct your data collection.

Many thanks,
Lorraine
(Secretary: SLSJ Ethics Cttee)

Lorraine Campbell
Clerical officer
PA to Head of Department of Sociology and Social Policy

School of Law and Social Justice
The University of Liverpool
Eleanor Rathbone Building
Bedford Street outh
Liverpool
L69 7ZA

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the Study: Alice Through the Contemporary Looking Glass: Older Women's Experiences of the Self/Body and Identity within a Commercial Weight Management Setting

Name of Researcher and Contact Details

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Telephone number 07950 291409

My name is Barbara McNamara and I am currently conducting a PhD at the University of Liverpool. My PhD study explores older women's (age 55+) experiences of the self/body and identity within a weight management setting. I'm interested in investigating positive and negative understandings of aging and weight ideals. This project was motivated in part by my own experiences of aging and also of having weight management issues that led me to join weight management organisations at various stages of my life.

This study aims to document how age and weight management procedures inform women's identities and approaches to weight. I have joined this slimming group in order to become a fully paid member and will take part in the group activities and meetings and will endeavour to make myself known at all times. I want to firstly understand how women adopt different strategies towards aging and weight. Secondly, I want to study how women see weight management and fitness as a means of improving health, and as a strategy for increasing physical attractiveness. I will be spending some time in the slimming clubs at different times throughout the day and early evening during weekdays in order to experience as wide a range of participants from the different age cohorts, social backgrounds and ethnicities as possible. Individual women will then be invited to take part in informal interviews. In the interview I will ask you about your management of the self/body through diet and how this relates to your identity. These interviews will take place within one of the following venues of your choice: A local coffee bar or café, providing it is not too busy or noisy; in my office at Liverpool University; at the slimming

club; or in your home. Interviews will be audio recorded with your permission and will last around one to one and half hours. I will be flexible and try to accommodate interview locations and times to suit you. An overview of the questions will be shown to you in advance so that you can decide whether or not you wish to participate.

Consent and confidentiality

Before you decide whether to take part or not, the issue of informed consent will be explained to you. If you are happy to take part, you will be asked to complete a written consent form. Your privacy will be respected and confidentiality will be maintained at all times throughout the research process. The consent form will address three elements of consent separately, which are:

1. Consent to participate in the research
2. Consent to audio recording of interviews
3. Consent for information to be used in publications.

Personal contact information will only be used by me to arrange interviews and to inform you of completion of the thesis in order to offer you a summary of the findings. If you do not wish to answer any specific questions I will move on. You may withdraw from the interviews at any stage throughout the process and if this happens, you will be asked if the information you have given so far may be used. If you agree to this, the partial interview will be kept until completion of the project when the data may or may not be used depending on the relevance of it. If you do not want any part of interview to be used, the recording will be erased. As participants you will be anonymous within the thesis and the research locations will not be named in the thesis.

Feedback

You will be offered a copy of the transcribed interview for verification and/or a summary of the research findings once the thesis is complete. I will also happy to provide feedback sessions to the weight management organisations who allowed access if they would like this to happen.

Data storage and processing

This project will use digital recording which will be subjected to transcription. I aim to transcribe all of the interviews, and the recordings will be stored digitally on a password protected computer within a locked office within the University until the thesis is completed. However, data will be made available to the supervisory team.

APPENDIX D: Participant Observation Guide

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The organisation conceptualised the goal of weight loss that it promoted in two ways:

As a means of improving health

As a strategy for increasing physical attractiveness.

Are such constructions evident in the company's literature?
Do these messages feature in the weekly discussions?

How are the members weighed and how is their progress (or lack of progress) recorded by the leader.

Does the 'weigh-in' cause much anxiety and frustration.

How do participants respond when?

1. losing weight
2. Gaining weight
3. Are there any distinctions made in terms of age
4. Do participants make any excuses and if so how are these challenged by the leader

How do accounts of 'repentance' figure in the participants narrative identity work?

1. How are they dedicated to weight management?
2. Does the programme offer flexibility and choice
3. Does the leader ask for volunteers to report how much weight they had lost and to share other 'successes'.
4. Does the leader make any references to the challenges that older members may face
5. How do members describe any recent challenges that they may have had overcome by adopting organisationally-legitimised practices, such as avoiding situations that might threaten their resolve or sticking to a pre-planned eating strategy.

The above field work questions can be further probed in the small ethnographic interviews

APPENDIX E: Biographical details of research Participants

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Name	Age	Profession	Organisation
Andrea	59	Support worker	Weight Watchers
Judith	64	Retired grocer	Weight Watchers
Grace	72	Retired legal secretary	Slimming World
Sam	58	Doctors receptionist	Slimming World
Noreen	74	Retired shop asst	Slimming World
Carol	55	Factory worker	Weight Watchers
Diane	56	Hairdresser	Weight Watchers
Jane	58	Accountant	Weight Watchers
Val	60	Ex shop asst	Weight Watchers
Dorothy	66	Retired dinner lady	Slimming World
May	75	Housewife	Weight Watchers
Alice	57	Caterer	Weight Watchers
Collette	55	Catering supervisor	Slimming Worlds
Janet	59	Shop worker	Weight Watchers
Brenda	67	Housewife	Weight Watchers
Joanne	57	Bakery assistant	Weight Watchers
Thelma	65	Retired dental asst	Slimming World
Sheila	68	Cleaner	Slimming World
Rosie	69	Carer	Slimming World
Sally	61	nurse	Weight Watchers
Pat	59	Social worker	Slimming World
Denise	58	Dog groomer	Slimming World
Julie	63	Veterinary asst	Slimming World
Gillian	56	Cleaner	Weight Watchers
Carmel	64	Retired bar maid	Slimming World
Jenny	55	Support worker	Slimming World
Anna	56	Drug/alcohol support	Weight Watchers
Helen	61	Nursing home asst	Weight Watchers
Liz	60	Voluntary worker	Slimming World
Kath	64	Lollipop lady	Weight Watchers
Suzanne	55	Nursing home asst	Weight Watchers
Gail	65	Dog breeder	Slimming World
Margaret	61	Cattery owner	Weight Watchers
Elaine	59	Midwife	Weight Watchers
Jean	56	Court clerk	Slimming World
Irene	59	Nurse	Weight Watchers

APPENDIX F: Interview Guide

Ok let's begin with a little background information. Could you please tell me your marital status, how long you have resided on the Wirral, marital status, ethnicity, occupation etc?

Ok moving onto your experience of yourself could you tell me:

1. How is your sense of self is constructed in relation to your health?
2. Do you associate weight loss with bad health and if so how have these concerns influenced you more as you have aged?
3. Have these concerns influenced others, say G.Ps, family members, and friends, and if so how?
4. Have these concerns altered your behaviour in anyway and was health your main motivation for joining a slimming club?

Ok moving on from health could you tell me?

5. How your sense of the self is constructed by the body/physical appearance?
6. Do you associate weight gain with a poor physical appearance and if so how have these concerns influenced you as you have aged?
7. Have beauty mandates influenced you in anyway?
8. Has aging/weight gain concerns influenced others, say family members and friends and if so how and why?
9. Have these concerns altered your behaviour in anyway and how much has physical appearance motivated you to join in a slimming club?
10. How do you feel about cosmetic surgery relating to weight-loss?

Ok having clarified your motivations for joining a weight-loss organisation can you tell me?

1. Have you ever been a member of a slimming club in the past and if so why?
2. What were your motivations for joining/leaving?
3. Was this group recommended by another member/ have success stories motivated you?
4. How does the organisation support/help you achieve your weight-loss goals
5. How do you feel about being weighed each week
6. How much and to what extent (if any) does the organisation help you to become more disciplined in terms of food/lifestyle
7. What do you gain from being a member
8. How much choice and flexibility does the programme afford you?
9. Is the programme enjoyable in anyway?
10. Having lost weight how does this make you feel?
11. What changes have you made to your lifestyle?

Ok I would like to move on now to talk about how you compare yourselves to the younger members of the group

1. Compared to younger members do you feel that your appearance is just as important as it is to them
2. To what extent (if any) could you say that aging has slowed down your metabolism which has led to you gaining weight as you have aged?
3. Do you feel that the leaders treat you any differently to the younger members in relation to weight-loss and if so why?
4. Do you go online?
5. Have older women's success stories influenced you in anyway?

Ok we have spent a lot of time discussing these issues but before we finish I was wandering if you have anything else you wish to add to what we have discussed today.

Thank you for your time.

CONSENT FORM

Name of Researcher: Ms Barbara McNamara

Please initial box

I confirm the purpose of this study has been clearly explained to me so that I can make an informed choice whether to participate or not ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving reason ☐

I agree to participate in a face to face interview for the study ☐

I agree to the interview being tape recorded ☐

I agree that verbatim comments from interview transcripts can be used when research findings are disseminated as long as they are not directly attributed to me by name ☐

....

Name of participant   Date   Signature

....

Researchers Signature   Date

One copy for interviewee and one for researcher

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