WATCHING OUR WEIGHT: AN EXPLORATION INTO THE POLITICS OF THE BODY USING INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN POST-STRUCTURALIST FEMINISM AND FOUCAULT'S DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH

by

AMELIA MORRIS

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Department of Political Science and International Studies
School of Government and Society
College of Social Sciences
University of Birmingham

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ABSTRACT

In feminist theory, there is no greater site of contestation than that of the body. This thesis explores how, often, debates on the body become centred upon a dichotomy between oppression and liberation. There is a vast diversity of scholarship that challenges this binary ranging from post-colonial, post-structuralist and Marxist feminist work, nevertheless, the dichotomy is still in action. This thesis focuses in on this dichotomy through the lens of dieting, to argue that the 'feminine' body is not simply a site of oppression or liberation. Rather, I draw upon the meeting points between Foucault's (1977) *Discipline and Punish* and post-structuralist feminist scholarship to suggest that power works 'through' the everyday language and actions used to construct dieting and fatness. Using *Weight Watchers* and *Slimming World* as case studies, I note how processes of self-surveillance discipline dieters bodies through the act of confession and the structuring of one's time around weight-loss. The underlying aim of the thesis demonstrates the complexities that surround women's relationship to the body; it is simplistic to suggest that dieting is a product of 'oppression' or a tool for 'empowerment.' In challenging this dichotomy, the thesis extends criticism of some post-structuralist feminist scholarship, which can occasionally 'fall back' into binary discussions of the body. Additionally, the thesis cements itself within the wealth of black feminist scholarship; by exploring the discourses surrounding Oprah Winfrey's dieting 'journey', the thesis addresses the gaps on race and gender within *Discipline and Punish*.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Geoffrey Morris.

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Chapter 1
Introduction: The Body, Power and Dieting

> Ross: if things go well, I might be out with her all night.
>
> Chandler: dude, don't do that to me!
>
> Monica enters.
>
> Ross: it's OK, you can stay here with my parents.
>
> Chandler: no, it's not that, I just don't want to be stuck here with your fat sister.

In this scene on the US sitcom *Friends*, the 'fat sister' to whom the men are referring, is a character called Monica Geller, a beautiful perfectionist with 'OCD' traits. However, throughout flashback scenes, the audience is repeatedly informed that "svelte and athletic" Monica was once fat (Richardson, 2016, p.83). Played by Courteney Cox in a fat-suit, the purpose of 'Fat Monica' (as she became known) was twofold. Firstly, she was there to be the punchline of a running joke, with quips about her weight being a constant across all ten series of the show (Harris-Moore, 2016, p. 93). Secondly, 'Fat Monica' provided substance to the character of Monica: haunted by her experiences as a fat child and young woman, Monica develops her trademark control-freak tendencies. Indeed, this particular scene marked the turning point for her character: after overhearing Chandler's remark, Monica is seen rejecting her Mother's offer to "finish off" two pies (with the response from her father: "she's finally full!"), marking her initial decision to diet.

In a later scene, Monica enacts her 'revenge' by revealing her newly thin body to Chandler (to the sound of excited claps and 'whoops' from the audience), who instantly pursues her romantically. When watching this episode of *Friends* as a teenager, I remember laughing along with the fat-girl jokes and feeling happy for Monica when she got her 'big reveal' revenge. With the benefit of

hindsight (and a feminist lens), I now see Monica as a somewhat tragic figure who is reflective of my own body journey, one that is probably recognisable for many other women. As a 'chubby' young woman, I constantly sought ways to lose weight, believing that it would make me both a 'better' and more attractive individual. In the playground, I recall my 14-year-old girlfriends and me sipping on *Slim-Fast* shakes and nibbling at pieces of fruit, feeling guilty if we strayed over a number of calories. Likewise, I remember feeling embarrassed if I had to eat in front of boys, worrying that they would presume I was a 'pig.' Now, as a thin control freak myself, Monica's desperate attempts to escape the shadow of her 'old' body feel painfully relevant to watch. Her former fatness is presented as being part of her character: she is terrified of re-gaining weight, the joke being that this has made her extremely uptight. As the audience, we recognise that these obsessional tendencies are born out of her traumatic memories as a fat girl. This is a narrative that so many women recognize from their own lives, one that has become normalized and even expected from young girls. Indeed, *Friends* is not unique in its depiction of fatness as a curse upon women. In the West, these messages are so ubiquitous that they often go unchallenged. For example, films such as *Shallow Hal* and *Precious* offer "stereotypical, extreme, and obvious" examples of fatness; the fat women characters are unattractive, lonely and seemingly stupid (Harris-Moore, 2016, p.1).

The purpose of this thesis is to explore why women diet and what this can tell us about operations of power and gender in relation to the body. In order to do so, the project will explore the discourses that construct the body and dieting, subsequently analysing the potential impact for women. Moreover, the thesis asks how power's relationship to the body is carried out in the every-day, exploring the processes of self-surveillance that are integral to dieting. This will be done

through an exploration into the dichotomy of power that has often governed feminist debates, drawing upon the work of post-structuralist feminist scholars to understand the complex relationships that women have to their bodies (see: Deveaux, 1994; Bartky, 1990, 1997; Bordo, 1993).

Context: Feminist Debates on the Body

The question of why women diet gets at the heart of feminist understandings of the body. It is a question that many feminists have sought to answer that is deeply wrapped up with notions of power. Thus, the importance of the body to feminism cannot be overlooked, as McLaren (2012, p. 95) notes: "feminists view the body as an important site of political struggle." Yet, within feminist scholarship, the body is an extremely contested area that has been explored through a vast web of perspectives, ranging from radical, Marxist and liberal feminist thought[1] (see: Wolf, 1999; Orbach, 1978; 1986; Chernin, 1994; Brownmiller, 1984; Jeffreys, 2005; Greer, 1971; Millett, 1980; Roiphe, 1994; Greer, 1971; Bolton, 2013; Yovel, 2009). The different stances on the body, within topics such as sex work or the beauty industry, have led some scholars to suggest that feminism is amidst an "identity crisis" (Alcoff, 1988; Grosz, 1993).

Although there is massive diversity within feminist scholarship on the body, the debates have often centred upon the question of oppression and liberation. On the one hand, some radical feminists view power as an oppressive force that works upon the body, with feminine practices being

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symbolic of a patriarchal form of control and subjugation. These scholars subscribe to an essentialist understanding of 'womanhood,' with women's biology rendering them subject to male dominated control (see: Greer, 1971; Bolton, 2013; Yovel, 2009; Millett, 1980; Brownmiller, 1984; Jeffreys, 2005, 2014; Mackinnon, 1989). On the other hand, some liberal and post-feminist scholars view the body as a vessel for liberation; feminism should enable women to take control of their bodies and embrace traditional understandings of femininity without judgement. This purposely sits in stark contrast to the feminism of the second-wave, which some scholars have referred to as a 'victim' ideology (Wolf, 1993; Roiphe, 1994; Paglia, 2011; Walters, 1998). Of course, there are multiple positions that don't fall within this dichotomy, such as post-colonial and post-structuralist feminist scholarship, which challenge monolithic understandings of power (see: Collins, 1986, 2000; hooks, 1981; Davies, 2003; James, 1996; Bartky, 1997; Bordo, 1993). Nevertheless, this dichotomy is still in operation throughout feminism. For instance, whilst scholars such as Bindel (2004, 2017) view sex work as a degrading act that oppresses the female body, liberal feminists such as Hardt (1999, p.100) suggest that it can be an empowering 'choice' for a woman to make. Likewise, whilst Jeffreys (2005, 2008) sees beauty practices as a form of self-mutilation dictated by patriarchal understandings of the body, Davis (1995) understands seemingly extreme beauty procedures, such as cosmetic surgery, as being: "first and foremost…about taking one's life into one's own hands."

This thesis situates itself within these debates, building upon the work of post-structuralist feminists, who have sought to overcome this dichotomy in a variety of different areas (see: Butler, 1990, 1993, 1999; Grosz, 1995, 1999; Gatens, 1996; McLaren, 2012; Ramazanoglu, 1993; Turner, 2000). For instance, Dellinger and Williams' (1997) piece on make-up in the workplace sought to

"move beyond the depiction of women as either oppressed victims or freewheeling agents," concluding that make-up could be both a hindrance to career progression *and* a form of subversion. Likewise, Bordo (1989) calls for the abandonment of the categorisation of bodies into "oppressors and oppressed, villains and victims." More widely, Butler (1990, p.93) is highly critical of feminist thought that speaks of liberating the body from the shackles of patriarchy; the body has no "natural past" that it can be liberated to due to being constructed through culture. This thesis draws upon this work, noting that the everyday nature of gender means that we must understand it as "the mundane way in which the bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitutes the illusion of an abiding gendered self."

More specifically, the thesis grounds itself within *Discipline and Punish* (1977). At first glance, this does not appear to be a strong feminist text; Foucault seemingly dismisses gender, consistently referring to the body as if it were 'one,' rather than reflecting upon the intersecting identities that power works 'through' (Bartky, 1990, p.11). Arguably, for Foucault, men and women have the same relationship to power, despite the long history of women's subjugation both socially and economically (O'Brien, 1999, p.225). This has led some scholars to question Foucault's relevance within feminism, contending that his position as a privileged-white-male is part of the problem in the silencing of women (see: Balbus, 1987; Meyers, 2014; King, 2004; Kupchick et al, 2009; Blumstein, 2001). For Balbus (1987), this gender-blindness means that feminists should reject his work, viewing a Foucauldian feminist approach as a "contradiction of terms." Moreover, Gosetti-Ferencei (2006, p.224) dismisses the concept of women bowing in submission to Foucault's understanding of power relations, encouraging feminists to resist the presentation of the feminine body as a site for "cultural inscription."

Despite Foucault's reputation within feminism, some post-structuralist feminist scholars have successfully wielded *Discipline and Punish* (1977) to interrogate gender and the body. Indeed, his analysis of power has been highly useful in exploring the construction of femininity (Deveaux, 1994; Sawicki, 2001; King, 2004; Duncan, 1994; Chapman, 1999; Germov and Williams, 1996). For example, building on Foucault's (1977) definition of power, Jagger and Bordo's (1993) work explores how normalised acts of femininity are deeply intertwined with social control, asserting that "the bodies of disordered women" must be read as a "cultural statement, a statement about gender" (p.16). For this thesis, the work of Bartky (1997) has been highly influential: drawing upon the notion of docile bodies, she explores how disciplinary power is central to the structuring of 'femininity.' In terms of dieting, she notes that the relentless 'improvement' at the heart of any weight-loss programme is a symptom of the panoptic power discussed within *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Likewise, Bordo (1993) grounds her interrogation of weight and dieting within an understanding of *Discipline and Punish* (1977) as speaking to the gendered body. For her, the desire for thinness in women directly relates to disciplinary control, a symbol of "self-mastery" (p. 185). Thus, the substantial scholarship that draws from *Discipline and Punish* (1977) in exploring the body demonstrates why it is an appropriate text to use in a thesis about gender and dieting.

Not only did Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) overlook gender, it seemingly ignored race. As Davies (2003) notes, Foucault's discussion of power of a fractured state ignores the stark differences in the discourses that surround black and white bodies. Indeed, black individuals have long been subjected to racist violence, meaning that Foucault's discussion of neutral power contributes to the erasure of this history (James, 1996, p.26). Within this thesis, it is essential to

explore how disciplinary powers in dieting impact diverse bodies, rather than discussing power's relationship to the body as universal. Thus, although I am using his work, I am also contributing to it by amplifying the voices of black feminist scholars who have been incredibly important in challenging Foucault's understanding of power (see: Collins, 1986, 2002, 2004, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991, 1993; Taylor, 1998; White, 2010; Hammonds, 2004; hooks, 1981, 1989, 2000, 2006; Cooper, 2016; Davis, 2011; Rollins, 1991; Witt, 1994; Griffin, 1996; Shaw, 2006). Indeed, scholars note that black women's bodies are 'objects' controlled and disciplined by slavery, the effects of which are still felt today (Wanzo, 2015; Yancy, 2004; Applebaum, 2010, Mohanram, 1999). This is especially pertinent when one explores the relationship between dieting and black femininity. As black feminists have noted, their bodies have been both defeminized and hyper-sexualized by racialized power structures which rely upon a juxtaposition with 'white beauty' (hooks, 1981, 1989; Wallace-Sanders, 2002; Powers, 1989 in Bordo, 1994; Thompson, 2015).

Thus, despite my use of *Discipline and Punish* (1977), the core theoretical positioning of the thesis is post-structuralist feminism (see: Butler, 1990, 1993, 1997; McLaren, 2012; Ramazanoglu, 1993; Grosz, 1994; Connell and Connell, 2005). In terms of gender, these scholars have questioned the notion of a biological 'essence,' suggesting that the very concept of 'woman' and 'man' is constructed via discursive texts (Butler, 1990, 1993; Hall and Jagose, 2012; Spargo, 1999). For Butler (1990), such discourses are constructed and maintained through everyday performances, meaning that gender is "an identity tenuously constituted in time" (p.519). Through this lens, one can understand gender as a continuous choice that individuals make in presenting themselves as 'feminine' or 'masculine.' Following on from the work of Bordo (1993) and Bartky (1997), the

discourses that surround the 'feminine' body will be interrogated through the lens of self-surveillance.

Introducing the Methodology

In order to explore practices of self-surveillance and the body, this thesis draws upon the intersections between post-structuralist feminism and *Discipline and Punish*. The work of Foucault (1977, p.93) interrogated discourses which construct and maintain our knowledge of society, a position that starkly contrasts positivist methodologies that seek to 'find' truth and 'evidence' (Kolakowski, 1993; Gartrell and Gartrell, 2002). Yet, in Foucault's eyes, the very essence of 'truth' is a construct which can be deconstructed, a stance which made Foucault deeply suspicious of scientific research which claimed to discover 'evidence.' Rather, the goal of the researcher should be to make sense of how subjects are constructed "within a historical framework" (Legrand, 2008, p.281).

When exploring dieting, this theoretical underpinning was an essential perspective for making sense of gendered bodies. Indeed, the methodological and theoretical positions of this thesis are deeply intertwined; one cannot exist without the other. Some post-structuralist feminists draw from Foucault's rejection of 'truth' in their analysis of gender. For these scholars, gender should be understood as a series of 'acts' or 'performances' rather than an a biological assignment given at birth. This position challenges the dichotomy between 'man' and 'woman,' seeking to understand the discursive practices that sustain our perception of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' (Butler, 1988, 1990, 1993). Therefore, in a thesis about power and the body, drawing upon both positions has been an essential tool in making sense of how femininity is constructed.

As has been discussed, although Foucault is not an obvious feminist, his work has been highly influential for some post-structuralist feminist scholars who have used his interrogation of discourse to understand gender[2] (see: Bordo, 1993; 1997; Sawicki, 1991; Rail and Harvey, 1995; Davis, 2006). Nevertheless, it is important to reflect upon the 'sticking points' that arose from drawing from both Foucault and post-structuralist feminist work, the most important being this apparent 'gender-blindness.' Whilst scholars such as Ramazanoglu (2002, p.10) suggest that carrying out Foucauldian methodologies puts feminists in a weakened position, I adopt Sawicki's (1991) stance that feminist scholars can wield Foucault's analysis of power in conducting their research and analysis.

Secondly, the choice of interviews does not fit with Foucault's criticism of 'lived experience.' His understanding of discourse means that interview responses are always tainted, because the subjects of interviews are themselves constructed via discourse (Sembou, 2016, p.7; Owen, 2013). Likewise, some post-structuralist feminist scholars have contested the notion of a "knowing subject", commenting that individual's identities are fluid and dynamic (Weedon, 1997, p.33; Mama, 1995, p.89). Such a position sits in opposition to the work of some radical feminist scholars, who believe that research should be conducted on the basis of women's shared lived experiences. It is important to reflect upon these scholars' position on interviews because a lot of feminist work on the body has centred around the lived experience of women (see: Mackinnon, 1987; England,

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[2] I am indebted to Dr. Nicola Smith for the many fruitful conversations we have had which have helped to formulate these points.

1993), especially the work of black feminist scholars (Childers et al, 2013, p.64; Carby, 1996; Collins, 1986; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981).

Despite this contestation, interviews have been an essential part of his thesis, providing the project with a strong sense of depth. Here, I follow on from Gavey (1997, p.464), noting that whilst language does construct one's subjectivity, the interviewer can approach their project with the understanding that discourse is never neutral. Indeed, interviews were incredibly important in enabling me to understand the every-day discourses that surround dieting by exploring the participants beliefs (Code, 2002, p.341; Longhurst, 2003). From this, then, I was able to analyse the discourses surrounding the body and dieting, which helped to build an overall picture for the thesis.

The primary methods for the project were interviews with ten women seemingly on either side of the 'oppression' and 'liberation' debate. Firstly, I spoke with dieters who are on/have been on *Weight Watchers* or *Slimming World*, in order to gain an insight into how they view their bodies and the daily practices of self-surveillance that is involved in dieting. The interviews revealed the processes of 'confession' involved in dieting, as well as the narrative of transitioning to a 'better' body. On the 'liberation' side, I interviewed members of the fat movement who have sought to liberate their bodies from the shackles of dieting and fat-oppression by embracing their size. The juxtaposition of both sets of participants allowed me to explore the dichotomy of power within the interview discourse and revealed the similarities between both sets of participants in terms of the body.

I carried out 14 interviews with women who are/have been members of *Slimming World* or *Weight Watchers*. The purpose of the interview was to understand dieter's perceptions of their bodies and to question why they seek to lose weight, in order to make sense of the narratives surrounding dieting. The second group of four participants described themselves as either fat activists or body positivity activists, both of which fall under the fat movement umbrella. Whilst members of both groups contend that normative understandings of fat need to be disrupted and subverted, they differ in their approach of how to achieve this goal. For fat activists, the fat body can only be liberated after oppressive systems of patriarchy and capitalism are dismantled (see: Cooper, 2016). In contrast, body positivity activists view liberation as a tool that can come from within the individual via acts of self-love and empowerment. It was important for this thesis to explore how members of the fat movement may attempt to resist dieting in order to speak back to the question of 'oppression' and 'liberation.' Although members of the fat movement seemingly reside within the 'liberation' camp, the analysis of this case study demonstrates how the dichotomy of power is replicated within anti-dieting movements. Moreover, the juxtaposition between members of the fat movement and dieters was an important one, which spoke back to the question of 'oppression' and 'liberation.'

The interviews followed a semi-structured approach, meaning that although I followed a question structure, the interviews went 'off-track' if the participants wished (Longhurst, 2003). This provided me with the flexibility to explore the participants answers yet also created direction for the interview structure (Code, 2002, p.341). I was able to discuss their answers or reactions to questions with the respondents, providing the interviews with a depth that might not have otherwise occurred. Thus, I discussed the following topics with my participants: their experiences and

understanding of dieting and the body, the daily practices of dieting/fat activism, their understanding of the dichotomy of power and the future for their body. I didn't set a time limit on interviews, feeling that this would disrupt the 'flow' of exchange between myself and the participant. Overall, each of the interviews lasted between 50-90 minutes in length and were allowed to come to a natural end. Following from Hesse-Biber (2013, p.197), I 'probed' the participants where necessary, which contributed to the richness of the data.

I conducted an in-depth discourse analysis upon the transcripts from interviews, which involved a critical reading of the language used by the participants. After colour coding the language into themes, I would begin to think about the underlying messages of the language used and how this spoke to the themes of my thesis. Additionally, it was important that I carried out discourse analysis on complimentary sources, such as magazines and blogs, which supported the information collated from the interviews. For example, I gathered language and images from 20 *Weight Watchers* and *Slimming World* magazines, as well as blog posts from members of the fat movement.

Moreover, alongside interviews, I carried out an in-depth case study into the discourses surrounding Oprah Winfrey's body "journey" with *Weight Watchers*. The purpose of this is to address the gap on race and gender within Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977), with discussions of the body within this text seemingly speaking only to white men (see: James, 1996; Davis, 2003). Thus, Winfrey was an obvious choice of case study: she is not only an enormously important cultural figure (see: Aschoff, 2015; Fellner et al, 2014), she has previously been an official spokesperson for *Weight Watchers*. Moreover, despite being the most successful African-American woman in the world, she has been famously plagued by bodily insecurities (Harris and Watson, 2007; Lowe,

2001). Consequently, the narratives that surround her body speak to this debate, informing the thesis about how power disciplines the dieting black woman.

Although Foucault resisted the development of a method for carrying out discourse analysis, I follow Graham's (2005) cry for "methodological anarchy." Whilst I engaged in a "respectful conversation" with Foucault's work, I drew upon the work of post-structuralist feminist scholars (p. 6). Overall, my goal was to understand how dieting discourses govern women's lives (DeLyser et al, 2010, p.412). Thus, when analysing my data, I hoped to make sense of how language and images construct the body (Given, 2008, p.217; Grue, 2016). This was done by looking "beyond" the transcripts and writings, situating the language within wider cultural and social contexts (Waitt, 2005, p.181). This was a constant and active process that carried out at every stage of the project, not just during the analysis. For instance, in my day-to-day life I would notice women's bodies in adverts and magazines, actively considering the underlying meaning. In a sense, then, discourse analysis was not simply a method for this work. Rather, it is an approach that underpins the project and has affected every decision made throughout the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2013, p.46). More generally, it is a way of seeing the world that has shaped my own outlook on myself and others within the everyday.

I'm Not Your Data: Doing Feminist Ethics

Within any research project, it is important to reflect upon the ethical implications of one's methods. Before I carried out the empirical elements of the project, I was granted full ethical approval from the University of Birmingham to conduct the interviews. Once this was approved, I was tasked with approaching the participants. Throughout the research process, I was consistently

aware that dieting is an incredibly sensitive topic for many women, meaning that I needed to treat all the interviews with immense caution. I contacted the members of *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers* through mutual friends who had been involved in dieting clubs, which allowed the participant contact group to snowball. Although some participants were happy to meet, others did not reply to my emails after the first stage of contact. I believed this was because of the personal nature of the project and, consequently, did not chase the participants for a response. For the participants who agreed to partake in the project, we arranged to conduct the interviews in a comfortable setting such as the interviewee's home or a local coffee shop.

Likewise, through a contact at a Brighton theatre specializing in queer performance, I was able to approach members of the fat movement for interview, all of whom were performance artists focusing on fatness and the body. Due to the personal nature of the interviews, it was important to research the potential participants work before making the initial contact. Once I had established a conversation with the interviewees, I was able to organize a meeting date and point. Again, the topics covered in the interview were sensitive, meaning that I asked the interviewees to choose a place where they would feel most at ease to speak to me openly about their bodies.

McRobbie (1982, p.5) warns researchers about the discomforts of interviews, noting that it can feel like extracting information from a vulnerable individual for one's own personal gain. It was important for me that I did not leave the participants feeling like I had simply got "what I came for" after asking them to reveal sensitive memories about their bodies (Letherby, 2001, p.11). Yet, I often felt guilty for being pleased when a participant disclosed a personal memory that was 'useful' for my project. Indeed, researchers can find themselves in a double-bind by not wishing to "holiday

on people's misery" (McRobbie, 1982, p.5), but also hoping to draw out interesting topics from the interviews.

Despite this, many of my participants commented that they had found the interview process to be somewhat therapeutic, with one interviewee noting that reflecting on her experiences with dieting had been a calming tool in combating her body issues. For Finch (1984), participants may not be comfortable talking about their personal experiences with friends or family. As the researcher may feel somewhat distinct from their lives, they may be able to provide the participants with a sense of relief. Throughout the research process, I felt the latter point was true: my participants appeared relaxed and willing to talk about their relationship to dieting. Yet, McRobbie (1982) suggests that this openness may be because of women's lack of power within society and the expectation that they should not decline an interview. Although there was no way of avoiding this possibility, it was important that the interviews were structured around the participant's schedules and were made as comfortable as possible for them. Likewise, it was essential that I was hyper-aware of their body language, being constantly aware of any hesitancy to answer questions. If the latter scenario occurred, I would reassure the participant that it was not essential for them to answer every question.

Who Do You Think You Are? Positionality of the Researcher

It is important to reflect upon one's position as a researcher in relation to the project. Such a stance sits in opposition to Foucault's call to write in order to "have no face" (Foucault, 1969, in Miller, 2000, p.123). By this, he was referring to his preferred anonymity when writing, suggesting that authors should resist the confines of "even a self-chosen identity" (Prozorov et al, 2016, p.63). Yet,

as feminist scholars have discussed, the ability to erase oneself often comes from a position of privilege (Taylor and Vintges, 2004, p.17). As Bartky (1990) notes, women cannot simply remove themselves from femininity within their writings. Rather, feminist scholarship must reflect upon the identities that we live and breathe in the everyday (England, in Nast, 1994, p.86; Brown and Strega, 2015; Prozorov et al, 2016; McLaren, 2012). As Daigle (2015, p.18) suggests, a reflexive approach to research not only creates transparency, it also builds an ethical relationship with one's participants.

At various stages throughout the project, I worried that I may be carrying out research that was inappropriate for my identity (Morgaine, 2014, p.226). Most notably, I felt concerned about exploring the relationship between dieting and black women's bodies. As a white woman, I have grown up with inherent privilege in terms of race, which have affected my understanding of the world. Yet, within a thesis about dieting, the social and cultural importance of the black woman's body needed to be explored. Thus, rather than drawing my own analytical conclusions, I hoped to mediate this imbalance of power by building my analysis upon the legacy of black feminist scholars (Collins, 1996, 2002, 2004; Crenshaw, 1993; Taylor, 1998; White, 2010; Hammonds, 2004; hooks, 1981, 1989, 2000, 2006; Cooper, 2016; Davis, 2011; Rollins, 1991).

Secondly, in a thesis about body-size, it was important to reflect upon my own body and the potential impact it could have upon my research. I am slim (UK size 8-10) and, therefore, needed to reflect on my thin-privilege when interviewing dieters and fat activists. As Bacon (2008) notes, being thin has allowed me to "meet and get approval from other people." Therefore, it was essential that I reflected upon the existing imbalance of power between myself and the participants. Most

notably, it was important that I was aware of the different levels of comfort and ability that our bodies had. For example, I initially wanted to conduct 'on-the-go' interviews, in which the researcher and participant walk through public spaces whilst conducting the interview. However, as Bacon (2008) contends, fat individuals are consistently discriminated against within all areas of public life. Therefore, it was important to carry out the interviews in places where the interviewees felt at ease, rather than creating any unnecessary anxiety. Rather than conducting the 'walking interview,' the participants and I met in spaces where they felt most at ease, such as a coffee shop or their home. Moreover, throughout the interviews, I was careful not to comment on my experiences of the body and dieting as I felt that this would demonstrate a blindness to my thin-privilege. Instead, I asked the participants to tell me about they body 'journey' and would not stop them from talking. Whilst I would follow the structure of the interview questions at natural intervals, I hoped that this approach would carve out a space for their voices to be heard.

The Body is …? Findings of the Thesis

The main findings of this thesis are, paradoxically, both simple and complex. Ultimately, power works 'through' women's bodies and is carried out through everyday practices of self-surveillance. Within dieting, this means that *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers* acts as the panoptic lens. The members of both programmes are encouraged to monitor the transition from a 'bad' to 'good' body closely, with the documentation of their food intake becoming a life-long practice. Following on from the work of some feminist scholars, this thesis has resisted the dichotomy of power that has often structured debates around the body, noting that women are active and aware of the gendered motivations for weight-loss.

The first practice that is integral to the disciplining of the dieting body is the process of confession and the structuring of dieter's time around food. As Stinson (2001) and Pylypa (1998) note, confessing one's 'sins' within the dieting meeting enables members to continue towards 'salvation.' This reinforces self-surveillance, encouraging dieters to monitor their food intake and 'repent' for any 'bad' choices they make throughout the week. My participants expressed the feelings of guilt and shame that occurred when they were encouraged to 'confess' their food intake at the slimming meetings, with one participant noting that she had to 'explain herself' to the group after gaining weight. Such processes work to emphasise the participant's lack of 'willpower', encouraging them to survey their bodies more intently. As Dowling (2008, p.82) notes, this works to "transform the minds of those individuals who might be tempted to resist it." The subtle workings of power make self-surveillance a consistent and ubiquitous set of actions, slowly changing the mindset of the individual.

Moreover, at the heart of dieting is the structuring of time, which works on two levels. As Foucault (1977) suggested, the construction of time is essential in controlling the body's rhythms; for instance, the use of the school or factory bell regulates the timings of the body throughout the day. Likewise, the dieting body is partitioned into a 'before' and 'after' period. Whilst the fat body is symbolic of the individual's 'failure', the 'new' body is both controlled and successful (Throsby, 2008; Bartky, 1997). This discourse was present in the participant's discussion of their dieting 'journeys', with one interviewee noting that she "hated herself" prior to losing weight. Indeed, throughout the *Slimming World* and *Weight Watcher's* magazines, dieter's "slimming stories" consistently refer to weight-loss as a journey towards salvation for the 'bad' body. For example, the thin body grants them access to experiences that they saw as impossible in a fat body, such as

wearing tight-fitting clothes or getting married. Thus, the thin body becomes distinctly separate from the fat body,

Secondly, time disciplines the dieting body through the constant planning and preparation involved in weight-loss. The members of *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers* are encouraged to structure their food around a timetable and to keep a detailed journal of their intake. Such a normalisation of the documentation of one's food and exercise habits demonstrates how food becomes an obsession for dieters, which ultimately consumes many women's lives. For example, participants expressed the exhausting nature of the dieting programmes, in which they are expected to monitor and calculate every morsel of food. Many interviewees noted that much of their free time was spent planning food for the week, meaning that the majority of their day was taken up by thoughts of dieting. Here, the thesis suggests that society needs to 'muddy the waters' between our definition of 'normal' and 'disordered' eating habits, noting that the obsessive tendencies encouraged by dieting companies cause much suffering amongst women (Brown, 1985; Heyes, 2007; Bordo, 2004).

Nevertheless, these findings do not mean that the participants are unaware of disciplinary forces, or that they are simply "cultural sponges" (Deveaux, 1994). Rather, many women diet with the full knowledge of cultural norms surrounding the body and gender. The fact that they diet anyway reveals the complex mechanisms of power that construct the 'feminine' body. Indeed, to quote one of my participants, they are "caught between caring and not caring" about dieting. This demonstrates the friction that exists between an awareness of gendered norms and the pressure to conform to heteronormative body standards. Whilst dieters may be critical of narratives surrounding dieting, they still may feel happy at the prospect of weight-loss. For example, Bordo

(1993, p.30) noted that after losing weight, she was branded a "hypocrite" by her feminist colleagues. Yet, as scholars suggest, the structures that surround the feminine body are so pervasive that it is often impossible for women to resist them (Rothblum, 1994; Stinson, 2001; Sedgwick, 2014).

Drawing upon the essential scholarship of black feminists (Hine et al, 1995, p.8; Poran, 2006; hooks, 1992; Collins, 1993, 2005; Thompson, 2015; Wallace-Sanders, 2002), the next finding of the thesis suggests that Oprah Winfrey's dieting journey can inform us about how black women's bodies are disciplined in a way that is deeply entrenched within historical representations of gender and race. The pervasive 'Mammy' and 'Jezebel ' stereotypes descended from slavery and have supported the control of black femininity. Whilst the Mammy is cantankerous and content with looking after white people, the Jezebel is a hyper-sexual 'danger' to white womanhood (Joseph, 2009; Lelwicka, 2002; McElya, 2009). In particular, the 'larger than life' Mammy role reinforced the association of beauty with white aesthetics, perpetuating the myth that black women are "removed from the pressures" of dieting (Powers, 1989). Despite this, Oprah's public weight-loss journey was deeply symbolic of the middle-class black woman's desire for thinness (Kyrölä, 2016, p.805; Suddath, 2011; Thompson, 2009; Patton, 2006). As white beauty standards were entrenched as the norm, black femininity became disciplined through a "straight, white male gaze" that demands complete control of the body (Joseph, 2009, p.237). The thesis found that the notion of control was cemented within Winfrey's *Weight Watchers* campaign, demonstrating the ways that fat black women are presented as "disobedient" (Farrell, 2011, p.153; hooks, 1989).

The use of soul food within Winfrey's *Weight Watchers* cooking book is deeply symbolic of the changing discipline of black women's bodies. As scholars such as Thompson (2015, p.802) and Williams-Forsen (2006) suggest, soul food was stigmatised due to its association with the diet of slaves, yet has since been reclaimed as a symbol of black pride. Nevertheless, for some, soul food reflects a "counter-revolutionary" image of blackness that is tainted by slavery (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011; Wiggins, 1990). Within popular culture, for example, soul food can be a method of reaffirming the Mammy stereotype, with films such as *The Help* depicting the selfless black woman who is happy to serve white women soul food. This thesis found that in Oprah's *Weight Watchers* dieting cookbook, many of the recipes are updated 'healthy' versions of soul food. Here, I draw upon the work of Thompson (2015) to suggest that the use of soul food within dieting discourses demonstrates the way that black women's bodies have become embroiled in white standards of beauty, disciplining black femininity through a white lens.

The next finding of the thesis speaks back to the question of 'oppression' and 'liberation.' Within the fat movement, activists are often positioned on either side of this division in relation to how they can resist dieting. Whilst fat activism is based upon the radical opposition to 'oppressive' structures that suppress fat bodies (see: Cooper, 2016; Schoenfielder and Wieser, 1983; Brown and Rothblum, 1989), body positivity activists encourage fat women to learn to liberate themselves from dieting through acts of self-love (Wann, 1998; Crabbe, 2015; Baker, 2015). This demonstrates how the dichotomy of power can play out in spaces of resistance, creating potential tensions within the fat movement. Yet, fat activism that is based upon post-structuralist feminism has sought to challenge this binary through the process of "speaking fat" (Saguy and Ward, 2011; Sedgwick, 2003). This refers to the demand to be recognised as fat without the social stigma, working to

reclaim the term and resist normative understandings of the body (Moon and Sedgwick, 2010, p.1). Indeed, one participant's performance piece demonstrated the desire to be seen as fat, beautiful and in control of her body.

Finally, the thesis found that whilst members of the fat movement dedicate their lives to resisting the oppression of fat women, they often feel compelled to lose weight. Amongst some fat activist circles, this is an act of 'treachery' that demonstrates a submission to feminine discipline (:see Melo-Erwin, 2011). Here, I was surprised to find that dieters and fat activists shared common ground: both sets of participants are aware of the reasoning behind their desires to lose weight and feel guilty for doing so. Yet, as Foucault (1977, p.202) notes, power is ever-changing and fractured, meaning that fat activist's cannot simply find 'liberation' away from pervasive dieting structures. Rather, this demonstrates how it is impossible to remove oneself from discursive texts that produce our understandings of the body; we cannot simply 'reject' dieting or separate ourselves from normative femininity. As one participant suggested, the desire to lose weight "never really goes away", reflecting the all-encompassing nature of dieting discourses.

The findings of this thesis are important for a number of reasons. Often, the dichotomy of power has structured debates on the body, with some feminists viewing the body as an object of 'oppression' or 'liberation.' However, building upon the intersections between Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and post-structuralist feminist scholarship (Bordo, 1993; Bartky, 1997; Deveaux, 1994), this thesis furthered the argument that the body exists within a 'middle-ground' of power. Thus, through the lens of dieting, the project offers an extensive exploration into women's complex relationship to the body and how this relates to the ever changing nature of power. Not

only does this bring together a range of women's voices and insight, it builds upon the bridges that

exist between Foucault and post-structuralist feminist scholarship.

Secondly, the thesis addresses a gap on race within *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Foucault has

often been accused of presenting the body as having only "one" experience of discipline (Bartky,

1997, p.95; King, 2004; Sawicki, 1991). As a white man, Foucault could be blind to the way that

panoptic power disciplines people of different races and genders. Moreover, Foucault's suggestion

that power only operates within specific institutions ignores disciplinary practices that take place

through dislocated means, such as via voluntary self-surveillance (Bartky, 1997, p.103). Thus, I

will draw on the work of black feminist scholars to address the gaps that need to be filled in with a

discussion on the relationship between gender, race and the body in dieting. Drawing upon the

work of Davis (2003) and James (2005), as well as a plethora of black feminist scholars (see: ,

Chapter 5 reflects upon how Women of Color (WoC) bodies are disproportionately impacted by

disciplinary power. Rather than presenting this as a 'discovery', I combine the aforementioned

scholarship to discuss the dieting body. The discourses that surround Winfrey's body, therefore,

speak to socio-historical narratives of black femininity which work to support whiteness (Hine et

al, 1995; Thompson, 2015; Wallace-Sanders, 2002; McElya, 2009; Sekayi, 2003; Patton, 2004;

Joseph, 2009). Her transition from the "modern Mammy" to a representative for *Weight Watchers* is

reflective of the way that black women's bodies have constructed and maintained by white society

(Jewell, 1993; Harris and Watson, 2015; Fuller, 2001; Kowalski, 2009). Historically, black

femininity has been juxtaposed with white 'beauty,' meaning that black women were "removed"

from societal pressures to lose weight (Patton, 2006; Thompson, 2009; Sekayi, 2003; Craig, 2002).

Paradoxically, black women's bodies are simultaneously belittled and dehumanized for *not* meeting

hegemonic standards of beauty (Herring et al, 1997; Joseph, 2009; Stoneman, 2012). This demonstrates the double-bind that black women face, with representations positioning them within the binary of desexed 'Mammy' or hyper-sexual 'Jezebel' (Lelwicka, 2002; Joseph, 2009).

Alongside the theoretical contributions outlined above, the thesis makes an empirical contribution to work on the body and dieting. Whilst feminist scholarship on the body has drawn upon dieters everyday practices (see: Bovey, 1989; Heyes, 2006, 2007), there has been little to no work that brings together interviews from dieters and fat activists. Indeed, Cooper's (2016) piece *Fat Activism: A Radical Social Movement* noted that there had previously been no work that traced the history of the fat movement. Her book, therefore, was the first of its kind in collating the legacy of fat activists. Despite this, her work did not include interviews with members of the fat movement. This provides the area of scholarship with an important comparison, noting the similarity between both sets of women. Not only does this carve out new empirical analysis, it demonstrates how the dichotomy of power can play out in both areas of 'submission' and 'resistance.'

There have been many case studies into the symbolism of Oprah Winfrey as a cultural figure (see: Squire, 1994; Brunsdon and Spigel, 2007; Peck, 1994; Masciarotte, 1991; Thompson, 2015), with some scholars exploring the narrative of Winfrey's weight-loss story (Longhurst, 2005; Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer, 2006; Shugart, 2013; Fikkan and Rothblum, 2012; Bordo, 2004). Nevertheless, there is seemingly little to no work exploring the discourses that surround her body in terms of dieting, *Weight Watchers* and the socio-historical positioning of black women. Drawing upon and building from the important wealth of black feminist scholarship, this thesis contributes

an extensive analysis of the disciplining of black women's bodies to post-structuralist feminist scholarship.

Within any research project, it is essential to keep coming back to the following question: why does all of this matter? Indeed, throughout the research and construction of this thesis, I consistently reflected upon what my findings meant for our understandings of dieting and the body. Most importantly, the thesis highlights how dieting can control women's lives, with the body becoming a site for near constant 'improvement' and modification. To put it simply, this matters because many women are unhappy with their bodies, chasing an unachievable goal that is both time-consuming and pointless. As I will demonstrate throughout the thesis, the fat woman's body is consistently ostracised (Cooper, 2016), meaning that women will spend their lives dieting in order to avoid the same humiliation.

Nevertheless, the nature of panoptic power means that thin is never enough, women's bodies are subject to limitless modifications (Bartky, 1997). In extreme examples, this can lead to conditions such as Anorexia Nervosa, an illness which predominantly victimizes young women (Bordo, 2004; Carson, 1993; Hesse-Biber, 1996; Orbach, 1986; Seid, 1989; Chernin, 1981). Yet, this thesis followed Bordo's (1993) and Bartky (1997) suggestion that our understandings of what extreme relationships to the body is warped: it is deemed 'normal' to relentlessly monitor one's every morsel of food, yet it is 'abnormal' for women to starve themselves. One might argue, then, that the cultural obsession with women's bodies has led to a widespread sanitised version of anorexia; 'normal' women's lives are dominated by a guilty, shameful relationship to food and the body that

can cause much anxiety and suffering. As Orbach (1986, p.3) famously stated, the anorectic's struggle is a "metaphor for our age," a symbol of women's fear in taking up space.

Yet, the underlying argument of the project is that women's relationship to the body is fraught with contradictions. Throughout the thesis, I explore how power disciplines the body through everyday practices of self-surveillance. As will be discussed, some feminist scholars have been positioned on either side of the 'oppression' and 'liberation' debate when discussing the body For instance, topics such as sex work have generated much debate within feminist circles. Indeed, the work of scholars such as Jeffreys (2003, 2005, 2008) and Sommers (1995) present polar opposite conceptions of the body. Despite this, there is a wealth of feminist scholarship which transcends this dichotomy, with the work of Bartky (1990, 1997) and Bordo (1993, 2002) presenting insightful analysis into panoptic power and dieting. Yet, by extending Deveaux's (1994) critique of some post-structuralist feminist work, this thesis matters because it contributes to the wealth of scholarship generating nuanced discussions of power and the body[3].

Follow the Breadcrumbs: Thesis Structure

Within Chapter 2, I situate the project within feminist scholarship on the body and the dichotomy of power, speaking to conversations about dieting and weight-loss. This locates the thesis between the 'oppression' thesis (see: Millett, 2000; Greer, 1971; Brownmiller, 1975; Mackinnon, 1989; Currie, 1992, Greer, 2012; Jeffreys, 2005, 2008; Lorde, 1984; Collins, 1986) and the 'liberation' approach (Lumby, 1997; Griffiths, 2015; Roiphe, 1994; Sommers, 1994; Paglia, 1992). There are many

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[3] I am indebted to Dr.Nicola Smith for the many fruitful conversations we have had throughout this research process, which have helped shape much of this thesis.

positions which challenge this dichotomy, such as Marxist and post-colonial feminist scholarship (see: Davis, 2011; Gatens, 2013; Suleri, 1992; Ahmed, 2013; hooks, 1992; Germanà, 2011). Yet, the chapter will set out the importance of drawing upon intersections that exist between Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and post-structuralist feminism for an exploration into dieting and the body (Bartky, 1997; Bordo, 2004; McLaren, 2012; Deveaux, 1994). Whilst Foucault did not specifically engage with gender, his work has a lot of utilities for post-structuralist theorising of the body. The final part of the chapter will address the gaps that exist on race within *Discipline and Punish* and the importance of drawing upon the wealth of black feminist scholarship in discussing the disciplining of the body (Collins, 1986, 2002, 2004, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991, 1993; Taylor, 1998; White, 2010; Hammonds, 2004; hooks, 1981, 1989, 2000, 2006).

Throughout Chapter 3, I explore the methodological route for the thesis. Most importantly, this sets out why a connection between *Discipline and Punish* and post-structuralist feminist work is appropriate for the project. Foucault's work was blind to both gender and race and within *Discipline and Punish* he consistently referred to the body as if it were 'one', rather than exploring the impact of differing identities (Ramazanoglu, 2002, p.10; McLaren, 2012). This has led some feminists to view the combination of post-structuralist feminism with Foucauldian thought as an impossible partnership (Balbus, 1987). Yet, as Sawicki (1991, p.15) notes, feminist scholars must look past the flaws in Foucault's work and "see what we can make" of his vision of power. Indeed, some post-structuralist feminists have adapted his analysis of the body to explore femininity and docility (Sawicki, 1991; King, 2004; Bordo, 1993; Bartky, 1997). This work was essential in building a methodology for the thesis, in which I use Foucault's analysis of power to interrogate constructions of femininity. Nevertheless, the chapter reflects upon the 'sticking points' that were

born from these intersections and how they impacted the 'nuts and bolts' of the thesis. The final part of Chapter 3 will reflect upon the importance of feminist ethics, as well as my own positionality as a researcher throughout the project

Next, Chapter 4 begins the empirical analysis of my interviews with members of *Weight Watchers* and *Slimming World*. The chapter demonstrates how the dichotomy of power plays out in people's own experiences and seeks to explore the complexities that arise from self-surveillance and dieting. Within the first part of the chapter, I ground the experiences of dieting within the 'oppression' thesis, drawing upon the work of some radical scholars to suggest that the participants are subject to patriarchal constructs of 'femininity' (Jeffreys, 2005; Piess, 1998; Brownmiller, 1977). Then, the chapter turns to the discourses surrounding 'liberation' within my interviews with participants and during the analysis of dieting sources. Drawing on post-feminist scholarship, I suggest that some dieters view weight-loss as a source of control and 'empowerment' (Roiphe, 1994; Lumby, 1997; Wolf, 2013; Walters, 1999). For instance, some participants noted that they felt more confident and at ease in their bodies after weight-loss, enabling them to be 'free' of their fat past. Within the final part of Chapter 4, however, I draw on the links between Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and post-structuralist feminism to explore the 'no mans land' of dieting. By this, I am referring to the fractured nature of self-surveillance in which a person's every move is observed and disciplined (Foucault, 1975, p.136). This section explores the act of confession and the process of time as being integral to the all-encompassing workings of panoptic power (Deveaux, 1994; Stinson, 2001; Jovanovski, 2017).

Throughout Chapter 5, the thesis addresses the gap on race and gender within *Discipline and Punish* (1977) via a case study of the discourses surrounding Oprah Winfrey's body and her relationship to *Weight Watchers* (Bartky, 1997; King, 2004; Sawicki, 1991; Davis, 2003; James, 2005). This chapter seeks to understand how black women's bodies are impacted by disciplinary power and how their experiences differ from white women. Locating Winfrey's body within the historical context of black femininity, the chapter draws upon the legacy of black feminist scholarship to note that black women have typically been removed from Eurocentric pressures of dieting (Thompson, 2015, p.245; Wallace-Sanders, 2002. p.105; McElya, 2009; Fleming, 2000, p. 123; Reeve, 2015, p.175). Yet, as the chapter will demonstrate, Winfrey's partnership with *Weight Watchers* is deeply symbolic of a cultural shift in how the black female body is governed (Sekayi, 2003; Patton, 2006). Indeed, the next section of the chapter sets out how neoliberalism has played a key role in the changing nature of black femininity, noting that Winfrey's use of soul food in her dieting book is reflective of this shift (Thompson, 2015; Magubane, 2008). Finally, the chapter will reflect upon how black women such as Winfrey are caught in a double-bind when losing weight, often facing hostile reactions to a thin body (Harris and Watson, 2015).

Finally, Chapter 6 speaks back to the question of oppression and liberation by exploring the rejection of dieting by members of the 'fat' movement. Although members of the fat movement share the common goal of wanting fat women to feel comfortable and happy within their bodies, they possess different visions for how to achieve these aims. Whilst fat activism is based upon resistance to the overarching oppression of the fat woman's body (see: Schoenfielder and Wieser, 1983; Brown and Rothblum, 1989; Bovey, 1994), body positivity activists see liberation as an individual act that comes from within the self (see: Wann, 1998; Crabbe, 2017; Baker, 2015;

Stanley, 2017). This chapter grounds itself within interviews with members of the fat movement to explore the tensions that can arise between these two approaches. For instance, whilst fat activists from the second-wave of feminism favoured subverting 'oppressive spaces,' body positivity activists suggest that women should learn to celebrate their fatness through embracing the naked body and wearing clothes designed for thin women (Pause and Wykes, 2016; White, 2014; Dickins et al, 2011). Within the final part of the chapter, however, I draw upon the intersections that exist between post-structuralist feminism and fat activism. Here, I draw upon scholarship to suggest that fat activism should stem from a desire to interrogate the "regimes of truth" that give meaning to the fat female body (Wright and Harwood, 2008, p.19; Sedgwick, 1993; Murray, 2005). For example, 'speaking fat' is a way for resisting the discourses that construct the fat body, working to destabilise the binaries that exist between 'good' and 'bad' bodies (Moon and Sedgwick, 2010).

In the final section of the thesis, Chapter 7, I reflect upon the importance of the theoretical and empirical contributions of this thesis. Speaking to the dichotomy of power that often plays out in feminist theory and the risk that feminist scholars are becoming divided, I drew upon the intersections between post-structuralist feminism and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) to explore the body and dieting. Secondly, the conversation about black femininity and panoptic power addresses gaps within *Discipline and Punish* (1977), in which Foucault treats the body like it is 'one' rather than reflecting upon the impact of differing identities. Likewise, the chapter emphasises the empirical contributions made by the thesis through the bringing together of interviews from both dieters and members of the fat movement, an approach which has not been used in other work on the body. Next, the discusses the importance of the thesis in setting out how dieting disciplines the body and the impact that this has on women's lives (Carson, 1993; Hesse-

Biber, 1996; Orbach, 1986; Seid, 1986; Chernin, 1981). The chapter then enters into a conversation

about the limitations of the project, which leads into a discussion about the potential avenues for

further research. For example, I suggest that an exploration into the role that social media plays in

dieting companies

Chapter 2
The Dichotomy of Power: Feminist Debates on the Body

There is vast diversity in feminist scholarship on the question of the body, nevertheless, it is often the case that these debates are structured in terms of 'oppression' and 'liberation.' On the one hand, some radical feminists propose that the body is subject to patriarchal structures that oppress the body (Jeffreys, 2005; Dworkin, 1975; Greer, 2004; Millett, 2000; Brownmiller, 1975; Mackinnon, 1989). However, a problem with this perspective is the discussion of women's oppression as a 'universal' experience, which scholars such as Lorde (1984) and hooks (2000) highlight intersecting identities such as race and class as being important factors in women's experiences. Likewise, such scholarship has often led feminists to essentialist understandings of the body, which perpetuates violence against the transgender community (see: Greer, 2014; Bindel, 2017). On the other hand, some liberal and post-feminist scholars contend that the body is a vehicle for liberation, emphasizing women's right to 'choose' how to exist within their bodies (Wolf, 1993; Sommers, 1995; Roiphe, 1994; Lumby, 1997). Despite this, criticism of such scholarship suggests that it encourages women to take part in their own subjugation via the name of 'liberation' (Faludi, 1991; Whelehan, 2000).

There are a number of positions which challenge radical and post-feminist scholarship on the body and seek to 'work past' the dichotomy of power, which include: post-structuralist, post-colonial and Marxist feminism. This thesis, however, seeks to draw from the intersections that exist within post-structuralist feminism and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Such a position offers the thesis a nuanced approach to the body, enabling me to explore how the body is constructed through everyday discourses. At first glance, Foucault is not an obvious feminist due to the erasure of

gender within some of his work. Nevertheless, feminists have used his work very fruitfully in exploring the body (Bartky, 1997, 1990; Bordo, 1990; Sawicki, 1991; McLaren, 2012; O'Brien, 1999). Indeed, his work is especially useful when bringing in feminist questions of race and the body, in which one can make sense of how discourses construct black femininity (see: Collins, 1996; 2002; Crenshaw, 1993; Taylor, 1998; White, 2010).

The first part of the chapter explores the work of some radical feminist scholars, who understand the body as being an 'oppressed' object (see: Greer, 1971; Brownmiller, 1975, Currie, MacKinnon, 1989). This is due to the perception of women as possessing a biological destiny, with scholars noting that the very definition of 'feminine' is constructed in opposition to 'masculinity', positioning women as the 'other' and 'lesser' counterpart to man (De Beauvoir, 1949). Indeed, for Millet (1970) and Raymond (1994), the all-encompassing power of men supports the suppression women. On a practical level, this is carried out through painful and unnecessary beauty practices, as well as sexual violence against women's bodies. This is because the female body is considered to be nothing more than a "cunt" (Jeffreys, 2004), meaning that all forms of heterosexual sex should be understood as oppression in action (MacKinnon, 1982; Greer, 1971). Yet, there has been much criticism of this position, including the over-simplification of the universally oppressed woman, which overlooks intersecting identities (Bell and Klein, 1996). Moreover, the chapter sets out how the language surrounding a 'real' woman's body often leads to transphobic conclusions (Serano, 2013; Davy, 2013).

The second part of the chapter sets out the liberal post-feminist view on the body, which both treat the body as a vessel for liberating oneself. For liberal feminists, agency and control over the body

are key to liberation, meaning that many scholars emphasise the right to abortion and encourage women to change representations of the 'feminine' body from within male-dominated spheres (Friedan, 1963; Thompson, 1972; Wolf, 1991). Post-feminism has some ties with liberal feminism in its emphasis on individual agency and control (Gill, 2007), but is distinct in its belief that feminism is a "spent force" that is now complete (McRobbie, 2004). This area of scholarship suggests that embracing traditionally 'feminine' practices, such as wearing make-up or high heels, are acts of liberation for women's bodies (Paglia, 2011; Roiphe, 1998). Through this view, taking control of one's body can be a method of achieving success within the professional and personal arena (see: Paglia, 2011; Roiphe, 1998). Such a celebration of women's sexuality comes from a critique of the 'powerlessness' that they believe is central to the second-wave of feminism. These scholars understand women as being able to liberate themselves, rather than 'whining' about the impact of patriarchy (Wolf, 1990; Roiphe, 1992; Paglia, 1992). Nevertheless, the position has faced much criticism from scholars who view post-feminism as only encouraging a neo-liberal and heteronormative version of sexuality and femininity (Whelehan, 2000; Levy, 2006; Genz and Brabon, 2008). Moreover, for Faludi (1999), the rise of post-feminism in the 1980s was symbolic of a rejection of women's new-found rights, which seeks to keep women 'in their place.'

Finally, the chapter explains the significance of post-structuralist feminism is 'getting past' the dichotomy of power. Most notably, Butler (1990, 1993, 1999) sought to transcend the binary opposition of a 'man' and 'woman's' body, instead presenting gender as a series of performative 'acts.' However, this section notes that an important area of post-structuralist feminist work is grounded in the scholarship of Michel Foucault, especially *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Within this text, the analysis of the panopticon prison provides is applicable to societal discipline of the

body. Despite this, Foucault has faced much criticism for his gender-blindness, with scholars such as Bartky (1990) noting that women's bodies have been subject to intense surveillance. Despite this, Foucault's work has proved useful for feminists, with Sawicki (1991) encouraging feminists to 'look past' his flaws. Likewise, it is important to address the gap on race within Discipline and Punish, which James (1996) and Davis (2003) have written extensively about. Thus, the chapter sets out the importance of drawing upon black feminist scholarship in a piece about gender and discipline (Collins, 1986, 2002, 2004, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991, 1993; Taylor, 1998; White, 2010; Hammonds, 2004; hooks, 1981, 1989, 2000, 2006).

It's a Man's World: Oppression of the Body

Radical feminism is typically associated with the 'second-wave' of feminism that arose from the 1960s and 70s[4]. For these scholars, the body is the central site of oppression for women (Greer, 1971, 2014; Brownmiller, 1975; Currie, 1992; Mackinnon, 1989; Beauvoir, 1949). Whilst this position is not a monolithic doctrine, it is still meaningful to talk about radical feminism as a position that views the female body as the subject of repressive power. Indeed, although there are other perspectives which make this point (see: Barett, 1989; Delphy, 2016), radical feminism has been at the forefront of the rhetoric surrounding the oppressed body. This sentiment is encapsulated

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[4] Krolokke and Sorensen (2005) explains how feminist activism evolved in "waves." The first wave was connected to the "liberal women's rights movement and early socialist feminism" throughout the late 19th and early 20th century (p.1). This movement was based around the access to rights for women, most notably voting. In the 1960s and 1970s, the second-wave of feminism arose through the "radical voices of women's liberation" and "theoretically based on a combination of neo-Marxism and psychoanalysis." They campaigned for the "dual workload for women working outside as well as inside the home," reproductive and sexual rights and a "breakdown of the gendered division of the educational system and the labor market" (p. 10). Nevertheless, there is great debate amongst feminist scholars as to whether feminism should be categorized, contending that feminism is "one long interrupted movement that has periods of greater and lesser success" (Mokoro and Grant, 2017, p.22; Thompson, 2002).

in the following quote, taken from Greer's (2000, p.200) work *The Whole Woman*, in which she

states:

> A woman's body is the battlefield where she fights for liberation. It is through her body that
> oppression works, reifying her, sexualizing her, victimizing her, disabling her. Her physicality is a
> medium for others to work on; her job is to act as their viceroy, presenting her body for their
> ministrations, and applying to her body the treatments that have been ordained.

Here, Greer suggests the body is 'worked upon' by oppression. This perspective comes from an

understanding of women's bodies as being determined by their biological destiny. Indeed, De

Beauvoir's (1949) seminal text contended that the silencing of women is based upon their bodies

being categorized as 'Other' (Pamerleau, 2009, p.7). Whilst masculinity is seen to represent

positive traits such as rationality and intelligence, the connotations of 'woman' are consistently

"defined by limiting criteria" such as passivity and weakness (Turner, 2012, p.24). Thus, women

are unfortunate in possessing a "socially infected" body that has been sculpted by oppressive

structures and norms (Hughes & Witz, 1997, p.50). This sentiment is encapsulated in de Beauvoir's

famous quote:

> One is not born but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fact
> determines the figure that the human being presents in society; it is civilization as a whole the
> produces this creature indeterminate male and eunuch which is described as feminine (Beauvoir,
> 1949)

Thus, for these scholars, women's biology predetermines the way that their bodies will be

constructed and maintained. This is because of an overarching system of patriarchy, which is a

direct translation from Latin to "rule by the father" (Millet, 1970, p.35). As Walby (1990) notes,

patriarchy is a universal concentration of male power which enables the "continuous subordination

and exploitation of women." For example, Raymond (1994, p.114) argues that the body becomes a site of patriarchal oppression and dominance by men from birth:

> We know that we are women who are born with female chromosomes and anatomy, and that whether or not we are socialized to be called normal-women, patriarchy has treated and will treat us like women.

Thus, according to this logic, women are passive objects that are molded by 'male keepers' in positions of power - such as doctors and husbands - as well as through everyday interactions with patriarchal ideals (Pearce, 2004, p.128). Indeed, these scholars view patriarchy as cross-cultural and spanning all of history, sharing the common goal of keeping women in a secondary position to men (Gordon, 1992, p.18).

For some radical feminists, the impact of patriarchy plays out through violence and aggression towards women's bodies, which works to "naturalise the deep-seated perception that it does not matter that women are seen to be less worthy than men" (Bowden & Mummery, 2014, p.77). Indeed, women are conditioned through patriarchy to be consistently violent towards their own bodies (Greer, 2014; Jeffreys, 2014; Davis, 2003). Through the male-oriented lens of the media, women's own biology is "transformed through socialization, turning the female skeleton into a feminine frame" (Berg, 1979, p.137). In this sense, historical conditioning of the body through beauty regimes demonstrates the self-inflicted pain that is expected to be performed by women. Historically, this can be seen through practices such as corset wearing, which simultaneously gave

sexual excitement to men whilst being "harmful and oppressive" to women[5] (Jeffreys, 2014, p.86).

Today, such feminists consider practices such as wearing high heels or makeup to be oppressive

processes against the body. As Dworkin (1989) contends, the rituals surrounding the female body

are built upon "hostility towards the female sex." She states:

> Pain is an essential part of the grooming process, and that is not accidental. Plucking the eyebrows, shaving under the arms, wearing a girdle, learning to walk in high-heeled shoes, having one's nose fixed, straightening or curling one's hair - those things hurt. The pain, of course, teaches an important lesson [...] the tolerance of pain and the romanticization of that tolerance begins here, in preadolescence, in socialization, and served to prepare women for lives of childbearing, self-abnegation, and husband-pleasing (p.133)

Thus, the process of "relentless conditioning" does not only remold the body for the male gaze, it

"erases all signs of vigor and independence" to ensure that women behave in a "meek and

submissive" manner (Rappaport, 2015, p.175; Berg, 1978). Indeed, due to their positioning as the

'Others' some feminists contend that women are forced into presenting "the inert and passive

qualities of an object" (Kowaleski-Wallace, 2009, p.55). Unlike men, it is not required for women

to have a personality for they are only expected to present their bodies to society. In this sense, men

possess the agency to "make themselves other than their bodies" and to design their own "paths

that they follow in life." In contrast, the journey of woman is based upon a "gradual loss of

freedom" that ensures she "suppresses her own subjectivity in order to reflect that of a

possessor" (Kowaleski-Wallace, 2009, p.55).

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[5] The corset was a mechanism that "exaggerated the natural female form", pulling in a woman's waist to reveal an hourglass figure. Often, women endured serious damage from corset-wearing, experiencing "extensive wasting of the back muscles, such that they in fact could no longer support their own upper body weight without assistance." Likewise, they were usually unable to breathe properly and would regularly faint (Murphy, 1999, p.101)

Indeed, for radical feminists, damaging representations of the body cause women to internalize patriarchal messages about themselves. Beauvoir (1949) argues that women fully absorb cultural objectification until they become "alienated from their own bodies." This means that they learn to "accept their secondary status in the eyes of the male other" and to frame themselves as "some sort of thing" (Pamerleau, 2009, p.7; Kappeler, 1986, p.215). Greer (1971) furthers this idea of alienation, contending that women's experiences are similar to that of a eunuch; they are "castrated by patriarchal power." This refers to practices such as the removal of body hair, in which Greer argues that the woman is distancing herself from her natural state (Currie, 1992, p.18). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Women's Liberation Movement in the US attempted to liberate themselves from such oppressive actions (Bradley, 2004, p.62). In one instance, in 1968, a group of activists protested the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, with "picket lines, guerilla theater, leafleting, lobbying visits" to the contests, who they urged to "reject the pageant farce" (Green, 1995, p.270). Famously, the women threw "false eyelashes, bras, and girdles" into what they referred to as the 'Freedom Trash Can' (Wood and Fixmer-Oraiz, 2016, p.63). In recent years, some feminist activists have protested the competition by wearing swimming costumes that are made of meat, to demonstrate the notion that the pageant is a "large scale meat market" in which women are "reduced to judgeable body parts" (Banet-Weiser, 1999. p.221). Indeed, for feminists such as Brownmiller (1975), such "aesthetics of femininity" aimed at modifying the body are based upon women "recognizing their powerlessness" and taking part in an expectation surrounding the body that is "used to perpetuate inequality between the sexes." (Kowaleski-Wallace, 2009, p.55). Jeffreys (2014) furthers this by arguing that beauty regimes are simply a form of self-mutilation and the notion of a consenting subject that enjoys the products need to be dismissed. Rather, "limits

should be constructed to the open slather of attacks" upon women's bodies "in the name of beauty or dissatisfaction with appearance" (p.4).

In the same way that acts of traditional femininity are forms of male domination, feminists such as Millett (1970) and Brownmiller (1975) have argued that the societal disdain for women's bodies can be seen in sexual politics. Here, they suggest that female sexuality has been systematically suppressed, meaning that sexual acts are always based upon male-domination (Mackinnon, 1989, p. 321). This is because the feminine body possesses a sexual energy that threatens men, meaning that patriarchal society is forced into representing women as 'objects' that can only be complete through "phallic penetration" (MacSween, 2013, p.1). Indeed, Jeffreys (2008, p.66) has noted that the female body is considered to be "no more than a cunt" with no personality to "recognize or encounter." This has led some feminists to be highly critical of sex work, which they suggest reflects the degradation of the female body in wider society. In their eyes, 'prostitution' is not the selling of sex, it is selling the customer "power over another human being" and that this is reflective of "the very core of the female's condition" (Jeffreys, 2008, p.6; Bindel, 2004, 2017). For example, within pornography, women's bodies are treated as 'things' to be used and abused by men, meaning that there is an "erotization of dominance and submission" (MacKinnon, 1982, p. 68).

Greer (1971) and Dworkin (1988) further this analysis on the oppression of sex by contending that all heterosexual relationships are always based upon "sadomasochistic power" and the "owning" of women's bodies (Chivers, 2003, p.18). This is because women's bodies have not been created by themselves, they have been reared through a 'male design.' As the "primitive and civilized worlds"

are also male worlds, the female body has been sculpted to "suit male needs." Thus, whilst men are

encouraged to develop aggressive and hostile behaviors - through phrases such as "that guy has

balls" - women are conditioned into complementing man's aggression by "producing the chief

feminine virtue" of passivity (Millett, 1970, p.37). Consequently, "hierarchies of power" govern

the relationship between men and women under a patriarchal system, leading to the "power and

domination" over the female body playing a crucial role in sexual activity (Killingsworth, 1991,

p.xiii).

However, the argument that the body is simply a site of oppression under patriarchal forces has

faced much criticism. Most prominently, the notion of the "universally subordinated woman" is

considered to be an "oversimplified conception of power and of gender" (Bell & Klein, 1996, p.

147). Indeed, the "total theory" of an essential female body being subjugated by men doesn't take

into account the complex oppression faced by other bodies such as those of a different "race,

ethnicity, class or sexual orientation" (Barnett, 2013, p.1). In this sense, although feminist scholars

who subscribe to this 'pro-woman' narrative attempt to understand the lived experiences of women

in their bodies, their arguments are undermined by "overzealous claims of universality" that can be

extremely problematic (Rhodes, 2012, p.34). This criticism was particularly prominent during the

second-wave of feminism, when the movement was accused of presenting white, middle-class

women's experiences as universal (see: Lorde, 1984; Collins, 1986). In her seminal text, *Feminism

Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, hooks encapsulates this criticism of sisterhood:

> We understood that political solidarity between females expressed in sisterhood goes beyond
> positive recognition of the experiences of women and even shared sympathy for common suffering.
> Feminist sisterhood is rooted in shared commitment to struggle against patriarchal injustice, no
> matter the form that injustice takes. Political solidarity between women always undermines sexism
> and sets the stage for the overthrow of patriarchy. Significantly, sisterhood could never have been

possible across the boundaries of race and class if individual women had not been willing to divest of their power to dominate and exploit subordinated groups of women. As long as women are using class or race power to dominate other women, feminist sisterhood cannot be fully realized (hooks, 2000, p.15)

In this sense, intersections of oppression need to be considered in discussions of gender, rather than presenting one definition of womanhood as universal. Scholars have argued that, in fact, whiteness is intrinsic to the second-wave of feminism; it prioritizes being "prudish, embittered and moralistic in a way that is clearly indebted to stereotypes of a certain form of uptight, white femininity" (Wlodarczyk, 2010, p.23; Henry, 2004).

Another criticism of the oppression thesis is the transphobic conclusions that some radical feminists have drawn from the definition of a "real" female body (see: Greer, 2014; Bindel, 2017; Jeffreys, 2004). Indeed, Greer once described trans-women as "misogynists" who need to be stopped from "penetrating the sacred space of female physical mystery" (Penny, 2011, p.1). This argument is based upon the notion that trans people fetishize the "patriarchal ideals of femininity or masculinity" in order to enter into "spaces not created for them" (Inckle, 2009, p.128). Raun (2016, p.99) notes that such assumptions imply that trans women would be unable to "feel or experience what it is like to live" as a woman. In the eyes of the radical feminist, they are only able to recreate a "crude" version of femininity that has not faced the same patriarchal oppression as a "real" woman's body (Greer, 2004; Bindel, 2004, 2017). This argument is encapsulated in the following quote from Jeffreys (2014, p.7):

> Beyond all else, transgenderism on the part of men can be seen as a ruthless appropriation of women's experience and existence. The men who claim womanhood do not have any experience of being women, and thus should not have the right to speak as 'women.'

However, this position is a form of "gender-entitlement", referring to individuals who feel that they have the "authority to accurately determine" who possesses a male or female body (Serano, 2013, p.1). As Bornstein demonstrates, the description of a "woman's body" is based upon "fickle definitions of gender" wielded for "political gains" by individuals in a privileged gender position (Davy, 2016, p.50). The representation of a singular "female body" that is a common, universal entity excludes other oppressed bodies from the narrative. Richardson (2000, p.55) furthers this by arguing that the entire concept of patriarchy, as well as the 'male' and 'female' body, are "problematically essentialist" and over-simplified (Richardson, 2000, p.55). Such a position is incredibly damaging to the lives of trans individuals and feminism in general, with Barker and Lantaffi (2017, p.258) noting that it is "painful" to watch the "level of hate, attack and rejection" that some feminists hold against trans women, especially when they have been brought up by second-wave feminism in their "personal, professional, and community lives."

It is Madonna's World: Liberating the Body

Liberal and post-feminist scholars contend that the body is a vehicle for liberation, rather than a site of oppression. In contrast to radical feminists, they see women as being agents of 'choice' and 'empowerment' away from oppression. Typically, liberal feminists have prioritised "equal opportunities, socialisation, sex roles, gender stereotyping and sex discrimination in schooling" (Coppock et al, 1995, p.51). Most notably, Wollstonecraft (1792), one of the earliest liberal feminist thinkers, viewed these opportunities as the key to women's agency and success. Indeed, within *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she famously stated: "virtue can only flourish amongst equals" (p.92), encapsulating the liberal feminist desire for equality with men, rather than overthrowing a system of male domination.

Today, a prominent example of this position can be seen in Sandberg's *Lean In* (2013). Sandberg, the Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, argues that gender equality can be achieved by women succeeding within typically 'masculine' settings, such as big business and government. She argues that this can be realized if women act with more confidence and assurance in themselves, stating:

> [...] despite being high achievers, even experts in their fields, women can't seem to shake the sense that it is only a matter of time until they are found out for who they really are - imposters with limited skills or abilities (p.28)

For Sandberg, this "imposter syndrome" (2013, p.28) has a devastating impact on women's ability to "sit at the table" of industry and this lack of representation has a trickle-down effect on rights such as owning property and accessing education.

As Griffin (2015, p.164) asserts, this focus on individual rights and private ownership is important in understanding the liberal feminist perception of the female body: these scholars firmly believe in the "sanctity of a woman's capacity to exert control" over her body. Most notably, in *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan (1963) explored the life of the American suburban housewife, contending that their deep sense of unfulfillment was rooted in a lack of control over their bodies and destinies. She noted that many women married young, became pregnant and looked after the house whilst their husbands were at work.

> A woman today who has no goal, no purpose, no ambition patterning her days into the future, making her stretch and grow beyond that small score of years in which her body can fill its biological function, is committing a kind of suicide.

Thus, the key to liberation is through individual agency over the body. This has led liberal feminist thinkers such as Javis Thompson (1972) to be vocal about issues such as abortion, emphasising a woman's right to choose the fate of her body, which appeals to the wider "sphere of inviolable rights over one's life and liberty" (Soble, 2006, p.338). Indeed, Friedan (1963, cited in Sherman, 2002) planted access to abortion "firmly in the basic human right to control one's own body and reproduction."

Likewise, within Naomi Wolf's (1991)[6] *The Beauty Myth*, she contends that women can take control of how the feminine body is represented and resist practices of objectification. Unlike radical feminists, Wolf does not view women's beauty practices as stemming from a "cultural landscape that provides women with limited choices to begin with" (Jovanovski, 2017, p.160). Rather, she sees it as women's responsibility to "drain" idealized images of femininity of their power by finding "alternative images of beauty" (p.227). She states:

> We can lift ourselves and other women out of the myth - but only if we are willing to seek out and support and really look at the alternatives (p.227)

Thus, women can liberate their bodies by taking control of how they are perceived. This means working within a male paradigm, rather than seeking to overthrow it. Indeed, Wolf (1991, p.279) notes that women working within the media can create a "counterculture" in the representation of the female body.

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[6] Although 'The Beauty Myth' (1991) is a piece of liberal feminist scholarship, Wolf's 'Fire With Fire' (1993) firmly positioned her within the post-feminist cultural moment (Gramble, 1998, p.41). Arguably, this demonstrates the close relationship that the two positions have to one another.

However, these scholars have been criticised for their white, Western-centric understanding of liberating the body. Indeed, scholars such as Ahmed (1999) reflect upon the antagonism that some white, liberal feminists direct towards Islamic women who choose to cover their bodies in the traditional Muslim dress. Speaking specifically about the war in Afghanistan, Delphy (2003, cited in Rygiel, 2008, p.60) argued that white, liberal, western, middle class feminists supported the US in their mission to 'save' the 'victimized and 'oppressed' Afghan women who are 'forced' to wear burqas, stating:

> To say that war is beneficial for Afghan women is to decide that it is better for them to die from bombs, from hunger, from cold, than to live under the Taliban. Death rather than servitute: that is what Western opinion has decided for Afghan women (Delphy, 2003, p.339, cited in Rygiel, 2008, p. 60).

In this sense, the 'liberation' some liberal feminists espouse can only be achieved if Muslim women "work outside of the framework of their faith, to give up their cultural identity" (Bailey Jones, 2011, p.156). Thus, the 'liberated' and 'in control' body discussed by liberal feminist scholars is only accepted through a white, western-centric lens.

Like liberal feminism, post-feminism understands the body as a tool for 'choice' and control instead of a subject of oppression. The key difference between the two positions, however, is that post-feminism sees the goals of liberal feminism as realised (Coppock, 1995, p.51). As McRobbie (2004) notes:

> [...] post-feminism actively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account in order to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of meanings which emphasize that it is no longer needed, a spent force.

Although the term emerged in the early 1920s, post-feminism achieved its status in the latter half of

the 20th century. In the early 1980s, post-feminism had been used to encapsulate a rejection of

"feminist ideas of the 1960s and subsequent decades" (Gamble, 1998, p.36). Yet scholars have

noted that the term is difficult to define, representing an "intimate relationship" between feminism

and neoliberalism rather than a monolithic theoretical standpoint (Gill, 2006; Wolf, 1991; Walters,

1999; Lehrman, 2001; Denfeld, 2009). Thus, at points throughout this section, I will draw upon the

work of scholars who have explored the impact of post-feminism within popular culture, rather

than scholars that identify as post-feminist (see: Genz, 2009; Genz and Brabon, 2009; Taker and

Negra, 2007).

Post-feminism is built upon a rejection of the 'oppression' thesis, instead contending that women

can wield the body to their advantage, as argued by Lumby (1997, p.8):

> Why insist on reading images as demeaning to women? Why teach women to read images in a way
> that makes them feel bad about themselves? Why not encourage them to make creative readings of
> images and to appropriate and reinvent female stereotypes to their own advantage?

Here, Lumby suggests that embracing the traditionally feminine body is the key to liberation. For

Roiphe (1994, p.55), women can take pleasure from their own actions which make them feel in

control of their bodies, from "having their faces lifted to having their tummy tucked" (Roiphe, 1994

quoted in Davis, 2003, p.10). If a "strong, confident woman" reveals her body by posing in a

magazine or strips for a living then this is an act of control upon one's body. Paglia (2011, p.11)

supports this notion, suggesting that the pop star Madonna is a true example of how to be "fully

female and sexual while still exercising control" over one's life. For these scholars, the control that

women exert over their own bodies can be used to gain power in a practical sense. As Paglia (2011,

p.11) suggests, Madonna's "strutting sexual exhibitionism" is the "full, florid expression of the whore's ancient rule over men." Likewise, Monica Lewinsky is viewed by Roiphe (1998) as a symbol of how to use one's "sexual power as a way to improve one's position in the world."

This emphasis on 'choice and agency' emerged during the debates on pornography and led to the notion that "women's consumption of feminine and sexualised products" can be associated with women's "increasing ability to exert agency through they're shopping practices" (Griffiths, 2015, p. 22). As Lumby (1997, p.1) suggests, the arguments surrounding the body need to move away from the concept of the "active male spectator" and the "passive female figure." She contends that the relentless emphasis upon "the patriarchal reading of an image" is not empowering or useful for women, but in fact works to restrict them (p.8). The following quote encapsulates this sentiment:

> Why insist on reading images as demeaning to women? Why teach women to read images in a way that makes them feel bad about themselves? Why not encourage them to make creative readings of images and to appropriate and reinvent female stereotypes to their own advantage? (Lumby, 1997, p. 8)

Here, Lumby argues that embracing the sexual body is an empowering tool for women to use to carve out equality. Indeed, throughout the 1990s, popular culture began addressing women as sexual consumers with TV shows such as *Sex and the City* cited women's 'liberation' as being achieved through the purchasing of the 'Rabbit' vibrator, which led to the dramatic rise in sales of the product. Elsewhere, fashion magazines like *Elle* reported on the best products for women, picturing images of celebrities "emerging" from sex shops (Attwood, 2005, p.393). Most notably, Griffiths (2015, p.22) points towards Storr's (2003) research on the purchasing of vibrators at *Ann Summers* parties. The basis of the parties is simple, providing an "all-female environment where women can buy sexy lingerie, erotic fashion, sex toys and other sex related products." Storr (2003)

suggests that this enables women to feel at ease in their bodies whilst helping them to break down

taboos about female sexuality from "the comfort of their own homes."

Additionally, the path to liberation comes from celebrating the inherent power of traditionally

feminine practices. As Wolf (2013, p.2) contends, the legacy of scholars such as Greer and Millett

left feminism tainted by the image of an "overweight, hairy-legged, middle-aged and scowling"

woman. Whilst she suggests that there is "nothing wrong" with this appearance, feminism should

be about "looking however one wants to," meaning that women should be able to enjoy feminine

practices such as shaving and wearing high heels. For example, the emphasis on choice and

embracing one's femininity is encapsulated through the 'Girl Power' movement of the 1990s,

which aimed to celebrate "all things Girl." This refers to viewing femininity as a tool to "further the

qualities of independence and emancipation fostered by the feminist movement." Pioneered by the

all-female pop group, the *Spice Girls*, 'Girl Power' gave women the opportunity to express

themselves by styling their bodies in a feminine manner through fashion, make-up and hairstyling[7].

Through a post-feminist lens, this allowed women to "attain equality without sacrificing all forms

of pink-packaged femininity", meaning that women were able to decorate and display their bodies

without "loaded issues" of oppression (Genz, 2009, p.78).

Therefore, such a position rejects the 'oppression' thesis and views the body as a vehicle for

achieving one's goals. For these scholars, the notion of patriarchy focuses too much on "women

being loyal to women" whilst partaking in open "hostility towards males" (Sommers, 1995, p.24).

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[7] The *Spice Girls* were a British pop-group from the 1990s who presented "Girl Power" as the "nonpolitical and non-threatening alternative to feminism." Harris (2004) notes that in their book, Girl Power, the Spice Girls wrote in "pink block letters" that *"feminism has become a dirty word. Girl Power is just a nineties way of saying it. We can give feminism a kick up the arse"* (p.71).

This, they argue, is deeply problematic as women are encouraged to embrace victimization and "identify with powerlessness" (Wolf, 1990, p.144). In this sense, these scholars view feminism as transitioning from a movement for freedom towards a doctrine of fear. For example, Roiphe (1992, p.12) cites eating disorders as an example of women's attempt to "take themselves out of the sexual game." Through this viewpoint, the radical feminist views power as "the ability to manipulate, control and punish" and ignores the concept of power as "the inherent ability each of us has to become what we are meant to be" (Wolf, 2013, p.146). As Paglia (1992, p.4) famously argued, feminism had become a "suffocating ideology" that was "stuck in an adolescent whining mode."

Thus, across American campuses and throughout the media, second-wave feminism was accused of "going too far" and alienating "ordinary women" with their rhetoric of overarching, male dominance (Whelehan, 2006, p.21). Indeed, in her book, *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism*, Roiphe launched a scathing attack upon campus feminism in the US[8], contending that women need to move away from "trauma and disease" towards a politics of "liberation and libido" (1994, p.12). Focusing on feminist arguments about campus rape culture, Roiphe argued that the body has become a site of shame due to a rise in the belief that "sexual adventure is a minefield of rape and disease" (p.12). She states:

> The image that emerges from feminist preoccupations with rape and sexual harassment is that of women as victims. This image of a delicate woman bears a striking resemblance to that fifties ideal my mother and the other women of her generation fought so hard to get away from. They didn't like their passivity, her wide-eyes innocent. They didn't like the fact that she was perpetually offended by sexual innuendo. They didn't like her excessive need for protection. She represented personal, social, and psychological possibilities collapsed, and they worked and marched, shouted and wrote,

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[8] Despite sharing criticisms of 'victim feminism', Wolf (1993, p.136) was critical of this position, contending that some post-feminist analysis of the body created "something slick and dangerous with the notion of victimisation." Contending that she was critiquing the "occasional excess" of the feminist movement, Wolf accuses Roiphe and Paglia of "ridiculing" and demoralizing genuine victims of sexual violence (p.136).

to make her irrelevant for their daughters. But here she is again, with her pure intentions and her wide eyes. Only this time it is feminists themselves who are breathing new life into her (1993, p.6)

Here, Roiphe suggests that the outdated reliance on women's 'victim status' needs to be replaced with an "unapologetically sexual" and "pleasure loving" version of feminism that allows women to embrace and liberate their bodies in a manner that is both "self-assertive" and "free-thinking" (Genz, 2006, p.64). This position seeks to move away from the vision of women as "helpless victims who need to be protected from the brute reality of a male-world" that invades and oppresses their bodies (Lumby, 1997, p.xvi). Consequently, Paglia (2011, p.11) proposes that the pleasure Madonna finds in her body as a sexual object exposes the "puritanism" of the old, feminist model. Indeed, when discussing the actress Elizabeth Taylor, Paglia furthers this point:

What a gorgeous object she is! Feminist are currently dithering over woman's status as a sexual object, but let them rave on in their little mental cells. For me, sexual objectification is a supreme human talent that is indistinguishable from the art impulse [...] not, as feminists claim, the victim of men.

Thus, for Roiphe (1994), there is a clear division between 'victim feminism' of radical feminists and the 'power feminism' that they were proposing. Through this lens, the latter represents women's potential to access power and liberation via self-definition (Genz, 2006, p.64).

According to Lumby (1997, p.9), women need to be suspicious of anyone who claims to identify the distinction between "real women" and constructed images of women's bodies within a patriarchal society. She questions how these individuals are able to exist outside these powerful forces, pondering as to whether they have a "vantage point." Instead of feeling "powerless over one's own body" and taking part in the "self-congratulation" that comes along with "speaking out" against the dangerous and objectifying male, women need to take control of their own bodies and

destinies (Roiphe, 1994, p.55). In this sense, women need to reject the notion that the body is a canvas for patriarchy and learn to enjoy the feminine experiences that they have been denied by some elements of feminism. Indeed, Lumby (1997, p.17) furthers this by suggesting that the notion of an objectified, 'sinful' body harks back to traditional Christian morals which "object to anyone doing anything with a woman's body not prescribed by God, or by a narrowly defined notion of woman's essential nature." Thus, some parts of feminism have become "complicit with an ideology that wants to deny women the right to control their own bodies" (p.18).

The main criticism of post-feminism is that it reaffirms women's bodies as objects by conforming to a neo-liberal version of liberation (see: Whelehan, 2000). Although this position presents the body as being "in-control" and able to "make choices", control is arguably based upon "the right to consume and display oneself to best effect" whilst dismissing "who controls the choices available" for women's bodies (Whelehan, 2000, p.5). Levy (2006, p.38) supports this notion, arguing that women embrace the "hypersexualized representations" of the female body. For example, Genz and Brabon (2008, p.151) note that a woman may find it empowering to reconstruct her body using plastic surgery, yet the reasons behind this choice are "enmeshed in social and cultural norms" that treat the female body as a sexual object.

For Levy (2006, p.38), such actions are part of a wider "raunch culture" which reflects the "conceptualization of women as subordinate to men." Although some post-feminists agree that women should be able to present their bodies as sexual objects if they feel liberated by this process, raunch culture doesn't allow women to be "sexy and frisky and in control without being commodified" (p.45). This sentiment is encapsulated through Levy's rejection of *Playboy* magazine as a source of empowerment and liberation for women's bodies, stating:

> They will only ever be seen spread out, in soft focus, wearing something light and fluffy and smiling in that gentile, wet-lipped way that suggests they will be happy to take whatever is given to them. They are expressing that they are sexy only if sexy means obliging and well paid. If sexy means passionate or invested in one's own fantasies and sexual proclivities, then the pictorials don't quite do it (Levy, 2009, p.200)

In this sense, post-feminist's version of liberation misrepresents the objectification of women's bodies as being synonymous with power and agency (Banet-Weiser, 2013, p.239). Instead, as Penny describes, women are offered a "monetized, deodorized, sexual transaction" in the name of "empowering" themselves and "learning to love their bodies" (Penny, 2011, p.1). For instance, post-feminist scholars are seemingly reluctant to "talk about collective activism, and indeed radical change", which makes their stance "compatible with liberal individualistic politics" (Whelehan, p. 220).

For scholars such as Faludi (1991) and Whelehan (2000), this backlash occurred as a response to women's engagement with activism throughout the second-wave. In order to assert feminism as the enemy, companies began to repeatedly suggest that women's appearance would suffer at the hands of their new-found equality (Faludi, 1991, p.239; Brooks, 2002; Hammer, 2002, p.78; Blum, 2003; McRobbie, 2004). For example, Faludi (1991, p.239) refers to a notable example of the 1988 Nivea campaign, which asked "is your face paying the price of success?", as well as a magazine ad that claimed: "women's professional progress had downgraded their looks; equality had created worry lines and cellulite." Through this lens, if women had "remained in their place" not been "carried away" by the second-wave of feminism, they would not be "suffering the stresses and strains" of the male world (Barrett, 2013, p.12). Whelehan (2000) furthers this by suggesting that such backlash is built upon "retro-sexism" that, at its base, is fearful of the "collapse of masculine hegemony" (Schaff, 2016, p.3). The contradictions that existed within the backlash were

summarised by Faludi (1991, p.12), who suggested that it demonstrated a shift in the way that feminism was discussed:

> The backlash is at once sophisticated and banal, deceptively 'progressive' and proudly backward. It deploys both the 'new' findings of 'scientific research' and the sentimental moralizing of yesteryear; it turns into media sound bites both the glib pronouncements of pop-psych trend-watchers and the frenzied rhetoric of New Right preachers.

In this sense, the "intense social pressures" that surrounds the narrow aesthetics of the female body "complicate any straightforward attempts at empowerment through erotic capital alone" (Kuldova, 2016, p.139). This may reflect a 'patriarchal bargain' that women make in order to survive in a male-dominated society, referring to women's submission to normalised gender roles (Inhorn, 1996, p.5). Indeed, Kandiyoti (1988, p.275) contends that women "strategize within a set of concrete constraints" to improve their life conditions and prospects. Thus, for scholars such as Levy (2008), post-feminists may emphasize women's "capacity to appear sexually desirable" in order to elevate their positioning within patriarchal society (Charles, 2013, p.42). In simpler terms, this can be encapsulated in the following phrase: *if you can't beat them, join them.*

It's a World of Constructs: Post-Structuralist Feminism and Foucault

Throughout the previous sections, I have established that there are important strands of feminist scholarship on the body that reproduce the dichotomy between 'oppression' and 'liberation.' However, it is essential to note that there are various alternative perspectives within feminist theory. More specifically, there are multiple positions that try and overcome the dichotomy of power, ranging from: Marxist, post-colonial and queer feminism. One example of this is Bernard's (2016) post-colonial piece on black female bodies, which offers a nuanced understanding of power dynamics in relation to gender and race. Particularly important in this literature is the work of post-structuralist feminists, who take the need to overcome this dichotomy as the starting point for their

scholarship. Accordingly, this thesis draws from and contributes to post-structuralist feminist

understandings of the body[9].

Post-structuralist feminism has been a valuable source in understanding the body. Most notably,

Judith Butler's (1990, 1993, 1999) work on gender has been immensely important in transcending

binaries about the body. Resisting the notion that sex determines one's gender identity, Butler

contends that masculinity and femininity can be experienced by all bodies. Rather, gender is 'done'

through every-day 'acts' in which both masculinity and femininity are performed. Such a stance sits

in opposition to the aforementioned discussions from some radical and post-feminist scholars, in

which femininity is presented as a biological destiny that is viewed as the source of oppression or

liberation. As Butler (1990) notes:

> The effect of gender is produced through the stylisation of the body, and hence, must be understood
> as the mundane way in which the bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitutes
> the illusion of an abiding gendered self.

Consequently, the very notion of being either a 'man' or a 'woman' is a construction that is

"fraught with incoherence and instability" (Valocchi, 2005, p.753). Butler (1990, p.139) maintains

that the essence of one's gender is simply an "illusion" that we create ourselves via "bodily

gestures, movements and styles." Through this lens, then, performativity is a "theory of

agency" (Butler, 1990, p.xxv) that seeks to dismantle categories of gender that are viewed as

"foreclosed and fixed" (p.147). In terms of the body, this position has led to feminists

"interrogating, playing with, and sometimes adopting new gender identities" (Shapiro, 2007, p.1).

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[9] I am indebted to Dr. Nicola Smith for her guidance in the phrasing of this paragraph and for the ideas that
have emerged from our conversations.

For example, the use of drag has been integral to 'messing with' normative understandings of the gendered body (Rupp et al, 2010).

Another important strand of post-structuralist feminism sits itself within the work of Michel Foucault, one of the most influential thinkers in modern history (see: Foucault, 1961, 1972, 1984). His scholarship suggests that our knowledge of the world is maintained through discursive structures, which refer to language and texts that construct one another. Discourse works through three strands, through the:

> […] delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agents of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts or theories (Foucault, 1977, p. 199).

As Mills (2006) notes, discourse becomes knowledge by being "called into existence," meaning that discourse is "linked to questions of authority and legitimacy" (p.51). In simpler terms, discourse acts as the "invisible workings" of society that that govern how we "talk, write, think, and act" (Lester et al, 2017, p.181). Within *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault explores the differing ways that power has "operated on the body" throughout history. His work demonstrates how one's body is turned into a subject and an object through modes of discipline and punishment; modern society shapes its individuals through "integration into uniformity" (Foucault, 1975, p.136; Elshtain and Cloyd, 1995, p.245). Indeed, for Foucault, the "question of the body is inseparable from questions of knowledge and power" (McLaren, 2012, p.86).

This position sits in opposition to radical feminists; Foucault does not view power as an "oppressive force" that is "held by some people and used to oppress others." Rather, power is "inherent to all social relationships and enacted through everyday practices" and has the potential

to "master and conquer" our bodies (Marzouk, 2015, p.56; Sobal and Maurer, 1999, p.81). For instance, in the *Docile Bodies* chapter within *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault begins by informing the reader about the evolution of the soldier. Through minute and constant actions such as adapting one's posture or walking in-step, the soldier was 'made.' The process of consistent and individualised corrections meant that the body was able to be "manipulated, shaped, trained" (Foucault, 1977, p.136). In the following quote, Foucault describes this process of disciplinary power:

> What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviours. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A 'political autonomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power' was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with techniques, the speed and efficiency that one determines (Foucault, 1975, p.138)

Here, power is defined as an insidious practice that atomises and controls a person's body. For Foucault, power works through "discourses, institutions, and techniques of self-surveillance" to create bodies that are the "locus of practical cultural control" (Sobal and Maurer, 1999, p.81; Gimlin, 2002, p.49). In other words, we are produced as "subjects" by powerful structures in our daily practices that shape our reality and cause us to grow into "docile bodies" that are subject to "external regulation (Gimlin, 2002, p.49). Thus, women should not be positioned "outside of power" and "powerless" victims. Instead, power works through everyone via practices such as self-discipline and following the dominant rules for living within modern society (McPherson, 2014, p. 36).

However, this definition of power should not be viewed as a new discovery. Rather, Foucault argues that disciplinary techniques of power have long-existed within institutions such as hospitals

and schools (p.138). In one example, he refers to the factories that appeared at the end of the eighteenth century, noting that the individualised nature of work made it difficult for the factory owners to "isolate and map" them. This was resolved by dividing up the work space into sections, so that supervision could be carried out that was both "general and individual," meaning that workers productivity could be measured and compared with their colleagues (p.145). In this sense, discipline for Foucault is a "highly individualised mode of regulatory norm which operates through minute training of the human body, under continuous observation and surveillance" (Bell and Chaibong, 2003, p.44). Foucault furthers this argument about micro-power by drawing upon the imagery of Jeremy Bentham's prison design. Through this, he suggests that processes of observation work to discipline our bodies. He outlines the description of the panopticon in the following quote:

> Bentham's panopticon is the architectural figure of this composition. We know the principle on which it was based: the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place the supervisor in a central in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, condemned man, a worker, or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shells in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions - to enclose, to deprive and to hide - it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of the supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap (Foucault, 1975, p.200)

This provides a metaphor for our own lives. For the inmates of the panopticon, the constant feeling of being watched causes them to perform self-surveillance and, ultimately, discipline their own bodies. Therefore, like the inmates of Bentham's prison, we live "in a panoptic society, a society where panopticism reigns" (Golder, 2013, p.143). To Foucault, the panopticon is "an elaboration of how an optics of power has operated" throughout the history of the Western world (Sheets-

Johnstone, 1994, p.20). Due to the pervasive rules set out by overarching social norms and structures, we survey ourselves until "conscious compliance gradually becomes habitual, and in becoming habitual inculcates norms in disciplined subjects, thus reshaping their subjectivity" (Prado, 2006, p.166). Foucault's (1975) metaphor encourages us to look beyond power as residing within an individual. Rather, power exists within everyone and everywhere. He notes that the process of ceremonial power wielded by sovereign individuals is often useless. Yet, the simple 'gaze' of the panopticon creates a disciplined body. Consequently, power works through the body and becomes a place where culture is "inscribed" (McLaren, 2012, p.83).

Unfortunately, Foucault's work has been highly criticised by feminist scholars for not engaging with gender. This is because, within *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault refers to men and women's relationship to power as being the same, despite the fact that women's bodies have historically been more subjugated than mens (O'Brien, 1999, p.225). Bartky (1990, p.11) encapsulates this criticism:

> Foucault treats the body throughout as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life. Where is the account of the disciplinary practices that engender the "docile bodies" of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men? Women, like men, are subject to many of the same disciplinary practices Foucault describes. But he is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine.

As Bartky contends, Foucault overlooks the intense practices of self-surveillance that are distinctly gendered. This "particularly feminine" mode of discipline exists in a literal and metaphorical sense, women are more restricted than men in their everyday movements and their "lived spatiality" (Young, 1984; Bartky, 1997).

Moreover, Bartky (1997, p.103) criticises Foucault's vision of power as being operational within specific institutions such as schools, hospital and prisons. She suggests that this ignores power which is "unbound" and discipline that is sought voluntarily. For example, weight-loss is often a voluntary pursuit chased by women under the guise of empowerment or health. Thus, rather than there being a central location that creates rules of femininity, the disciplinary power that constructs femininity "is everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular" (Bartky, 1997, p.103). Here, the suggestion is that here is no central 'oppressor' of women's bodies. Rather, 'people' – friends, family, co-workers and themselves – work to reinforce normative body standards and deep feelings of shame. Through persistent cultural messages, we inscribe 'knowledge' onto different bodies and allow such discourses to govern the way in which "we understand one another" and relate to each other (Murray, 2007, p.363). As Murray (2007, p. 364) suggests, we are: "haunted by a norm that is nowhere concretely to be found."

For some, this 'gender-blindness' prevents Foucault from applying his work to a "study of the social construction of gender" due to his presentation of the body as being a site for "cultural inscription." Through this lens, Foucault's work removes female agency and renders women into a position of "passivity and silence" that forces them to "bow in submission to the influence of power relationships" (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2006, p.224; Sawicki, 1991, p.83). This has led some feminists to contend that Foucault simply reinforces the sexism that is "endemic throughout Western political theory" (Meyers, 2014, p.95). Indeed, for Balbus (1987), Foucault represents the privileged, white European male intellectual that has silenced women's voices, making a Foucauldian-feminist approach paradoxical.

Despite this criticism, Foucault's ideas have a lot of utilities for post-structuralist feminist theorising. For instance, his work has proven itself to be incredibly useful for "destabilising and undermining gender norms," (Sawicki, 1991, p.50). An understanding of *Discipline and Punish* (1977) has been extremely useful to many feminists in analysing constructions of the female body, which has historically been subject to intense surveillance (see: Bartky, 1997, 1990; Bordo, 1993; 2004; Butler, 2011; Grosz, 1994; Davis, 2013; Heyes, 2007; Coleman, 2010). For example, scholars such as Inckle (2006) have noted that women's body parts have always been closely monitored, with exposed areas, such as breasts and body hair, being treated as simultaneously sexual and disgusting.

Moreover, McLaren (2012, p.24) contends that the accusation of Foucault ignoring gender provides an insight into the "oversimplified view of power and social relations" that some feminist scholars have adopted. By Foucault's own definition, power is an inescapable force that exists everywhere. His decentralised concept of power does not take "theoretical unities as its starting point" and is consequently able to trace the "power effects of the theories themselves" (Sawicki, 1991, p.52). Instead of explaining power's effects and treating it as a "mysterious substance," Foucault aims to "grasp power" in its "basic nature" by observing it at its core (Loriaux, 2016, p.39). Thus, in contrast to the aforementioned feminist scholarship, Foucault's work acts as an anti-theory that does not "tell us what is to be done" but simply describes how "some of our ways of thinking and doing have served to dominate us" (Sawicki, 1991. p.52).

Nevertheless, not only is *Discipline and Punish* (1977) blind to gender, it has also been accused of overlooking race. As James (1996, p.25) argues, *Discipline and Punish* (1977) "contributes to the erasure of racist violence" and works to "universalise the body of the white, propertied male."

Indeed, whilst Foucault discusses "social fear and policing" reflected in "binary division and branding," he wholly ignores the "racial binary oppositions to designate social inferiority and deviancy as biologically inscribed on the bodies of non-males or nonwhites" (James, 1996, p.26). Davis (2003) furthers this by suggesting that the judicial framework of "innocent until proven guilty" usually doesn't apply to black bodies, demonstrating how institutional panopticism is more applicable to people of colour. Thus, when conducting an analysis of discipline and power, it is essential to explore "racialized and gendered power structures" (Davis, 2003, p.96; Deveaux, 1996, p.226).

One can address the question of race by bringing in the work of black feminist scholars who have long argued that the black woman's body is deeply symbolic of sexist and racist discipline (Collins, 1986, 2002, 2004, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991, 1993; Taylor, 1998; White, 2010; Hammonds, 2004; hooks, 1981, 1989, 2000, 2006; Cooper, 2016; Davis, 2011; Rollins, 1991; Witt, 1994; Griffin, 1996; Shaw, 2006). For example, Eurocentric beauty ideals have forced black women to embody whiteness (Patton, 2006). This can be seen in the representation of natural black hair as "inappropriate" or "unprofessional" for the workplace, forcing many black women to adopt white hairstyles (Johnson, 2016, p.2). Indeed, Ahmed (2006) suggests that this symbolises how whiteness is a "general orientation" of being (p.151), meaning that the world is "made white" and all other bodies must erase their identities to align with such whiteness.

The Body is Power: Conclusion

This chapter set out the dichotomy of power which can often structure feminist debates, exploring both the work of radical and post-feminist scholars who view the body as either an 'oppressed' or 'liberated' entity. Although there is a plethora of queer, Marxist and postcolonial feminist

scholarship on the body that seeks to transcend this binary, I situate the thesis within the intersections between post-structuralist feminism and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Whilst Foucault is not considered a feminist scholar, post-structuralist feminists have successfully used his work to examine the body (Bartky, 1997, 1990; Bordo, 1990; Sawicki, 1991; McLaren, 2012; O'Brien, 1999).

In this first part of the chapter, I interrogated the work of some radical feminist scholars and their understanding of the 'oppressed' body as being the focal cite of subjugation for women (see: Greer, 1971, 2014; Brownmiller, 1975; Currie, 1992; Mackinnon, 1989; Beauvoir, 1949). The notion of a body that is 'worked upon' by oppressive structures is grounded in a perception of women possessing a biological destiny. For scholars such as De Beauvoir (1949), the representation of 'woman' is defined in opposition to masculinity and often deemed as weak or passive. This is because of the all-encompassing rule of men, defined by patriarchy, which enables the oppression of women from birth until death (Millet, 1970; Raymond, 1994). Such power dynamics play out through violence towards women's bodies, including self-inflicted violence via beauty practices such as wearing high heels and corsets (Jeffreys, 2014). For these scholars, the female body is considered solely to be a sexual organ that satisfies male needs, meaning that all heterosexual sex should be considered an act of abuse (MacKinnon, 1982; Greer, 1971; Dworkin, 1988; Millett, 1970). Nevertheless, criticisms of this position demonstrate that an understanding of the "universally subordinated" woman oversimplifies conceptions of power and gender (Bell and Klein, 1996). Likewise, the analysis of a 'real female' often reaches transphobic conclusions, which scholars such as Serano (2013) and Davy (2016) noting that this over-simplifies the structures of gender.

Within the second section of the chapter, I explored liberal and post-feminist scholarship that views the body as a tool for liberation. Liberal feminism views the body as the key to 'equality between the sexes' via 'exerting control' over oneself, meaning that these scholars are often active in issues such as abortion, which allows women agency in their bodies (Friedan, 1963; Thompson, 1972). The post-feminist stance was born out of the media in the 1980s, in which popular culture encouraged women to take pleasure from their traditionally feminine bodies. Thus, embracing actions such as having cosmetic surgery or wearing make-up are acts of empowerment for women (Paglia, 2011; Roiphe, 1998). Through this lens, the control a woman exerts over her body can be used to achieve practical goals such as elevating one's career (see: Paglia, 2011; Roiphe, 1998). This celebration of feminine sexuality comes from a critique of what post-feminist scholars refer to as the 'victim feminism' of the second-wave, which they suggest encourages an identification with powerlessness (Wolf, 1990; Roiphe, 1992; Paglia, 1992). Instead, these scholars contend that women need to take control of their own destinies, with Lumby (1997) arguing that a feminism that shames women for enjoying their bodies is aligned with the Christian-right, who have historically been afraid of women's sexuality. Yet, the criticisms of post-feminist work on the body is that it only encourages a heteronormative, neo-liberal version of sexuality and empowerment (see: Whelehan, 2000; Levy, 2006; Genz and Brabon, 2008). For some, this symbolised a backlash against women's new-found equality, in which women's achievements are reduced down to their appearance (Faludi, 1991; Brooks, 2002).

The final section of the chapter introduced the importance of post-structuralist feminism in transcending the dichotomy of power, in particular the work of Butler (1990, 1993, 1999). Another important strand of post-structuralist feminism is grounded within Michel Foucault's analysis into

the construction of language and knowledge. In particular, *Discipline and Punish* explores how the body has been disciplined throughout history, contending that power is an omni-present and fractured source (Marzouk, 2015; Sobal and Maurer, 1999). The metaphor of the panopticon prison within this text speaks to the disciplining of bodies throughout society, we survey ourselves until we are compliant with societal norms. As the chapter noted, however, Foucault's work has been highly criticised for his lack of inclusion on the topic of gender. For Bartky (1990), this is absurd considering how women's bodies have been subject to more regulation than men throughout history. Yet, despite this, his work has been used to advance feminist theory, with scholars such as Sawicki (1991) highlighting that feminists need to "see what we can make of him." Moreover, *Discipline and Punish* has been accused of overlooking race and writing about discipline from a position of white privilege (James, 1996; Davis, 2003). Thus, in order to explore gender and power, it is important to address race by drawing upon black feminist scholarship, which has always emphasised the symbolic nature of the black woman's body to discipline (Collins, 1986, 2002, 2004, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991, 1993; Taylor, 1998; White, 2010; Hammonds, 2004; hooks, 1981, 1989, 2000, 2006). Within the next chapter, I move on to discuss how this literature has helped me formulate a methodology, as well as in constructing the mechanics of the thesis.

Chapter 3
Body Discourse: A Post-Structuralist Feminist/Foucauldian Methodology

The goal of my thesis is to demonstrate the power of language and images in creating our understanding of 'appropriate' bodies and what this means for women's understanding of the world. Likewise, I will attempt to explore how these understandings are deeply wrapped up in gendered and racial norms. As the previous chapter outlined, this thesis grounds itself within the 'meeting points' between post-structuralist feminism and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish.* In order to do so, I draw from the work of post-structuralist feminist scholars who have fruitfully used Foucault's work on discipline to explore the body (see: McLaren, 2012; Ramazanoglu, 1993; Bordo, 1993; Bartky, 1997; Grosz, 1994). The purpose of this chapter is to set out what this combination between Foucault and post-structuralist feminist methodologies look like, why this approach is appropriate for my thesis and to justify the methods that I undertook. As will be explored, there are various 'hurdles' to cross when combining a Foucauldian framework and feminism and so it is important that the chapter untangles this problem.

In the first part of the chapter, I set out why drawing from post-structuralist feminist methodologies and the work of Foucault is the best route of analysis for this project. Foucault (1977) contended that, in any society, there are norms which "permeate, characterise and constitute the social body" (p.93) through the production of discourse. This type of research sits in opposition to positivist methodologies, that look for 'hard' facts and 'data' in order to 'prove' one's work (Kolakowski, 1993; Gartrell and Gartrell, 2002). Foucault's skepticism of overarching 'truths' led him to question the very essence of 'scientific' research, arguing that the dismissal of research for

being 'unscientific' ignores the vast range of knowledge within "subjects of experience" (1980, p. 85).

Likewise, for post-structuralist feminists, gender does not exist as a concrete division between 'man' and 'woman.' Rather, as Butler (1990, 1993, 1997) noted, the gendered body is created and maintained through such discursive acts that we repeatedly perform (Hall and Jagose, 2012; Valocchi, 2005; Spargo, 1999). Thus, in a thesis about the construction of the body and dieting, drawing upon both approaches is appropriate in order to interrogate discourses that construct our knowledge of the body. As I discussed in Chapter 2, for some feminists, Foucault's blindness makes a Foucauldian-feminist approach impossible (see: Meyers, 2014; Bartky, 1990, 1997; Sawicki, 1991). Despite this, there are notable examples of post-structuralist feminist research on the body that demonstrates the potentially harmonious relationship between Foucault and feminism (see: Bartky, 1990, 1997; Sawicki, 1991; McLaren, 2012; Loriaux, 2016). However, it is important to reflect upon the 'sticking points' of carrying out a methodology built upon post-structuralist and the work of Foucault in order to rationalise it.

Then, the chapter will turn to the mechanics of the thesis[10]. Firstly, I will discuss the reasoning behind my choice of case studies. Secondly, I will set out the steps that I took in carrying out my interviews for the project: I interviewed members of *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers*, as well as members of the fat movement for comparison. This section will explore my reasoning behind the use of semi-structured interviews, the preparation that I undertook prior to the interviews and the

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[10] Thank you to Dr. Nicola Smith for the terms and phrases used in this thesis which arose from our many fruitful conversations about this project.

process of interviewing itself. Next, I will explore the difficulties that come along with defining the process of "doing" Foucauldian discourse analysis, noting that post-structuralists have struggled with the ambiguity of the approach. However, as will be discussed, I conducted a "methodological anarchy" that situates feminist scholarship into Foucauldian understandings of power (Graham, 2005). The chapter moves on to discuss the importance of positionality in a feminist research project. This section uncovers another difficulty in conducting Foucauldian feminist research, due to Foucault's emphasis on writing from a point of anonymity (Foucault, 1969; Miller, 2000; Prozorov et al, 2016). As will be discussed, this is not possible in feminist work. Rather, the researcher must always locate their own identity within the project in order to be reflective upon one's own privileges (Hartsock in McLaren, 2012; Taylor and Vintges, 2004; Daigle, 2015). Finally, the chapter will set out the ethical considerations that I undertook before and throughout the project. Due to the personal nature of the project, it was important to be aware of the participant's welfare throughout the interview process. Here, I draw upon work on feminist ethics in research by McRobbie (1982) and DeVault (2004, cited in Hesse-Biber, 2012).

Exploring the Discourses of Dieting: Intersections between Post-Structuralist Feminism and Foucauldian Methodologies

In order to explore power's relationship to the body, this thesis draws upon the 'meeting points' between post-structuralist feminism and the work of Foucault. Indeed, it is important to note that the methodology and the theoretical perspective of this thesis go hand in hand. For post-structuralist feminist scholars, gender is something that we continuously 'do,' rather than something that we are (Butler, 1988, p.530; Valocchi, 2005; Hall and Jagose, 2012; Spargo, 1999). Post-structuralist feminist work is sometimes grounded in the work of Foucault, a perspective which

views power as an active force constructed through discursive texts, rather than something that is possessed (Brooks, 2002, p.50). The concept of discourse refers to "practices that systematically form the object of which they speak" (Foucault, 1977, p.49). Thus, according to post-structuralist feminists like Butler (1990, p.139), we must dismiss our understanding of gender as concrete and come to see it as an "illusion" that is created and maintained through "bodily gestures, movements and styles." This means that the binary constructions of 'man' and 'woman' are not representative of "internal essences" (Valocchi, 2005, p.36). Such a standpoint has been instrumental in demonstrating how gender binary constructions are "fraught with incoherence and instability" (Butler, 1990; Hall and Jagose, 2012, p.753).

This thesis builds upon Foucault's skepticism of positivism, which has typically been the mainstream methodology for the social sciences. In his own words, the goal of positivism it to conduct research in order to "lay down the law for each and every science" (Foucault, 1980, p.174; Foucault, 1990). Positivist methodologies are based upon the belief that there is an 'essential truth' waiting to be found. This type of scholarship looks for 'facts' and 'hard data' to 'prove' one's research (Kolakowski, 1993; Gartrell and Gartrell, 2002). Such an approach has been the dominant way of carrying out research since positivism's inception and has permeated the social sciences for decades (Baran, 2016). However, Foucault's mistrust of overarching 'truths' led him to question the very essence of 'scientific' research, arguing that the dismissal of research for being 'unscientific' ignores the ways that science itself is constructed through discursive texts (Foucault, 1980, p.85)[11].

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[11] This criticism can be seen in Foucault's mistrust of "science" and "facts." In 1968, Foucault had returned to Paris from Tunisia, writing of his frustration with the "cold academic debates on Marxism" that greeted him there (Kreps, 2016, p.12). For Foucault, the problem with Marxism was this construction of "truth" within theory and the nourishment of "science in the 19th-century sense of the term" (Foucault, 1980, p.132; Smart, 2013, p.136). Rather, he suggested that "factual statements cannot be divorced from rationality" because a "fact is something that is rational to believe" (Smart, 2013, p.354; Smart, 1994; Ritzer and Smart, 2011).

In this sense, it is important to remember "no research is carried out in a vacuum" and that researchers can never be fully separated from the work that they conduct (McRobbie, 1982, p.48). Indeed, this project takes the stance that research can never be "value-free" and that our social reality should not be viewed as "static" (Hesse-Biber, 2013; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010).

Thus, the focus on discursive texts means that post-structuralist feminist methodology contests the notion of a 'knowing' subject who 'emanates' meaning (Fadyl and Nicholls, 2013, p.35). Consequently, the purpose of Foucault's work was to "free history from the grip of phenomenology" (Foucault, quoted in Legrand, 2008, p.281). Whilst phenomenology is a large discipline which encompasses many perspectives, some proponents of it believe that research should explore the lived experience of subjects in order to make sense of the world (Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.141). Thus, Foucault's rejection of phenomenology stems from his argument that any analysis should be based upon the interrogation of "a theory of discursive practice" (Marshall, 1996, p.30). In his eyes, the subject "as we experience it, is a product of discourse" (Fadyl and Nicholls, 2013, p.25).

The subject's knowledge of lived experience has been constructed through discourse, so should not be seen to represent 'truth.' Indeed, as Foucault famously stated, "power is everywhere, but not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (1977, p.93). These ubiquitous workings of power are established via the "production, accumulation, circulation and

functioning" of discourse (p.93)[12]. In other words, the purpose of research must be to understand the way in which the subject became constituted "within a historical framework", rather than to take the subject's thoughts and actions as given (Legrand, 2008, p.281). This is not to suggest, however, that Foucault denied the existence of a reality that "pre-exists humans" or the "materiality of events." Rather, he suggested that the only way to make sense of reality is through an interrogation of discursive structures (Mills, 1993, p.54).

In Chapter 2, I noted that although Foucault can be blind to gender, *Discipline and Punish* has been a foundational text for many post-structuralist feminist explorations into the body. For example, scholars such as Sawicki (1991) and King (2004) have drawn upon *Discipline and Punish* in order to explore how femininity is constructed and maintained, concluding that women are conditioned to discipline their bodies to follow the rules of femininity. Most notably for this thesis, Bordo (1993) and Bartky's (1997) classic adaptation of docile bodies in relation to weight and dieting makes sense of the ways that power trains women in "docility and obedience to cultural demands" to produce a body that is "recognizably female." Indeed, Bartky (1990, 1997, p.95) borrows from Foucault's argument that reality is constructed, noting that femininity is an "artifice, an achievement" that is maintained through discursive acts. She carries out an in-depth discussion of the way that dieting breaks-down the body and conditions it to "master" the "pursuit of a body the

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[12] Foucault's critique of phenomenology was influenced by the "historicising" work of Heidegger and the "scientific histories " of Canguilhem. Heidegger, despite being a phenomenologist, concluded that people's thoughts and behaviours were governed by their experiences. However, he noted "this relationship could never really be made clear" as people "tended to think that they were acting freely and independently of their contexts." Likewise, Canguilhem's work was based around scientific research on the body, yet he noted that "scientific rationality and reason" is constantly evolving (Danaher et al 2002, p.6). Danaher et al (2002, p.7) notes that Foucault took away from both theorists the idea that "what people could know was always limited by their contexts, and second, and relatedly, that what constituted truth and rationality was not inevitable."

right size." This is based upon an in-depth discourse analysis into women's practices of dieting in the every-day (Bartky, 1997, p.95).

Likewise, Bordo's *Unbearable Weight* suggests that a marriage between post-structuralist and feminist thought enables researchers to explore how the body is the "focal point for struggles over the shape of power" (1993, p.17). Like these scholars, I contend that discourse analysis should not be viewed as a method. Rather, it is an "underpinning influence" of my research built upon Foucauldian understandings of reality (Hesse-Biber, 2013, p.46). In this sense, the thesis will seek to interrogate the way that bodies and dieting are "constituted through language," noting that discourses are complex systems that "support and perpetuate existing power relations" (Gavey, 1989, p.464). This means, then, that the research is not concerned with "revealing any objectively knowable reality" with regards to the body and dieting. Rather, I seek to understand how the production of "truth" about the body and dieting enforces our "knowledge" on the topic (Malson, 2003, p.44).

However, one "sticking point" in the use of post-structuralist feminist methodologies is reconciling Foucault's apparent gender blindness. Through his work on decentralized power, Foucault discusses the body as "one," seemingly ignoring the implications of intersecting identities (Meyers, 2014; Bartky, 1990, 1997). As King (2004, p.29) writes, for someone whose purpose was to "elaborate on how power produces subjectivity" by exploring the way that discourse constructs the body, his work is "curiously gender-neutral" (p.29). In terms of carrying out Foucauldian research, this leaves feminists in a 'weak' position: the challenge to theories of power has the potential to "disintegrate the politics of difference," meaning that there is the potential for feminists to "slip

back" into the habit of discussing the category of 'woman' through undifferentiated terms (Ramazanoglu, 2002, p.10). As I set out in Chapter 2, this has led some feminists to question whether a Foucauldian feminist approach is a contradiction in terms (Balbus, 1987; O'Brien, 1999). Nevertheless, I agree with scholars such as McLaren (2012) and Sawicki (1991) who suggest that Foucault's decentralising definition of power enables feminists to train a gendered lens onto discussions of reality. For Brooks (2002, p.56), feminists simply "cannot afford to ignore Foucault" as his work provides so much insight into the operations of power, which can be linked to constructions of femininity. Rather, when conducting a post-structuralist feminist methodology, one can wield Foucault's thought in discussions of gender relations but must be "wary" of the potential for "supporting male dominance." Indeed, Sawicki (1991, p.15) contends that her position as a post-structuralist feminist entails the ability to "think feminism through Foucault, and, where necessary, to think beyond him." She argues that this allows feminists to "see what we can make of him."

Likewise, my choice of interviews as a primary method does not fit with Foucault's criticism of "experience." In his eyes, interviews cannot provide the researcher with insight because subjects are always constructed through discursive practices. This is encapsulated Sembou (2016, p.7), who writes that: "the whole of modern thought is imbued with the necessity of thinking the unthought." Here, Foucault suggests that a person's account of their own experiences cannot be "seen as a point of origin for the construction of meaning" due to the subject being constructed through discourse (Fadyl and Nicholls, 2012, p.25). Rather than using research interviews, then, some Foucauldian scholars prefer to work with the "plethora of historical and present-day texts that are already available to us" such as street art or policy documents (p.27).

However, it is important to point out that my analysis in no way attempts to generalise all women's understandings of the body and dieting, nor does it suggest that there is a singular "experience" of womanhood and femininity that can be gathered from my interviews. Moreover, my thesis accepts the criticisms of prioritising experience, however, interviews have played an essential part in the researching of this project. Rather than considering my subjects "experience" to be valid in itself, I remained aware that "language (and discourse) constitutes subjectivity" and that "language is not innocent and neutral" (Gavey, 1997, p.464; Gill, 1995). The interviews with dieters and fat activists allowed me to analyse their use of discourse to gain insight into how the body is constructed, how participants are active in these constructions and the ways in which "a battle for subjectivity" often ensues (Gavey, 1997, p.464). Thus, the language from the interviews was situated within wider discourses on the body. For example, this was done by noting the similarities between participant's answers and narratives that exist within mainstream dieting discourses.

Who and Why? The Choice of Case Studies

Although the dieting industry has many companies within it, this thesis will focus on *Weight Watchers* and *Slimming World* as a site of analysis. The reasons for doing so are as followed: firstly, both companies are two of the most well-known and successful companies in the UK. By success, I am referring to the amount of groups and clients that both companies have. Whilst *Slimming World* has over 16,000 groups and 900,000 members (Slimming World, 2018), *Weight Watchers* holds 6,000 weekly meetings (Weight Watchers UK, 2017). Likewise, in 2012, the BBC reported that both companies were the market leaders, noting that the NHS had even begun to refer 'obese' patients onto both programmes (Wallis, 2013). In 2017, other popular diets include *The Cambridge*

Diet and the *5.2 diet*, however, these programmes are not built around a group dynamic like

Slimming World and *Weight Watchers*. Rather, such programmes rely on individuals following a set

plan of diet foods and meeting with personal consultants. For my project, I felt that the process of

attending meetings and interacting with other dieters would prove an important point of analysis in

understanding dieting discourses, as well as "snowballing[13]" between participants. For instance,

talking to members of *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers* meant that they were able to provide

me with contact details for other members of their group.

Another reason for choosing to focus on *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers* is their similar

histories, which speak to the themes of this thesis. In 1961, Jean Nidetch, the CEO of *Weight

Watchers* stepped into a crowded room above a cinema in New York. Nidetch, described as a "214

lbs Queens housewife" who "transformed into a trim 142-lb career woman" had begun dieting by

meeting with her friends for moral support (McFadden, 2015, p.225). Their group met once a week

for check-ins and discussed their progress, which later evolved into the Pro Points system

(WeightWatchers, history and philosophy 2017). The CEO of *Slimming World* was also a housewife

who had a "lifetime's experience of weight problems." She started the company in 1961 after

realising her desire to help people "achieve their dreams" (Slimming World, 2017). Thus, the

narrative of both company's speak to the notion of a body 'journey.' As will be discussed in

Chapter 4, this is an integral theme throughout my analysis.

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[13] Snowballing refers to the process of asking each participant if they could suggest other people to talk to. This proved useful when speaking with dieters, who often knew a number of people at their slimming clubs (Lyon et al, 2015, p.111).

Moreover, in Chapter 5, I explore the relationship between black women's bodies and dieting, using Oprah Winfrey as a case study. There are a variety of reasons for choosing Oprah as a focal point for such a discussion, the most important being her position as the world's most successful African-American woman and household name. For example, Aschoff (2015, p.82) notes that Oprah is so "omnipresent" that she is able to be known only by her first name. Secondly, she is considered to be a representative of meritocracy and the 'American dream.' After a sexually abusive and impoverished background in Mississippi, Winfrey rose to fame after being the first African American woman to anchor the news at Nashville's WTV-TV (Thompson, 2015, p.805; Illouz, 2003). Through acting and her daytime TV show, Winfrey became a household name and one of the first African-American billionaires identified by the Forbes billionaire list (Peterson, 2017). Her 'rags to riches' story has been consistently repeated as 'proof' that one's racial difference and socioeconomic status can be 'overcome' via hard work and discipline (Fellner et al, 2014, p.147). In this sense, Oprah has become a living embodiment of neoliberalism's promises for individuals: if you work hard, regardless of race, you can reach your goals. Therefore, Oprah is an important cultural icon within neoliberal society who is worthy of exploration and analysis (Cloud, 1996). Most importantly for this thesis, however, is Oprah's relationship with the dieting industry and her body. In 2016, Oprah announced her partnership with *Weight Watchers*. The CEO of the company stated that the deal aimed to expand the company's purpose from "focusing on weight loss alone to more broadly helping people lead a healthier, happier life" (Collins, 1997, p.1). The announcement was made via a series of adverts in which Oprah revealed her 26 pound-weight-loss, despite claiming that she could still eat "bread every day." The notorious "Oprah factor" had a significant impact on *Weight Watchers*, with the share price of company rising by 18% on the day of the adverts release (Revesz, 2016).

As the aforementioned example demonstrates, Oprah's public battle with her body has often

overshadowed many of her incredible achievements. Despite her extreme success as a multi-

millionaire talk-show host, author, director, producer and actress, she is perhaps most famous for

her public "yo-yo dieting" in the media. Indeed, Oprah has always been very open about her hatred

of her fatness and on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* she "welcomed her audience into her struggles with

weight loss" (Harris and Watson, 2015, p.102). Likewise in a *Love Your Body!* issue of her *O*

magazine, Oprah recalled the various diets that she has been on, including an 1,200 calorie per day,

vegan and liquid diet, all of which have lead her into a "cycle of discontent" (Ortega, 2014,p.93).

Typically, Winfrey has been very open about how this continuous cycle of weight-loss and gain has

led her to feel discontent in life. For example, despite winning an Emmy for best talk show host,

Oprah confessed that she worried more about her "too-fat knees" showing when she sat down at the

awards (Farrell, 2011, p.125). Thus, Winfrey's body journey is an important site of exploration for

a chapter about race and self-surveillance in dieting. Her position as a highly successful black

woman who has documented her dieting journey in the public eye allows me to interrogate the

possible intersections that occur between race and gender in relation to dieting, self-surveillance

and idealised notions of femininity. Indeed, members of the fat movement have been openly

critical of Oprah's ties to the dieting industry, with an article in The New York Times questioning:

> Seriously? Oprah Winfrey, with all her influence, all her accomplishments, the school she's built and the
> money she's earned, is still feeling lost, buried, or like she's not her best and most authentic self? Shouldn't
> Oprah, of all people, be open to the possibility that she already is the woman she's meant to be? And when
> you're 61, are you really, still, expected to be fretting over whether you've got your "best body"? Can't you
> just page through your high school yearbook, eat the way your cardiologist says you should, and call it a day?
> (Weiner, 2016)

This critique demonstrates the significance of Oprah's pledge to lose weight on *Weight Watchers*, implying that disappointed onlookers saw her as a "traitor" to fat women. Such a narrative provides the thesis with an essential point of analysis, allowing me to explore the complex power relations that surround Oprah's weight-loss. Indeed, after the news of Oprah's partnership with *Weight Watchers* was revealed, *The Financial Times* reported that the company's shares jumped "more than 13 per cent," simultaneously demonstrating Winfrey's power and close ties to the dieting industry.

The Nuts and Bolts: Justifying Foucauldian Interviews

Although feminist scholars have long resisted positivist methods that reduce complicated subjects to 'disconnected variables', there are still deep contestations between feminists with regard to their approaches to research and the 'right' way to conduct feminist methodologies. In particular, when discussing the body, the question of 'experience' has led to some divisions within feminist scholarship on how to carry out interviews (see: Smith et al, 2015, p.85). Therefore, it is important to reflect upon this friction in order to defend the theoretical underpinnings of my interviews, which are deeply intertwined with the project's methodological choices.

As Evans (2017, p.6) notes, women's 'experience' has often been prioritised within feminist research. For example, scholars such as Oakley (1981) highlighted the need to connect with the 'female' experience. Likewise, England (1993, p.255) emphasised participant's "subjective experience" and the "emotional aspects of social life grounded in concrete, daily experiences" (England, 1993, p.255). Another notable example of this resides within aspects of Black feminism, which contended that the "commitment to the liberation of black people" was "profoundly rooted" in the lived experiences of black women (Childers et al, 2013, p.64; Carby,

1996; Collins, 1986; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981). Black feminist interpretations of such experiences were used to "facilitate scholarship that is emancipatory for the masses of black women" (Dow and Wood, 2006, p.409). Collins (2002, p.258) agrees, "distant statistics are certainly not as important as the actual experience of a sober person." Indeed, other feminist researchers choose to focus on experiences that demonstrate "issues of power and position" (Dowling, 2011, p.83; Gottfried, 1996, p.23; Hesse-Biber, 2013, p.6). Within Mackinnon's (1987) work *Women's Lives, Men's Laws*, she argues that to advance women's rights, feminists must understand lived experience. In one chapter, she contends that issues such as pornography are a "primal experience of gender hierarchy" (p.316). She furthers this by suggesting that the anti-pornography laws are a successful example of feminists using women's experiences to counter oppression, suggesting that they were "grounded in the experience of prostituted women" (p.160). This is especially true within elements of Marxist feminism, which view an individual's "material and lived experience structures his or her understanding of his or her social environment." For example, the worker's understanding of the world will be "more complete than the master's alone", due to the necessity of understanding the world of work and that of the master's world (Nagy and Hesse-Biber, 2013, p.6).

The question of experience has created contestations over the relationship that exists between the researcher and the researched. On the one hand, scholars such as Oakley (1981) contend that women's experiences create an intimate bond of sisterhood. She rejects the notion that the interview is a "one-way process" in which the interviewer "elicit and receives" information from the participant (Roberts, 2013, p.30). Instead, she contends that feminist researchers are able to share personal stories with their participants, which will eventually lead to a friendship between the

interviewer and interviewee based upon their shared experiences as women. Finch (1993, cited in Hammersley, 1993, p.172) furthers this by suggesting that a woman interviewing a woman is "special," and it is easy because her "identity as a woman makes it so."

However, the concept of women's shared identity has been criticised within feminism (see: Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1981, 1988; McRobbie, 1982). In this case, Oakley (1981) ignores the fact that women are "divided by other variables" than gender such as race, class and disability (Cotterill, 1992, p.595; Ramazanoglu, 1989). Through this lens, feminists suffer a "delusion of alliance" if they "assume common interests in woman-to-woman research" (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p.106). Moreover, other feminist scholars such as McRobbie (1982) condemn the "shaky notion" of "shared femininity" as "nonsense", contending that researchers should not treat interviews as a recruitment opportunity for feminism. Indeed, for McRobbie (1982, p.52), the very notion that feminism can "solve all women's problems" is extremely patronising and naive.

On the other hand, some post-structuralist feminist scholars align themselves with Foucault's work to argue "experience has no inherent essential meaning" (Weedon, 1997, p.33). As Mama (1995, p. 89) contends in her work *Behind the Masks*, subjectivity is "not as a static or fixed entity but as a dynamic process during which individuals take up and change positions in discourses" (Mama, 1995; Takhar, 2013, p.1). In other words, although our experiences may seem very real, they actually arise out of how we "conceptualise our context." We provide our experiences with meaning, rather than vice versa (McLeod, 2010, p.16). As Weedon (1989) notes, the very notion of subjectivity is an area of both "social transformation and social control."

This position is strongly opposed by some radical feminists who propose that women must begin to "collectivise their own experiences" in order to make sense of their history (Mies, 1983, p.362). Indeed, the division within feminist methodologies over experience has been particularly pertinent when discussing topics relating to the body. For instance, some radical feminists argue that sex work is a 'degrading' experience for women (Jeffreys, 2008; Barry, 1996; Whisnant and Stark, 2004). In contrast, scholars such as Smith et al (2015, p.85) note that although experience can be a "valid source of information," one should not consider it to be the only "true or authentic" insight. Rather, it provides the researcher with "additional" information for analysis. Throughout this thesis, I borrow from Smith et al s (2015) conceptualisation of experience as being useful, but not complete.

I conducted ten interviews with women who are/have been members of *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers*. The aim of the interviews was to understand dieter's perceptions of their bodies, question why they seek to lose weight and understand the everyday practices of dieting. The dieters were aged between 18 and 56 and had all been on *Slimming World* or *Weight Watchers* on-and-off for a number of years (often, they had been on both). Whilst I hoped to interview participants from a diverse range of backgrounds, the only individuals who responded to my invitations were White British individuals.

Additionally, I carried out four interviews with members of the fat movement. As will be explored in Chapter 6, both fat activists and body positivity activists share the common vision of resisting dieting and normative understandings of fat women's bodies (Cooper, 2016; Rothblum and Solovay, 2009; Brown and Rothblum, 1989; Schoenfielder and Wieser, 1983; Young, 2017; Farrell,

2011; Crabbe, 2017). Their differing position on how to achieve emancipation for fat women speaks back to the question of the oppression and liberation of the body, allowing me to explore how some women attempt to reject dieting. These participants were aged between 25 and 45, were all White British, except for one participant who was Black British.

I asked both sets of participants similar questions, because I felt that this would highlight any stark contrast in thoughts surrounding the body between my interviewees. In terms of the interview format, I felt that a semi-structured approach would provide the interview with some direction, but also encourage the participants to express their "thoughts, beliefs and values" (Code, 2002, p.341; Longhurst, 2003). As it exists in the "grey area" between the rigid and the more free-flowing unstructured interview, a semi-structured interview allowed me some flexibility with the questions (Burnham et al, 2008, p.240). This is because interviewees are able to play an "active role" in the process, whilst the interviewer has "the freedom to discuss possible contradictions and ambivalences with the interviewees" (Watzlawick and Born, 2007, p.60). Such an approach is useful for discourse analysis, as it treats the interview process as a conversational encounter (Wood and Kroger, 2000, p.72). Although, I had a set list of questions (Appendix 1), I discussed the following broad topics:

- **The dieters/fat activists "body journey."** By this, I am referring to the way that they perceive their body and how this has been impacted by constructs of hegemonic beauty. For example, are their reasons for dieting/becoming a fat activist traceable to the way that bodies are interpreted? How has the wider media influenced their understandings of their own bodies? At what point did they decide to diet/become a fat activist?

- **The daily practices of dieting/fat activism**. This refers to the micro-politics of dieting and fat activism: what work goes into achieving a thin body/rejecting dieting standards? How does self-surveillance enact itself in the every-day?

- **Oppression and liberation**: I sought to understand whether the dieters/fat activists viewed themselves as either oppressed or liberated. For example, what does "empowerment" mean to them? Have they ever felt empowered through dieting/fat activism?

- **The future body**: at what point, if ever, will the participants feel happy with their bodies?

Consequently, the questions were open-ended as I felt this approach would allow the participants the "freedom to raise any issues they feel are important" (Burnham, et al, 2008, p.119). Not only did this establish a comfortable working relationship between the interviewee and me, it meant that themes arose naturally and gave rise to topics that I had not considered when planning for the interviews.

Overall, each interview lasted between approximately 50 to 90 minutes. I would ask the participants to tell me the 'stories' of their bodies, starting from their first experiences of dieting to the present day, as well as their hopes for the future (Dagle, 2016). Thus, I didn't set a time limit on the interviews, instead preferring the participants to speak until they felt the conversation came to a natural close. Likewise, although I had a question structure, my participants would often speak for around 5-10 minutes, then say statements such as: "Sorry, what was the question again?" Sometimes, I found that this acted as an "exit guide" to bring the participant back to the original question (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002, p.695), but other times it was useful to react naturally. Hesse-Biber (p.197) refers to this as "probing", noting that the sign of a good interviewer is the

ability to "distinguish between when a marker has been dropped that you want to pick up on and when you should probe further into a participant's response." Indeed, such elaborations added colour to the participant's stories, providing me with a deeper insight into the discourses that surround the body.

'It's More than Reading': Doing a Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis

Foucault "actively resisted" developing a method for conducting discourse analysis in order to avoid falling into the "positivist trap" of creating an essentialist "research method" (Graham, 2005, p.5). Thus, this means that it is difficult to "find coherent descriptions of how one might go about discourse analysis using Foucault." Indeed, for some, avoiding the declaration of one's methods has "become a trap in itself" due to the ambiguity that surrounds "doing" Foucauldian research[14] (Graham, 2005, p.2; Harwood, 2000). Nevertheless, it has been noted that his theoretical approach can act as a guide for post-structuralist researchers in carrying out discourse analysis[15] (Given, 2008, p.336). As has been discussed, this thesis is built upon Foucauldian understandings of discourse as being directly related to the production of knowledge and power. Indeed, they are "so closely interrelated that a field of discourse is co-extensive with a field of power" (Calas et al, 2009, p.60). Therefore, an exploration into the construction of subjects through discursive texts is

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[14] Here, I echo Graham's (2005,p.5) nerves about using the term "ambiguity." She questions: "I understand the play on multiplicity of interpretation and open-endness that ambiguity signifies, however, the term ambiguous is itself ambiguous - it not only means 'open to various interpretations' but also 'of doubtful and uncertain nature; difficult to comprehend' and 'lacking clearness or definiteness, obscure' [...] this echos much of the criticism directed towards Foucauldian and post-structural writing [...] can I maintain a post-structural respect for uncertainty without appearing vague or, for the want of a better word, uncertain of what I am doing?"

[15] Cheek (cited in Given, 2008, p.357) notes that this is because Foucault's work does not "represent a linear, homogenous body of work." Consequently, Foucauldian discourse analysis should be considered as a "plural term." Consequently, researchers need to "identify" and "select" the appropriate tools from Foucault's work to apply to their project. For example, in my case, I am drawing upon *Discipline and Punish* to understand how bodies are disciplined through dieting.

the underpinning influence for any post-structuralist feminist project (Weedon, 1987; Black and Coward, 1981). One is able to make sense of power/knowledge relations via an interrogation into the way that language and images are used (Given, 2008, p.217; Grue, 2016). This refers to the way that our knowledge of the world and each other are constructed through discourses. Yet, as Gavey (1989, p.464) suggests, discourses are "multiple, and they offer competing, potentially contradictory ways of giving meaning to the world."

On a practical level, I follow Graham's (2005, p.6) call for "methodological anarchy." This does not simply mean 'anything goes,' rather, it demonstrates a need to "move beyond the strait-jacketing confines of methodological rules." This will be done by grounding my work in "careful scholarship" and "engaging in a respectful conversation with Foucault, whilst looking to and building on the insights of others" (p.6). Firstly, this means understanding that critical readings of texts will always prove "inadequate" due to the "variety of different discourses or perspectives, each apparently valid" (Burr, 1995, p.60, cited in Hook, 2001, p.539). Indeed, Foucault offers a warning to researchers who attempt to reduce discourse to "one comfortable role" (p.540). This means that discourse analysis involves "more than analysing the content of texts for the ways in which they have been structured in terms of syntax, semantics, and so forth" (Cheek, cited in Given, 2008, p.336). Rather, the purpose of my thesis is to explore the ways in which discourses functions within the sphere of dieting and how this links to the social, cultural and historical construction of women's bodies. This can be achieved, firstly, through a focus on statements and their position within wider contexts. As Foucault (1986, p.99) explains:

> There is no statement in general, no free, neutral, independent statement; but a statement always belongs to a series or a whole, always plays a role among other statements, deriving support from and distinguishing itself

from them: it is always part of a network of statements, in which it has a role, however minimal it may be, to play.

In simple terms, a statement refers to "things said that privilege particular ways of seeing and codify certain practices" (Graham, 2005, p.11). As Anderson (2003, p.12) notes, researchers should not discuss statements as being "stated independently of time, place and materiality." It is impossible to "imagine or discover what a pre-discursive world might look like", but one can seek to understand the discourses that govern our lives (DeLyser et al, 2010, p.412). Thus, it is important to "look beyond" the statements that my participants give; they are "constructed through discourses," meaning that it is impossible for their answers to be "fully self-aware" (Barnard-Willis, 2012, p.62). This process would enable me to explore the the way that "truths" surrounding dieting are normalized and presented as "common-sense," subsequently allowing the continuation of structures and rules that govern our knowledge of "acceptable" bodies (Waitt, 2005, p.165). Consequently, I drew upon Philips' (cited in Given, 2008, p.358) suggestions for questions that the researcher can reflect upon prior to conducting a post-structuralist analysis:

> What rules permit certain statements to be made? What rules permit us to identify some statements as true and some as false? What rules order these statements? What rules permit us to identify some statements as true and some as false? What rules allow for the construction of an explanatory map, model, or classificatory system for this text?

In order to ask these questions, a familiarisation with the texts was essential. Here, it is important to reflect upon the specific process I undertook in collecting and analysing the *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers* magazines, as well as my use of other popular culture sources. Additionally, this will demonstrate how the interview questions were created and the transcripts analysed. As Gill (2000, p.175) notes, "discourse is occasioned," meaning that all language and images are there to *do* something, they cannot be analysed within a social vacuum. This means "changing the way that language is seen in order to focus upon the construction, organisation and functions of discourse" in

terms of dieting and the body. To do this, I gathered as many sources as possible from *Weight*

Watchers and *Slimming World*: magazines[16], social media posts and YouTube videos. For my

analysis of fat activism, I began by simply searching the internet using key phrases such as 'fat

activism', 'body positivity' and 'body-love activism.' This enabled me to find cultural figures

Once I had gathered a broad range of sources, I immersed myself "within the material being

studies" (Gill, 2000, p.175) by reading and re-reading the texts. As Wood and Kroger (2000, p.92)

suggest, here it is important to take note of how the text makes you feel, noting: "does the text raise

hackles? make you bristle? make you smile?" When re-reading the texts, I made notes on pages of

the magazines/print outs of these reactions. For instance, in certain areas, I felt 'angry' or 'sad' or

both.

Although Gill (2000, p.179) argues that sometimes the "phenomenon of interest may not be clear

until after some initial analysis," I found that the themes 'jumped out' at me. This was especially

true when reading the *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers* magazines, where the language of

'confession,' 'sin' and 'transformation' consistently reoccurred. Wood and Kroger (2000) support

this notion, stating that researchers should not "ignore the obvious" if it feels right.

Next, the interview questions were built upon the coded themes: although I did not use language

such as 'confession' or 'journey,' I constructed questions that explored whether participants

engaged in/resisted these discourses. For example, by asking dieters to simply explain their dieting

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[16] As I was buying magazines online that were no longer stocked in stores, it was difficult to choose sources based upon a specific date for the purpose of exploring how discourses may have changed within said time frame.

history to me, I was able to mirror the coding practice outlined by Gill (1996, 2000) and note any similar narratives that arose from the transcripts and the magazine articles, providing my analysis with a necessary depth. For instance, it was interesting that many of the statements made the dieting participants were reflected in the magazines. To me, this reflects Foucault's (1986) argument regarding the lack of neutrality in speech and written words; they are always reflective of wider discourses. Indeed, Graham (2005, p.10) notes that such a "regularity of statements" comes to represent a wider "discursive field" that gives, citing Deleuze's (1988, p.11) definition of this instance as a "family of statements." Such actions allowed me to 'absorb' myself in the texts and become aware of key themes that ran throughout my sources. For instance, in my conversations with dieters, the following themes arose: body shame, a body 'journey' towards a 'good' body, food as a moral judgement and the structuring of time around one's food intake. In my interviews with members of the fat movement, I noted the themes of body shame and liberation.

Next, I was able to think about how these themes are "given meaning through relationships between words (word clusters), and connections between word clusters in different texts" (Waitt, 2005, p.181). In other words, by seeing 'beyond' the transcripts, I was able to make sense of how certain types of knowledge are produced about the body and dieting. This was essential in order to situate the body within the wider social, cultural and historical context of women's identities.

'Writing With A Face': Justifying Feminist Positionality and Post-Structuralism

For Foucault, researchers should write in order to "have no face", referring to his deliberate attempts to "erase the signs" of himself from his writings: "do not ask me who I am, and do not tell me to remain the same" (Foucault, 1969, in Miller, 2000, p.123). This "quest for anonymity" comes

from Foucault's unwillingness to "be confined within even a self-chosen identity" and reveals another "sticking point" that occurs when conducting post-structuralist feminist research (Prozorov et al, 2016, p.63). By seeking an anonymous voice, he is suggesting "depersonalization and de-individualisation" are essential for academic writing; situating oneself within the research means to attach notions of "truth" to one's experiences (Taylor and Vintges, 2004, p.75). Indeed, to "erase oneself" is somewhat easier when writing from a position of "entrenched male privilege" (Taylor and Vintges, 2004, p.17). For feminists, removing oneself from the research is impossible. As Brown and Strega (2015) contend, declaring oneself as "genderless and sexless" in one's writings suggests that one has been "immune" to categorizations. Rather, they suggest that the author must reflect upon how such identities have "forever changed my life and my body" (p.207). Moreover, Hartsock, quoted in McLaren's (2012, p.55) critique of Foucault notes that women cannot "destroy the subject" because they have never experienced subjectivity, stating:

> The combination of conceptual elements is quite paradoxical: deconstructing, dismissing, or displacing the notion of the rational subject at the very historical moment when women are beginning to have access to the uses of discourse, power and pleasure…the truth of the matter is: one cannot construct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted.

Likewise, as Bartky (1990, 1997) noted in her work on the body, it is impossible for women to simply step away from the normative femininity that they have been conditioned to embrace. In terms of research, then, women must reflect upon these positions in relation to power. As Daigle (2016, p.18) notes, a "reflective and self-critical approach" to research is essential; it is simply "not enough" to "assume that a feminist or anti-racist standpoint will act as a standpoint will act as a safeguard against exploiting others." Not only is this important for me as a researcher in conducting better and more rigorous work, it also creates an ethical relationship between myself and the participant. Indeed, the importance of such reflexivity is encapsulated in the following quote:

When researching this project, I was aware that I may be doing research where I don't 'belong' (Morgaine, 2014, p.226). Firstly, as a white woman, I pondered over the appropriateness of discussing black women's bodies in dieting in Chapter 5. My position as a white woman impacts my understanding of the world and comes with an inherent privilege. Despite this, I still felt that the conversation was an essential one to be had in a thesis about dieting, with the narratives surrounding Oprah's body being symbolic of wider discourses around race and gender. Likewise, the chapter addresses an important gap on race in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Thus, rather than coming to my own conclusions, I drew on the legacy of black feminist scholars who have long argued that black bodies are inscribed with meaning that positions them as regulated objects (Collins, 1996, 2002, 2004; Crenshaw, 1993; Taylor, 1998; White, 2010; Hammonds, 2004; hooks, 1981, 1989, 2000, 2006; Cooper, 2016; Davis, 2011; Rollins, 1991).

Thus, when drawing conclusions upon the symbolism of Oprah's body, I am not specifically referring to Oprah as an individual. Rather, I am discussing the stories that surround her body. Here, I draw upon Daigle's (2016) work on storytelling, in which she argues that narrative "questions the authority of the academic voice" (p.26). By approaching our research with storytelling in mind, one can "express fear and harm in ways that other methods simply could not" (p.27). Indeed, whilst the act of storytelling may not be enough, it provides a spotlight for "voices not normally heard" (p.29). In this sense, I seek to write from the perspective of telling stories about Oprah's body in relation to the history of black women's bodies, in the hope that it mitigates some of the unequal power dynamics at play. Additionally, this approach speaks to my

wider thesis, which hopes to portray the stories of women's bodies. Whilst I do not suggest that one experience is correct, it brings life to interviews and potentially mitigates the unequal power dynamic between the researcher and researched. However, in terms of positionality, it is still important to state that I am responsible for my interpretations and that I recognize that the very process of speaking already "belongs to an already well-defined structure and history of domination" (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995; Pedwell, 2010, p.25; Spivak, 1999, p.244).

Secondly, I am considered 'slim' (UK Size 8-10). Often, I was questioned by my colleagues about my approach to the topic, with some peers presuming that the project was based upon the best tactics for weight-loss or the fastest methods of body-toning. When I divulged the real purpose of my thesis, I was regularly asked: "why are you doing a project about dieting and fatness if you aren't fat?" Indeed, such responses sometimes made me feel like an imposter in my own research and that I shouldn't be studying the topic at all. This point became particularly pertinent when I was planning interviews and worrying that my participants would question our purportedly "shared femininity," thinking I did not recognise the privileges that come along with being (McRobbie, 1982). Thin-privilege is best explained by Bacon (2008) who, as a thin woman, wondered about the appropriateness of her work about fatness, stating:

> Because I am relatively thin, it's been easier for me to meet and get approval from other people. This has helped me make friends, find a life partner, develop professional contacts, and secure jobs. It also means I am treated with greater respect when I shop or eat in a restaurant. It means I have a larger choice of fashions at less expensive prices and never have to pay for more than one airline seat, making travel and its accompanying opportunities more accessible. I could go on for days listing the ways in which I have benefited from others' perception of my weight, but I believe these simple examples make the point. I can think of very little in my life that is untainted by thin privilege.

Thus, as a thin researcher, it is important to recognise the imbalance of power that already existed between myself and the participants. I have tried to keep this in mind when planning and

conducting my interviews. For example, initially I wanted to conduct walking interviews, which entail conducting interviews whilst walking. Described as the 'go along' interview, it is often used within geography to see how participants move through and interact with space (Anderson, 2004). I felt that this would be useful for understanding how dieters and fat activists react to certain spaces. However, I later realised that this may be anxiety-inducing for my participants. As the quote from Bacon suggests, fat people are subject to constant discrimination. Thus, I felt that walking interviews might expose my participants to unnecessary stress and worry. For example, I did not wish to expose the participants to public spaces such as busy streets or parks as they may have felt uncomfortable around large groups of people.

Instead, I asked the participants to choose an informal space to meet where they would feel most comfortable, such as a local coffee shop. This was essential so that the interviewees felt at ease in their surroundings and comfortable throughout the interview. Likewise, although the interviews had a conversational style, I did not put any of my own thoughts across about my own body and diet as I thought this would be somewhat blind to my thin-privilege. Yet, during the interviews, I did not get the sense that the participants felt uncomfortable talking to me about fatness and dieting. I hoped that by asking the participants to talk (rather than having a 'back-and-forth' style conversation) they felt that the interview was a space for them to express themselves and be heard.

Another point about positionality arose when considering the language used within the project. Throughout the thesis, I consistently refer to 'fat' women and 'fat' activists. To call somebody 'fat' (especially women) is viewed as an insult in Western society as fatness is presented as being synonymous with laziness, stupidity and gluttony (Orbach, 1998). Yet, within Fat Studies

scholarship and activism, authors have attempted to "cast off the shame" of fatness by reclaiming the word. As the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAFTA) explains:

> Fat is not a four letter word. It is an adjective, like short, tall, thin, or blonde. While society has given it a derogatory meaning, we find that identifying ourselves as 'fat' is an important step in casting off the shame we have been taught to feel about ourselves." (Farrell, 2011, p.138)

For some members of the fat movement, the use of the word fat subverts the negative associations of fatness. However, throughout the project, I pondered whether it was appropriate for me to use this reclaimed language as a thin woman; it certainly felt strange to flippantly refer to bodies as fat. Indeed, when presenting my work to colleagues, I often saw them wince at the use of the word. Once, a friend remarked that she took a "quick intake of breath" when she read it on paper, loaded nature of the word. However, despite this discomfort, I felt that using fat as a descriptor was essential for deconstructing bodies in dieting. For instance, if I did not refer to bodies as fat, I would be contributing to the notion that fat bodies are somehow bad or offensive. Rather, as a post-structuralist, I felt that the discomfort I experienced when using the word fat (as well as the reactions of those around me) demonstrated the importance of interrogating the discourses that surround certain bodies. As Foucault (1967, 1977) would argue, the power of discourses does not derive from the "abstract ideas they represent," but from their use within "institutions and practices that make up the micro-political realm" (Barnes and Duncan, 2013, p.9). In other words, the use of the word fat only holds negative meaning when it is used in a context that aims to demean fat bodies. This produces our knowledge about fat bodies, cementing binary "truths" about unappealing fatness and idealized thinness. Consequently, I arrived at the conclusion that avoiding the use of the word fat in my writing would represent a departure from the aims of the thesis.

'I'm Not Your Data': The Importance of Feminist Ethics

Prior to conducting my research, I received full ethical approval from the University of Birmingham to carry out my interviews. The next step of the project was to approach members of *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers* for interviews. I found that access to these participants was fairly easy, due to having several friends and relatives who are on/have been on these programmes. I started by interviewing these friends, but due to the communal nature of slimming groups, my initial participants were able to put me in contact with other members. I sent an initial email to potential participants, asking them to respond to me if they wished to be involved in the project. Whilst some participants were happy to be interviewed, others seemed unsure and stopped replying to my emails after the initial contact. I did not follow up these emails, believing that the discomfort and personal nature of the topic was the reason for their caution over the project.

I gained access to members of the fat movement through friends and contacts from my time studying for a master's degree in Brighton. For example, through a contact at The Marlborough Pub and Theatre (a queer performance space), I was put in contact with several fat activist performers who had done shows there during the time of the Brighton Fringe. Again, after making initial contact, I awaited the potential participant's confirmation before arranging an interview. With members of the fat movement, it was appropriate to research their performance work beforehand in order to tailor my questions to each participant. All of the participants had taken part in fat activism or body positivity activism, so it was important to be aware of their work prior to our conversation. Before the interviews, the participants were sent a detailed information sheets and consent form. This meant that they could read questions before the interviews, which I felt would allow the participants time to think about potential answers.

Due to the face-to-face nature of the interviews, I could not guarantee participant's anonymity. Rather, I assured the participants that their information would remain strictly confidential. I achieved this in three stages: firstly, I assigned each of the participants a pseudonym for the purpose of the thesis. Next, I transferred the audio files onto a password-protected file on my computer, ensuring that I labelled each file under the participants pseudonyms. Finally, I transcribed each of the interviews into a separate word document and colour coded dieters transcripts into 'pink' and members of the fat movement into 'blue' for clarity.

McRobbie (1982, p.5) argues that researchers cannot be prepared for the discomforts of research, noting that it can often feel like we are "holidaying on people's misery." Here, she is referring to the notion that researchers can "step into" participant's lives and feel pleased when they reveal personal (and potentially upsetting) information, only viewing the respondent's answers through the lens of usefulness for the project. This was a concern for me, especially as the topic of the body and dieting is such a personal and complex issue which may have held painful memories for my participants. I did not want to leave my participants with the emotional memories after "getting what I came for" (Letherby, 2003, p.111). Indeed, during the interviews, there were times when a participant said something particularly sad or unnerving and I thought about the potential for a 'good quote' for my thesis. I was unsure of how to resolve this tension, other than sitting with the participants after the interview for a general 'chat' and providing them with the questions beforehand so that they did not feel ambushed by very personal topics.

However, after the interviews, my participants expressed that it was cathartic to reflect upon one's body issues. One interviewee expressed that she had not thought very deeply about her relationship with her body and practices of dieting, but to do so was helpful and calming. This seems to align with Finch's (1984) argument that talking about sensitive or 'taboo' topics may provide the participants with a sense of release and comfort. Indeed, women talking about their bodies and dieting in a self-deprecating manner is the norm, an in-depth discussion about one's struggle to accept/change their bodies may be less common. When interviewing my participants, I got the sense that they may not have spoken about the topic with anyone else; the questions were designed to get the participants thinking about the minute aspects of dieting and/or the microaggressions that coincide with female fatness, I wondered if they had spoken about these issues to such a detailed level. Whilst members of the fat movement have surely spoken about bodies prior to our interview, they may not have not spoken about their own body 'journey' in such depth.

Hesse-Biber (p.203) cites DeVault's (2004) work on the importance of listening carefully in interviews, citing phrases such as "you know" as demonstrating the participant's entering into a "realm of not-quite-articulated experience, where standard vocabulary is inadequate." In such instances, then, it is important for the researcher to be aware of the discomforts of the participant and to notice if the interviewee seems unable to answer the question. Despite this, McRobbie (1982) notes that women's willingness to talk may be an indication of their powerless state and hesitancy to say no. Although it was not possible to get around this potentiality, it was necessary for me to organise the interviews around the participant's schedules and comfort levels, noticing any hesitant language as being symbolic of the interviewee's discomfort and adapting accordingly to put them at ease.

Another concern that I had for the project was the potential that these interviews could cause anxiety to me as a researcher: I have struggled with body-related issues for many years and felt concerned that the interviews could prove distressing. As has been discussed, it is not possible for researchers to disregard their own identity when researching and writing in the manner that Foucault (1965, 1980) encourages. In my case, gendered structures that have governed my identity sparked my interest in this topic, meaning that I started the project with a vested interest in the research. In this sense, it would be impossible to fully remove myself when researching. Indeed, Letherby notes that she encountered distressing experiences during her doctoral research interviews, due to the fact that they "resonated" with her own "feelings and experiences" (Letherby, 2003, p.111). There was no way to guard myself against this possibility; I wanted to avoid a hierarchical and mechanic style of interview, which meant opening myself up to be vulnerable (Gilbert, 2000, p.20). This shaped how I thought about and approached the research, in some ways seeing it as an extension of my own body narrative. By this, I mean that the project acted as a cathartic release for understanding my own difficulties with dieting. I like to think that this formed a connection between my participants and I based upon our bodily struggles, allowing me to reflect upon the insidious nature of dieting.

'The Devil's in the Discourse': Conclusion

This chapter has acted as a roadmap for the methodological approach of this thesis, as well as the instruments that I have used to explore the body and dieting. Firstly, I aimed to demonstrate why a post-structuralist feminist methodology is the most appropriate route for this thesis and that it is possible to untangle the difficulties that come along with conducting a Foucauldian feminist

research project. For post-structuralist feminists, gender is created and maintained through discourses that structure binary understandings of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' (Butler, 1988; Valocchi, 2005; Hall and Jagose, 2012; Spargo, 1999). As was discussed, post-structuralist feminist methodologies are sometimes influenced Foucault's understanding of discourse (1972, 1980). This stems from a critique of positivist methodologies and the skepticism of seeking an essential 'truth' or 'fact' (Foucault, 1980, p.48). The purpose of research, rather, should be to understand the ways that the subject is constructed through historical and social contexts (Marshall, 1996; Fadyl and Nicholls, 2013; Legrand, 2008). Here, I noted that such a position is drastically different to the work of some radical feminists, who prioritize the emphasis of the 'lived' woman's experiences (Oakley, 1981; Mackinnon, 1987). Not only does this position rest upon a "shaky definition of shared femininity" (McRobbie, 1982), but this thesis aligns itself with the post-structuralist feminist argument that experience has "no inherent essential meaning" (Weedon, 1997; Mama, 1995).

In the next section, I reflected upon the the harmonies that exist between a post-structuralist methodology and an analysis of the body and dieting. Most importantly, one only has to look at the various projects that have explored the 'female' body using Foucauldian understandings of power (see: Bartky, 1997; Bordo, 1993; Sawicki, 1991; Rail and Harvey, 1995). Indeed, a post-structuralist lens allows feminists to understand the productions of 'truth' that constitute femininity.. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the problematic elements of Foucault's work. Most importantly for this thesis, Foucault's work on power has been "curiously gender-neutral," leading some scholars to question the appropriateness of using his work in a feminist project (Balbus, 1991; O'Brien, 1999). Despite this, I support the position that Foucault's analysis of

power can act as a useful template for feminist research (Sawicki, 1991; Ramazanoglu, 2002; Brooks, 2002). Next, the chapter focused on the 'sticking point' of carrying out interviews and using a post-structuralist feminist methodology. As I noted, Foucault is critical of 'experience' as a foundation for research (Fadyl and Nicholls, 2012).

The chapter then turned to the mechanics of the thesis. Firstly, I set out the case studies that will be the focus of my analysis. As I discussed, both *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers* are suitable case studies due to their position as two of the most successful dieting companies in the UK (Wallis, 2013). Similarly, Oprah Winfrey's "omnipresent" position in the US and long history of dieting make the narratives that surround her body an important site of investigation (Aschoff, 2015, p.82; Cloud, 1996). In the following section, I set out the process of preparing for and conducting interviews with dieters and members of the fat movement. As I noted, a semi-structured approach allowed the participants to set out their thoughts and drift away from the question, which was when the most insightful information was gathered (Code, 2002; Longhurst, 2003; Gubrium and Holstein, 2002). Then, I explored the difficulties in "doing" a Foucauldian discourse analysis, concluding that it should be based around an exploration into the way that statements work to create "truths" about the body (Graham, 2005; Harwood, 2000). This will be done through the following processes: a familiarisation of the text and situating said statements within the socio-historical constructions of bodies (Wiatt, 2005; Given, 2008).

Whilst Foucault (1969) claims that researchers should write from a position of anonymity, this is not possible in feminist scholarship. Indeed, the researcher should locate their identity and privilege within the project, then reflect upon the potential power dynamics (Hartsock in McLaren, 2012;

Taylor and Vintges, 2004; Daigle, 2015). As I noted, my position as a white woman with a thin

body threw up important questions about my approach to the research. Following from Daigle

(2016), I contended that the thesis should be viewed as "storytelling", meaning that I aim to shine a

light on voices that are "not normally heard" (p.29). Although this approach does not dissolve the

responsibility of my interpretations, it potentially mitigates some of the unequal power relations

between the researcher and researched. Finally, I set out the ethical considerations undertaken

throughout the project. Most notably, I drew upon McRobbie's (1982) work into feminist ethics,

making sure that I was aware of the tentativeness of the subject throughout the interviews;

discussing one's relationship to the body is an intimate topic. Likewise, I reflected upon my own

vulnerability throughout the interview process, suggesting that there is no method for protecting

oneself from the details of the project (Letherby, 2003; Gilbert, 2000).

Chapter 4
The Dichotomy of Power in Dieting

Throughout this chapter, I harness the theoretical themes identified earlier in my thesis. In Chapter 2, I set out the dichotomy of power that has structured feminist debates on the body. The topic of dieting, along with other 'feminine' practices, has been a focal point for scholars from both sides of the discussion. Whilst some radical feminist scholars conclude that dieting is a symptom of a violent patriarchal power that dominates and oppresses women's bodies (see: Brownmiller, 1975; Mackinnon, 1989; Jeffreys, 2008, 2014), some post-feminist scholars view such practices as 'empowering' choices for the autonomous woman (see: Roiphe, 1994; Sommers, 1994; Lumby, 1997). Nevertheless, this chapter will argue that a post-structuralist feminist understanding of power is the best route for analyzing the complexities of women's relationship to the body and dieting. Drawing on the work of scholars such as Bartky (1990, 1997) and Bordo (1993), I will suggest that dieting is not a simple choice between 'oppression' and 'liberation.' Rather, micro-physics of power work to construct and maintain the body, meaning that dieting "transforms the minds of those individuals who might be tempted to resist it" (Downing, 2008, p.82; Stinson, 2001). As Foucault (1977) would argue, power is not something that can be wielded; rather, it works 'through' a body that is inscribed by culture. Thus, the goal of this chapter is to develop this theory in practice with the collected empirical material, noting how the dichotomy of power plays out in women's everyday experiences of dieting[17]

The first part of the chapter draws on the work of some radical feminists who view dieting as a symptom of oppressive, patriarchal power (see: Greer, 1971; Brownmiller, 1975; Currie, 1992;

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[17] I am indebted to the help of Dr. Nicola Smith, who has helped me shape the language of the thesis through our many fruitful conversations.

MacKinnon, 1989). For these scholars, weight-loss practices are a form of mutilation that demonstrates women's submission to an inferior status (Jeffreys, 2000, p.422; Dworkin, 1975). Indeed, some have suggested that this is because society regards women as 'bad,' meaning that their bodies are punished by self-starvation and grueling exercise regimes. In their eyes, this is intrinsically linked to men's fear of women's natural power; they are forced to become smaller in order to appease such fears (Dworkin, 1989; Johnson, 1974; Clark and Lewis, 1977). Here, I locate this theory within my conversations with dieters, some of whom had experienced oppression because of their weight. In contrast, the next section sets out the notion that dieting is an individualised choice and that weight-loss can help women to feel liberated (see: Sommers, 1995; Paglia, 1992; Lumby, 1997; Walters, 1990; Wolf, 2013). These scholars contend that it is hypocritical for some radical feminists to dictate how women use their bodies, the liberation granted by feminism should allow women to lose weight if it is 'empowering' to do so (Walters, 1990, p.100). Indeed, unlike radical feminists, some post-feminist scholars argue that women need to lose the "victim-ideology" encouraged by the second-wave of the movement. In this section, I note that some of my participants expressed their joy at losing weight and gaining "control" over their bodies. For post-feminist scholars, this is a choice that women should be allowed to make without judgement from other feminists.

In order to transcend this dichotomy, the third part of the chapter draws upon the work of post-structuralist feminist scholars to argue that the aforementioned arguments present a simplistic conception of powers relationship to the body (see: (Bartky, 1997; Grosz, 1994; Bordo, 1993; Germov and Williams, 1999; Sobal and Maurer, 1999; Throsby, 2008). Rather than viewing dieting as a source of "oppression" or "liberation," I suggest that women have a complex understanding of

their bodies and weight-loss that should not be reduced to two binaries. Through this lens, one

should view power as a fractured and ever-present force that works through our everyday actions.

For Bartky (1990, 1997), dieting places women under the lens of the panopticon, meaning that their

weight-loss is closely monitored. Women's bodies are subject to transformations under the guise of

"self-improvement," yet this functions as a highly efficient form of social control that ensures

women do not dominate space (Bordo, 1993, p.166). Here, I refer to the process of confession

within the slimming groups, an example of how dieters are encouraged to perform self-restraint in

order to transition towards a 'good' body (Stinson, 2001; Pylypa, 1998). Likewise, at the heart of

dieting is the structuring of time. As Foucault (1977, p.151) suggests, time is a disciplinary force

that ensures the body repeats patterns and rhythms. This section will explore the ways that the

dieting body is conditioned to carefully consider and prepare one's food intake, ensuring that they

become dependent upon such a routine (Nast and Pile, 2005, p.252; Longhurst, 2001, 2005).

However, in the latter part of the chapter, I reflect upon Deveaux's (1994) criticism of some post-

structuralist feminist work on the body, arguing that feminists must be careful to not present women

as passive "dupes" of panoptic power. Rather, it is important to consider the complex relationship

that women have to their bodies and the impossibility of removing oneself from gendered

structures.

Oppression: Dieting as Violence upon the Body

As I noted in Chapter 2, some radical feminist scholars argue that beauty practices signify the way

that women's bodies are "worked upon" by patriarchal norms. Indeed, for these scholars, the

process of making oneself smaller through dieting is an act of violence against the body that

demonstrates the powerlessness of women (Greer, 1971; Brownmiller, 1975; Currie, 1992;

MacKinnon, 1989). For example, Jeffreys (2000) suggests that dieting should be considered a form

of self-mutilation that is a result of the "occupation of a despised social status under male

dominance" (p.410). Likewise, Bovey (1989, p.268) supports this point by suggesting that weight-

loss surgery is an extreme form of mutilation for when dieting fails, stating that women no longer

have to "rely on dieting to kill their bodies." When describing liposuction, she notes:

> This form of mutilation involves converting the fat into a liquefied form and inserting several long metal tubes into the skin. These cannulae are attached to a pump; when it is switched on the fat is sucked out as yellow sludge into a calibrated glass container. It is considered unwise to remove more than two kilograms at any one time. I have not seen liposuction performed but the description of the section pump and cannulae reminds me of the time I saw a dead body embalmed; then, blood and organic matter was sucked out via a cannula and pump and deposited into a glass container

Here, Bovey aims to demonstrate the lengths to which women will go to punish their bodies in

order to achieve thinness. Subsequently, some radical feminist scholars reject the post-feminist

argument that beauty regimes are an individual 'choice.' Historically, they argue, such a distinction

between the 'public' and 'private' realm has enabled the continuation of 'male

supremacy' (Jeffreys, 2005, p.10; Dworkin, 1974; MacKinnon, 1989). For example, as Raymond

(1985) notes, the prioritization of 'privacy' has meant that women's bodies have been repeatedly

"oppressed, abused, and rendered invisible" (p.85). Thus, rather than representing 'empowerment',

beauty practices are symbolic of a subordination in women that "men find so exciting" (Jeffreys,

2005, p.21).

Indeed, for these scholars, patriarchy is reliant upon the "eroticized power difference" in which one

party has to "play the girl" and be a willing participant in one's own oppression (Dworkin, 1975,

Jeffreys, 2005, cited in Sawicki, 2017). For fat women, who exist outside of the patriarchal bodily

ideal, their lives exist within a "tense and stressful straightjacket" (Sawicki, 2017, p.1). It is no

wonder, then, that women take desperate measures to lose weight. Consequently, Jeffreys (2000) is highly critical of post-structuralist scholars, such as Butler (1990), for their apparent dismissal of the "ways in which the power relationship between men and women constructs women's feelings and actions towards their bodies" (p.422). She contends that women do not have a "flexible" relationship with their bodies; they are kept under the "constraints of inferior social status" that forces them to submit to beauty norms (p.423). Certainly, in my interviews with dieters, the topic of oppression through the stigmatization of their bodies was a regular theme:

> Rosie: A couple of times, people have told me that my boyfriend is way more attractive than me and that I'm doing really well for myself. Which is awful, but I do think that's probably partly to do with my weight.
>
> Taylor: [...] people can tell that you've gained weight and it's [...] yeah [...] I constantly feel like people are judging me for it [...] it's not even about how you look, but just not even having to think about the fact that people are thinking about you.
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> Laura: there's so much pressure to have like thigh gaps and bikini bodies. I know that - when i was with my ex - I was taller than him as well so I felt like a tree all the time. I felt massive. Even now if I think about going on holiday, I think 'oh god I need to make sure that I'm toned and ready to go away' and stuff. But I think it is hard not to be influenced by celebrities. Especially when I did dancing [...] it's such a body conscious industry anyway. I don't think you can avoid it now.

Arguably, these quotes suggest that women's bodies are subject to oppressive norms based upon patriarchal constructs of "femininity." For scholars such as Jeffreys (2005, p.106), dieting and other beauty practices (such as wearing make-up or removing one's body hair), have become so normalized that they are not presented as "self-development." She criticizes the work of Peiss (1998), who contended that beauty practices allowed women to carve out communities based on a sharing of "pleasurable women's culture." However, Jeffreys rejects this, arguing that other harmful beauty practices such as "female genital mutilation and Chinese footbinding" create similar community satisfactions. Within my interviews with dieters, it was suggested that the programmes had been a damaging process with lasting impact upon their body image. As a member of either

Slimming World or *Weight Watchers*, dieters attend a weekly meeting in order to track their weight-loss and seek advice from other members (Slimming World, 2018; Weight Watchers, 2018). Jovanovski (2017, p.34) notes that such companies have begun to shift away from 'dieting' rhetoric, preferring to present their programmes as "lifestyles choices, rather than as a weight-loss diet." Rather than focusing on restriction, the companies' rhetoric centers around the notion that their members never feel hungry of deprived and that no food is off limits (Slimming World, 2017; Weight Watchers, 2017). This, however, sits in contestation with points made by some of my participants, who stated:

> Amanda: I still wasn't eating breakfasts, I don't think, so I was saving points there. But that's when it gets in your mind, it's like 'oh where can I save points?' [...] to be told that you are aren't doing enough and that you don't have enough willpower, is really degrading. It's massively degrading. It automatically suggests you aren't good enough.

> Shelley: When I look back now, a lot of it was quite unhealthy at times, because a lot of it focused on this one day a week when you get on the scale and then it doesn't necessarily [...] it's not really about health, it's about numbers [...] just everything is quantified. So, if you've lost 2 lbs then that is better than losing one pound even if you've lost two pounds next week because you know, you know, you've survived on really shitty food.

> Shelley: I think it's left me with a lot of issues that I'm still trying to deal with, because it's one thing to want to accept the way that you are but it's quite difficult when you are constantly being told that you shouldn't. Yeah and I'm still trying to […] kind of deal with that.

> Taylor: I think, inevitably, when you join a group to lose weight, if you are not losing weight, then [...] no matter what you say in the group [...] you feel like a failure. But if you are not doing well, over a series of weeks, you just feel [...] yeah [...] you just feel rubbish.

These quotations are interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, both participants imply that their weight-loss was about creating a smaller body, rather than improving their health. This is what Stinson (2001, p.91) refers to as the "anti-diet-diet", in which companies repackage weight-loss as a healthy and 'empowering' choice. Although *Weight Watchers* and *Slimming World* contend that their programmes are not restrictive, the comments about "saving points" and "surviving on shitty food" suggest otherwise. Indeed, Shelley and Amanda stated that their weight-loss was about

"numbers," implying that the end-goal was thinness rather than 'health.' Seemingly, for Amanda, the process of "saving points" was a method of restriction used to lose weight at each meeting[18].

For some radical feminists, this demonstrates the way that patriarchal power operates; women's bodies are controlled and judged by their ability to meet idealized standards of beauty perpetuated by the male gaze (Jeffreys, 2000, 2005; Greer, 1971; Brownmiller, 1977; Currie, 1992; MacKinnon, 1989). Moreover, Amanda's suggestion that she was made to feel "not good enough" for not losing weight supports Dworkin's (1974, p.33) argument that a "good woman" conforms to "what is on the surface a good woman." One might argue that Amanda's inability to conform to a "good" body meant that she was punished in the group meeting through public humiliation. Incidentally, however, Dworkin suggests that the "underlying premise of this society is that all women are bad, that we have a nature that's bad and we deserve to be punished." For example, she contends that pornography is about "punishing us to the point of annihilation" (p.34). In terms of dieting, then, one might argue that women's bodies can *never* be good enough, regardless of how much weight they lose. Through this lens, one might consider dieting to be about the act of punishing women's bodies, rather than achieving thinness. Indeed, some radical feminist scholars suggest that women's weight-loss is less about the body and more closely related to the "power dynamic between men and women." Men's desire for power can only be achieved if women are forced to "grow smaller, more dependent, and invisible" (Dworkin, 1989, p.28). As Johnson (1974) suggests, women are "seasoned to be slaves", meaning that they are conditioned into considering their state of

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[18] The term "points" refers to Weight Watchers member's food "allowance." Dieters are given a "personalised SmartPoints" allowance based upon their BMI (body mass index). The members then add up their points throughout the day to meet their "Daily SmartPoints Allowance" but must not "carry over" points onto the following day (WeightWatchers, 2017). Slimming World has a very similar programme, in which certain foods are categorized with a "higher risk" value. Rather than foods being given a numerical value, however, recipes are labelled under one of the following: Free Foods, Healthy Extras or Syns. Once dieters join Slimming World, they are given a unique diet plan that involves mixing the different food categories.

oppression as "normal" (p.56). Arguably, this is because of men's inherent "fear of women" and the "threatening environment" that their bodies represent (Clark and Lewis, 1977, p.139). For Greer (1981), this can be seen in the seemingly conflicting standards for women's bodies, they are expected to be both thin and curvy. She notes that they will always chase different bodies in order to "capitulate the demand", stating:

> The thinnest women either diet because of an imagined grossness somewhere or fret because they are not curvaceous: the curviest worry about the bounciness of their curves, or diet to lose them. The curvy girl who ought to be thin and the thin girl who ought to be curvy are offered more or less dangerous medications to achieve their aims (p.45)

Here, Greer (1981) suggests that women's bodies will never be good enough as they are expected to constantly remould themselves to fit the male design. Indeed, Bovey (1989) furthers this idea by pointing towards the "ever-widening anorexia epidemic", noting that for these women "no weight is ever low enough" (p.205). For Jeffreys (2005, p.32), dieting should be considered a human rights issue due to the potentiality of it turning into an eating disorder that leads to the death of women.

Liberation: Dieting as an Empowering Choice

Earlier in the thesis, I explored the divisions between radical feminism and post-feminism in their understandings of power and the body. Additionally, I noted that liberal feminist scholars also view the female body as a 'sacred' entity that demands individual agency in order to achieve 'equality' (Friedan, 1963; Soble, 2006). For these scholars, women need to work together to "turn away" from oppressive representations of the body and to exert control over their existence (Wolf, 1991, p.227). This section, however, will draw upon the work of some post-feminist scholars in my analysis, who view the goals of liberal feminism as 'complete' (McRobbie, 2004). In stark contrast

to the work of some radical feminists, some post-feminist scholars see beauty practices as a tool for liberation that provides women with agency over their bodies (see: Sommers, 1995; Paglia, 1992; Lumby, 1997). Anderson (2015, p.1) notes that this is because post-feminism is grounded in the belief that women have access to empowerment via individualized choices, especially by partaking in "hyper-femininity" (p.3). In particular, scholars such as Lehrman (1997) contend that women do not have to sacrifice their femininity in order to achieve equal power to men.

Rather, embracing traditional concepts of femininity is the *key* to unlocking one's power. In *Sexy Feminism*, for instance, Armstrong and Rudulph (2013) inform their readers that the "choices you make every day can turn into acts of empowerment, for yourself and womankind." Through their work, they attempt to distance themselves from the "stereotypical feminist who eschews armpit-shaving and makeup-wearing." For Walters (1990, p.100), it is hypocritical of radical feminists to suggest that their doctrine can deliver a "value-free zone" for women's bodies. The stereotypical 1970s feminist was expected to wear "long hair, no bras, batik wraparound skirts" and in the eighties the 'look' of the movement was "dungarees and short hair and bright earrings." Whilst there is nothing wrong with such fashion, it should mean that other women should be left to dress and change their bodies, as they like.

Indeed, in Paglia's essay on the pop-star *Madonna,* she argues that embodying the "eternal values of beauty and pleasure" should be at the heart of feminism (Paglia, 1990). Instead of viewing feminine practices as a 'mask', feminism needs to recognize that "we are all masks." Walters (1999) agrees, citing *Madonna* as an example of a woman using normative concepts of beauty and sexuality to demonstrate her power and financial independence (p.98). In simpler terms, this

suggests that women should be able to express themselves through makeup and body modification

without judgement from feminists. As Lazar (2009, cited in Jovanovski, 2017, p.60) notes, the

wielding of such language has become widespread throughout the dieting industry, with companies

promoting women's "basic right to be beautiful." This sentiment is encapsulated in the following

quote, in an article by Lehrman (2001) called *What Women Want*:

> Well, it seems that all women, regardless of estrogen or income levels, want to be beautiful yet
> smart, strong yet flirty, confident yet coy, passionate yet in control of every aspect of their lives: a
> combination of the best of traditional femininity and the best of traditional masculinity.

For these feminists, then, power comes from embracing normative understandings of feminine

"beauty." Instead of treating the body as a passive victim that is worked upon by patriarchal

powers, women need to stop feeling guilty for taking part in beauty practices that are looked down

upon by some radical feminists (Roiphe, 1994; Lumby, 1997; Wolf, 2013). This rhetoric is

pervasive within popular culture, with many celebrity feminists emphasizing the relationship

between feminism and women's choice to be feminine[19]. Most notably, shows such as *Sex and the*

City and *Desperate Housewives were* important in cementing this discourse throughout the 1990s

and 2000s. Although the characters helped to "rewrite the scripts" on sexuality and singlehood, the

shows placed an emphasis on the importance of engaging in normative beauty practices (Gill,

2008). Here, the "empowerment" comes from women's ability to 'please themselves' by using

beauty to make themselves feel good. In this sense, post-feminism does not seek to understand the

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[19] In 2017, the actor Emma Watson made the following statement in an issue of Vogue in response to criticism of her posing in a revealing outfit for Vanity Fair magazine: *it just always reveals to me how many misconceptions and what a misunderstanding there is about what feminism is. Feminism is about giving women choice. Feminism is not a stick with which to beat other women with. It's about freedom, it's about liberation, it's about equality. I really don't know what my tits have to do with it. It's very confusing* (Reuters 2017). Likewise, the star of *New Girl*, Zooey Deschanel defended herself against critics of feminism in an interview with *Glamour* in 2013, stating: *I'm just being myself. There is not an ounce of me that believes any of that crap that they say. We can't be feminine and be feminists and be successful?* (Jang, 2017)

reasons why young women have, for instance, dramatic cosmetic surgery (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Harris, 2004).

Thus, post-feminism encourages women to embrace the 'feminine' practices that were rejected by some radical feminists and to reap the benefits of normative beauty. Indeed, in my interviews with dieters, some participants expressed how weight-loss had been an 'empowering' tool for them:

> Laura: before I started I just felt, like, minging. I felt massive and not confident at all with anything. I used to walk around wearing huge baggy jumpers and stuff and I just hated the thought of going on a date or anything like that or people seeing me [...] I did loads of things of just trying to count calories [...] there was one where you just ate soups [...] I just did it with Cup O' Soups and it was minging [...] I really hated myself as well. I didn't realize it at the time but I really hated myself and I felt like I should just know better [...]
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> Interviewer: What happened when you changed from fad diets to doing Slimming World?
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> Laura: So, I was at home actually [...] my Mum did Slimming World and I just happened to be in her group. I just thought 'now or never' and I thought 'I'll give it a go.' I just joined up one day and realized I could actually eat food [...] in my first week, I lost 8 ½ lbs [...] it was amazing because I thought 'finally, I've got something where I don't have to starve myself.' There are other people here who know how I feel, I didn't feel guilty about eating and I started to feel good about myself again. And then I lost another two stone. I remember when I got to target just feeling good about myself. I couldn't wait until I could go out and buy new clothes and stuff. It wasn't until then that I realized that I was wearing like Size 18 jumpers and I got down to a Size 10 so I was like 'this is amazing, I don't feel guilty.'
>
> Interviewer: Do you feel there was a moment where you felt good about yourself?
>
> Laura: I think it was when I put on my favourite jumper and I realized that I looked like a drowned rat and I remember [...] I was pulling a sicky from work to go and meet my family who had gone away for the weekend and there was a pool so Mum was like 'bring your bikini' and I thought 'oh god, I haven't worn a bikini in a while.' Can you remember when there was all those ice bucket challenge things? So, when I did mine, I remember looking at the video and thinking 'I look awful.' I just felt really uncomfortable in it and then it was the same bikini I put on to go to this pool and I just thought 'oh my god, I actually feel comfortable in this and I don't mind if people see me.

Laura's weight-loss narrative implies a transition from being deeply ashamed of herself and her body ("I felt minging") to feeling much more confident and happy ("I don't mind if people see

me"). Indeed, the suggestion that she "really hated" herself demonstrates the level of pain that Laura felt prior to losing weight and the way that her body size impacted her entire life, the language used suggests that it was a distressing period for her. For some post-feminists, then, her decision to lose weight was an empowering step away from victimization and towards self-fulfillment. Whilst they would argue that being fat is not a problem in itself, women can and should choose to lose weight if it will help them feel more powerful (Lumby, 1997; Roiphe, 1994; Wolf, 2013). As I noted in Chapter 2, Roiphe (1994, p.55) is highly critical of any feminists who belittle women who "take control of their own bodies and destinies." In *The New Feminism*, Walters (1999) condemns past feminisms for their understanding of fashion and beauty as the being the sole oppressor of women, thus denying them the opportunity to decorate their bodies (p.83). She notes that women should not "withdraw from decorative culture but by openly enjoying their bodies on their own terms." In this sense, some post-feminist scholars may contend that Laura's dieting 'journey' enabled her to feel powerful in her body, rather than self-conscious and anxious. This is similar to Penny, who states:

> Penny: I think it's given me a confidence boost, so far I've just lost over a stone and I do feel more comfortable. And I feel more comfortable, I feel a lot healthier, it's not just about the way I look [...] I've noticed it in my clothes more than anything, I don't really look in the mirror and think 'wow I look really skinny' but I think that a lot of clothes are too big. So, I've started wearing a smaller dress size. I've not necessarily done it to make myself feel smaller, it's more to, get rid of the bits that I don't like. That sounds really weird, but, I don't ever want to be a stick. I know that my body shape is not like the classic, what they expect you to look like in magazines. I've got a different dream in mind to what the media says.
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> Interviewer: OK. And what would you say that is?
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> Penny: I dunno, I just think I want to be toned [...] I've got jiggly bits.

Here, Penny notes that dieting and weight-loss have enabled her to feel better about herself. Yet, she nods towards normative beauty standards ("what they expect you to look like in magazines"), demonstrating her knowledge of critiques of media. As Walter's (1999) argues, it is patronizing for feminists to assume that women are simply "oppressed" by these norms, suggesting that "others may be reveling in it, others yet may be ignoring it" (p.91). In this a way, Penny does both; whilst stating that she is not complying with normative beauty standards, she is enjoying the process of weight-loss in order to feel good about herself. She wants to rid herself of "jiggly bits" without being viewed as a victim of the media, demonstrating her awareness of mainstream ideals of beauty. By noting that she "has a different dream", Penny asserts herself as "doing as she pleases" with femininity (Genz, 2009, p.85). Walters (1999) furthers her point by contending that women's problems should not be "put down to Kate Moss and Gucci" (p.91). Rather, such symbols represent one version of femininity, which women should be free to adhere to. Quoting Oullette (2002), Genz and Brabon (2009, p.75) note that much of post-feminist rhetoric is built upon this idea of women's right to "choose" their own femininity. In contrast to the second-wave feminists that came before them, the post-feminine woman "actively demands her sovereignty - not as an object or prey - but as a feminine woman." Indeed, other participants noted that dieting has allowed them to feel "in control" of their lives and their bodies:

> Taylor: I think I generally feel a lot more in control. I'm generally quite good at being good at things [...] My weight is the thing that I'm least good at (laughs) and I think [...] it makes you feel like you're slightly more on it with life because with other things, when you aren't coping with life, nobody else can really see it. But when you're not coping in managing food, people can tell that you've gained weight and it's [...] yeah [...]

> Taylor: you know, it's not about [...] you know my consultant would be like, it's not about making a member get to a particular weight or anything. I think, inevitably, when you join a group to lose weight [...] there's a lady in my group, she's lost something like 12 stone and has managed to

massively reduce her medication and had a complete change to her health. It's so inspiring to me how life changing that is. So you've got that element which makes you feel good.

Jane: So, before I started Slimming World [...] just, yeah, unsatisfied with how I looked. I think it has something to do with the fact I teach in a girl's school and [...] um [...] they care a lot about looks, it based around aesthetic all the time. So, I just wanted to improve [...] improve in that way. It's boring things, like, it's easier to get clothes in 12's and not a 16. So, when I was doing Slimming World [...] yeah [...] I felt quite compelled by it really, not because [...] in the discussions, I appreciated those but they didn't necessarily impact me directly. I'm not sort of the best in social situations but the actual programme itself and how much it worked [...] was quite good for me.

These passages suggest that dieting can be a liberating and transformative process for women. Both participants cite a lack of confidence as symbolizing their "before" bodies, but note that the dieting programmes provided them with control over their appearance. For instance, Taylor's comment that "people can tell if you aren't coping with food" implies that her body 'gave away' the lack of control she felt over her diet. Ironically, then, restricting her food intake has allowed her to feel "free" in her body. Moreover, her comment on the "inspiring" story from her slimming group suggests that the end-goal for dieters is not necessarily thinness; rather, the objective is to become comfortable and confident in their bodies. For some post-feminists, the notion of taking control is an important one, as women's right to choose their lifestyle is an assertion of their power (see Wolf, 1994; Roiphe, 1993; Lumby, 1997).

In rejecting the victimhood proposed by the second-wave of feminism, Wolf (1993, p.xv) proclaims that women need to "consolidate their gains" in order to capitalize on "the new female power." Thus, rather than "clinging to the outdated image of ourselves as powerless", dieting can be viewed as an act of 'empowerment' that asserts a woman's control over her life. Indeed, although Jane explicitly stated that her reasons for dieting are "aesthetic", this too should be a celebrated act of power. As Whelehan contends (2000, p.4), the post-feminism of the 1990s was founded upon "the

right to consume and display oneself to best effect." Through this lens, women should not feel

guilty about being able to "have it all"; our newfound equality permits us a successful career, a

stable family and a 'hot' body. Indeed, for Walters (1999, p.2), young women of today make the

feminist movement seem outdated with its rigid conception of the 'right' type of femininity, stating:

> They are combining traditionally feminine and traditionally masculine work and clothes and
> attitudes. They are wearing a minidress one day and jeans and boots the next. When they grow up,
> they expect to be able to give birth one year and negotiate a pay rise the next.

In this sense, women's liberation can be inextricably linked to occasionally conforming with – and

enjoying – the 'ideal' version of femininity (Roberts, 2009, p.229). As Dubriwny (2013, p.15)

suggests, the 'choices' offered to women within post-feminist discourses are almost always

supported by one's alignment with traditional gender roles, the argument being that if women feel

'empowered' by this, then feminism needs to adapt. In some ways, we can understand post-

feminism as (purporting to be) the second-wave of feminisms' cooler and more in-touch sibling;

whereas some radical feminists said 'no, you can't', post-feminism's rallying cry is 'yes, you can,

this is what liberation should be!' Dieting, then, is one outlet for this celebration of individualized

power. In 2018, one can see how this message still permeates dieting discourses, with the

'empowering' process of weight-loss being praised for allowing women to 'love' their bodies (Gill

and Ellias, 2014; O'Brien and Hallstein, 2011; Roth et al, 2012).

Nevertheless, as I outlined in Chapter 2, this approach has been heavily criticized by feminist

scholars (see: Whelehan, 2000; Gill, 2007). For Gill (2007, p.257), this post-feminist concept of

'liberation' is dependent upon the restriction and discipline of the body; today, a "sleek, controlled

figure is essential for portraying success, and each part of the body must be suitably toned,

conditioned, waxed, moisturized, scented and attired." Other scholars have taken issue with this seemingly paradoxical perspective too, with Faludi (1992) contending that it represents a "backlash" against the true values of feminism that ensures women's consumption of beauty products (Genz, 2009, p.21). As Whelehan (2000, p.17) suggests, the second-wave of feminism was accused of representing "crimes against women" and that "equality is incompatible with femininity." She furthers this by contending that the 'girl power' encouraged by post-feminist scholars "fuels the myth that young women are 'in control' of their lives" and, consequently, offers "a more positive liberatory message to young women than contemporary feminism ever could." In their eyes, post-feminism does not represent real 'choices' for women. Instead, it repackages the old restrictions created by patriarchal femininity and presents them as 'liberation' (Penny, 2011; Whelehan, 2000). For example, Levy (2009, p.197) offers a scathing attack on the "plastic stereotypes" of femininity proposed by post-feminism, suggesting that it is time to admit that "the emperor has no clothes."

No (wo)Man's Land: The In-between Nature of Panoptic Power in Dieting

This section contests the aforementioned scholar's understanding of power, preferring to follow a post-structuralist conception of its relationship to the body. Post-structuralists understand power to be a fractured and ubiquitous force that works 'through' our everyday actions (Foucault, 1977; Dowling, 1994; McNay, 2013). For Foucault, the eighteenth century stood out as producing bodies as "raw materials" which are moulded "by and for the operation of power" (Dowling, 2008, p.78). Rather than viewing power as a unified and sovereign force, Foucault presented power as being encompassed by ubiquitous "regimes, systems of surveillance and normalizing tactics" (1975, p. 170-228). In other words, power has become an "increasingly subtle and insidious" force that seeks

to "transform the minds of those individuals who might be tempted to resist it" (Downing, 2008, p. 82). This means that throughout history, humans have been subject to strict powers that physically restrain the body, such as torture.

Yet, modern societies are able to control subjects through their movements, gestures and attitudes, creating a body that is 'docile' (Foucault, 1977, p.136). The 'docility' of a body is demonstrated through its ability to be "subjected, used, transformed and improved" via the everyday operations of power (p.136). As I noted in Chapter 2, one way that bodies become 'docile' is through the effect of the panopticon, Foucault's metaphorical prison system that symbolises society's relationship to power (1975, p.201). Here, he cites the fractured state of power that ensures the effectiveness of a panoptic society:

> The ceremonies, the rituals, the marks by which the sovereign's surplus power was manifested are useless. There is a machinery that assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium, difference. Consequently, it does not matter who exercises power. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine (p.202)

This description of an omnipresent, fractured power sparked important discussion about the body, gender and femininity for some post-structuralist feminists (Bartky, 1997; Grosz, 1994; Bordo, 1993; Germov and Williams, 1999; Sobal and Maurer, 1999; Throsby, 2008). These writings sought to transcend the concept of a woman that was solely oppressed or liberated by a unified source of power. Rather, they contended that power works through women's bodies via daily acts of self-surveillance surrounding beauty (Stinson, 2001). In terms of beauty practices, then, the body has become an "object, target and instrument" of power that causes women to carry out body modification (Grosz, 1994, p.149). For example, in *Reshaping the Female Body*, Davis (1995) explores the dilemma faced by women who choose to have cosmetic surgery. Here, she suggests

that it is problematic to assume that women are "cultural dopes" at the mercy of "misogynist, knife-happy surgeons" (p.5). In contrast, she suggests that women "paradoxically feel empowered or liberated" by the beauty norms which supposedly "constrain and enslave them" (p.55). However, for this thesis, the most notable feminist interpretation of Foucault's 'docile bodies' comes from Bartky's (1990, 1997) scholarship on power and the body. Throughout her work, Bartky (1990, 1997) contends that women are encouraged by cultural norms to "engage in pursuit of the 'right' body size and shape" (Blood, 2004, p.38). The following passage sets out her interpretation of the panopticon in relation to women's beauty practices:

> The woman who checks her make-up half a dozen times a day to see if her foundation has caked or her mascara has run, who worried that the wind or the rain may spoil her hairdo, who looks frequently to see if her stockings have bagged at the ankle or who, feeling fat, monitors everything she eats, has become, just as surely an inmate of the Panopticon, a self-policing subject, a self-committed to a relentless self-surveillance. This self-surveillance is a form of obedience to patriarchy. It is also a reflection in the woman's consciousness of the fact that she is under self-surveillance in ways that he is not, not whatever she may become, she is importantly a body designed to please or excited. There has been induced in many women, then, in Foucault's words, a 'state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power (Bartky, 1997, p.81)

In this sense, women's bodies are created and sustained through operations of panoptic power. As Malson (2003, p.172) contends, this creates an "economy of visibility" around the 'feminine' body, meaning that women are subject to constant modifications and improvements that align with the 'ideal.' Within her work, she explores the example of the anorexic woman as a symbol of this normalizing gaze; the "self-observation, examination and documentation" she places herself under "not only controls but also produces" her subjectivity (p.171). Similarly, in terms of dieting, Bartky (1990) agrees that the restriction women place upon themselves represents the internalization of the gaze of a "panoptic male connoisseur" (p.72).

Dieting, for Bartky, celebrates women's ability to discipline "the body's hunger" and treat the body as "one's enemy, an alien being bent on thwarting the disciplinary project" (p.66). The stereotypically "feminine" woman is "defined more in terms of what she isn't than what she is" (Bartky, 1990, p.244). Certainly, in terms of the body, women are celebrated for having "a lack of" fat and their ability to keep their bodies small. Whilst the "fashion" for bodies has developed, the standards for "acceptable bodies" has always prioritized and encouraged slenderness (McLaren, 2012, p.93). As Bartky (1990, p.26) notes, "massiveness, power, or abundance" in women is "met with distaste." For Bordo (1993, p.166), this means that a large proportion of many women's lives is centred around the pursuit of thinness and the "conviction of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough." She notes that the "discipline and normalization" of feminine bodies needs to be "acknowledged as an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control." Indeed, women's desire to take up as "little space as possible" is deeply symbolic of their place within society (Bartky, 1997, p.11).

Thus, much like the prisoners of the panopticon, dieters "internalize the critical gaze of others" and "subject themselves to careful self-examination" (Stinson, 2001, p.9). Indeed, Stinson (2001, p.9) notes that this never-ending process of body monitoring is intensified when tied to the act of confession. In my interviews with dieters, confession was seemingly at the heart of the *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers* programmes. At the weekly meetings, the members spend time discussing and analyzing their food choices and exercise habits, as well as 'preparing' for upcoming events where food is involved. This topic of confession is touched upon in the following excerpts:

Rosie: So, you all sit in a circle and then she goes round the circle and you have to talk about your week. It's really boring, for a start. There's like 25 people and they are like 'oh I've had a bit of a bad week because it was somebody's birthday on Monday and then I had to eat some cake.

Sarah: [...] you'd get weighed, then they'd do the thing where they'd say what everyone had lost. It was supposed to be encouraging, apparently. They'd say it was encouraging because, say you didn't lose much, the person next to you would try and encourage you, like, 'if you try really hard, you'll do better.'

Taylor: So, yeah [...] it tends to be about having somebody's birthday coming up, and, yeah, identifying that just because you are going through that, then it doesn't mean you have to spend the whole week eating rubbish. Yeah, it is one of the only things that has worked for me, but then also, it can lead you into a crisis point where you think [...] the only way I can lose weight is by going into group and eating a particular set of foods.

Taylor: Generally, if you've lost weight, you'll only talk in terms of absolute numbers. Even if you've had a really bad week, they'll still say, you've lost three and a half stone or whatever. Then they'll ask questions like [...] 'are you feeling ok?', 'are you happy?' then they'll ask you how this week's gone, because obviously, f you've gone on a cruise [...] then if you've gained weight, they don't care, they're just happy to get back and get back on plan.

In this sense, the meetings encourage the dieter to "confess her transgressions" such as over-indulging on cake ("I've had a bad week"), which allows them to absorb information from the slimming club about how to be 'good.' Ultimately, the process allows the dieters to follow the path towards "redemption" (Stinson, 2001, p.9). Moreover, Pylypa (1998, p.27) suggests that dieting creates bodies that are "controlled, habituated to external regulation and self-restraint." One can view the process of this production within the aforementioned quotations: the dieters attend the meetings to receive guidance about the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' foods; their bodies are closely monitored through weekly weigh-ins and they are consistently brought back to "the plan" if their body-size begins to increase. The repetition involved, such as the weekly summing-up of everyone's food intake, sharpens the lens of the panopticon; when the dieters eat outside of the slimming group meeting, they will still be aware of "the eye of the supervisor" (Foucault, 1977, p. 202). In Rosie's comment, for example, the hypothetical member who "had to eat some cake" would have had to make a mental note to tell the group about their 'bad' behaviour in the following week. This creates a reliance on the group meetings and the dieting plan, as demonstrated in

Taylor's comment that "the only way I can lose weight is by going to group." In this sense, like

Foucault's description of the soldier whose body is controlled via self-surveillance, the body of a

dieter can be "made; out of a formless clay" (1975, p.135).

Moreover, Bovey (1994, p.30) suggests that the use of shame is intrinsic in process of confession,

noting the religious undertones of the "fat sinner" who "sets out to become the thin saint." Indeed,

Shelley supports this when reflecting upon her time at Slimming World, stating:

> Shelley: I think there is something about having to go and having to have it recorded which meant that if you knew that you had to have yourself weighed that week then it felt like a bigger deal than if you were doing it yourself. Because obviously you were in front of lots of different things, they do ask you 'so did you lose this week?' or 'did you gain this week?' so there is a sense that if you put on weight, it is a fail and you have to - kind of - explain yourself.
>
> Interviewer: So did you feel that shame plays a part in it?
>
> Shelley: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah I would say so. There's a lot of shame.

In this sense, the process of "confessing" one's gain can be a shameful experience that reinforces

the association between weight-gain and failure. Indeed, in his later work, Foucault (1980, quoted

in Spitzack, 1990, p.59) referred to the confession as a "ritual that unfolds within a power

relationship." As Stinson (2001, p.211) argues in her study of commercial weight-loss groups,

members "speak often of frustration, ambivalence, shame, and guilt." This is because the 'solution'

to fatness is both "individualized and depoliticized", meaning that weight-gain is the symptom of

the dieter's "bad" choices. Indeed, Spitzack (1990, p.29) argues that this is similar to historical

discussions in the medical community about how diseases can be controlled through "willpower."

Quoting Sontag (1979, p.55), she notes that diseases were seen to have stemmed from "social

deviation." One only needs to view the way in which fatness is portrayed in the mainstream media

to understand the emphasis placed upon dieter's "responsibility" to lose weight themselves. Fat

bodies are regularly referred to as "diseased", with fatness being labelled "an epidemic" that will

lead to a "doomsday" scenario of an "overweight" nation. The public are consistently told that they

need to "take steps to help themselves" (BBC, 2014), reinforcing the idea that the body is symbolic

of one's strength of character. Often, fat bodies are treated as a freakish spectacle, with shows such

as *The Biggest Loser* and *You Are What You Ea*t showcasing fat individual's weak-will power and

repugnant bodies. A notable example of this can be seen in the 2012 TV show *In Obesity: The Post*

Mortem, in which pathologists cut open an anonymous woman's body to issue a warning about the

the "effects" of obesity. Archer (2016) explores how the dehumanization of the deceased woman

emphasises the responsibility of individuals in disciplining their bodies:

> By using this woman's body to speak for her unique history and experience, it is intimated that obesity is the
> fault of the individual, rather than an indicator of intersections of poverty and class, genetics, medical issues
> and psychology. The body, taken completely out of context, becomes dehumanized. Such portrayals can only
> intensify the pathologising of the plump, fuelling prejudice of a growing number of people. The programme is
> pure spectacle.

This representation of the fat body helps us to understand the dynamics of the slimming group

meetings and the emphasis on individual responsibility and will-power. Indeed, for fat women, they

face the "double burden" of being both "diseased" and failing to fulfill their "feminine" duties of

heteronormative attractiveness (Cooper, 1998). Thus, it is their personal choice to succeed in the

dieting plans, lose weight and become a "better" woman. To reiterate Spitzack (2011, p.59) point,

the meetings are presented as a useful way for the dieters' to understand their 'wrongdoing' and

fully commit to their journey towards a better self. In the name of female health, dieters are forced

to see the 'truth' about themselves through continuous self-inspection until they are granted

absolution by those who present such truths. For instance, Sarah recalled that if she did not lose

weight in the meetings, she would be told: "If you try really hard, you'll do better." Likewise,

Amanda noted a moment when the group leader told her, "Pick yourself up, you'll do better next week." Again, this demonstrates the way that the meetings act as a disciplinary tool for dieters to remain "on track", whilst ensuring that the desire for weight-loss feels like it has come from within the members; with enough control and "willpower," they can *finally* achieve a "good" body.

Alongside confession, another way in which power disciplines the body in dieting is via the structuring of time. Referring to the structuring of the prison, Foucault (1977) notes that punishment is both "structured" and "rule-governed", ensuring that "corresponding practices of surveillance keep prisoners in line" (p.151) This description encapsulates dieter's experiences of *Weight Watchers* and *Slimming World*: time is used as a way to monitor the dieter's experiences of the programmes and organize their food habits. Most notably, like the bell described by Foucault (1975), dieter's time is partitioned into a "before" and "after" body. This narrative can be located within both *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers'* 'Slimming Success Stories' within their magazines and online:

> Ruth: I now realize how little confidence I had before. I've been on the plan for two years and I've lost more than 4st so far. My friends tell me that I walk with my head held higher and I seem much happier. I've started paying more attention to my appearance too. I never wore make-up before, but now I love experimenting with it (Weight Watchers, 2012, p.23)
>
> Gabby: I've always wanted to wear a pencil skirt. Now that I've lost weight, I feel confident enough to pull it off (Weight Watchers, 2012, p.23)

Prior to their weight-loss, the women's refusal to wear "nice" clothes is demonstrative of the ways in which fat women are not supposed to engage with typically "feminine" regimes such as wearing make-up or revealing outfits (Pausé and Wykes, 2016, p.144). Their bodies are deemed "distasteful" and are, consequently, rendered invisible (Bartky, 1997, p.101). In contrast, the dieters

"final" body is presented as being distinctly separate from their fat bodies, revealing the individual

as "disciplined subject" that can exercise "control and restraint" over consumption as well as taking

up as "little space as possible" (Throsby, 2008, p.120; Bartky, 1997, p.101). At the heart of this

narrative is the use of the timetables to plan one's food and "prepare" for the potentiality of being

faced with "temptation." In the magazines, templates of possible timetables allow dieters to plan

ahead for their week, as well as big occasions such as summer or Christmas holidays. Indeed, the

Slimming Success Stories proudly describe the perceived relationship between weight-loss and

timetabling:

> Planning was also key. I'd sit down for half an hour when the kids were in bed and plan the family meals for a week. I'd then write a shopping list and stick to the foods on it. I'd also track religiously on the app, using my weekly SmartPoints allowance if I wanted a treat (Weight Watchers, 2017)
>
> Planning and prepping meals in advance has been an important part of my slimming success. I'll go ahead for busy days by cooking up batches of our favourite dishes to freeze (Slimming World, 2017)

A similar thread emerged in my conversations with dieters:

> Shelley: [...] there was a lot of writing stuff down, food diaries and calculations and thinking about how much it is worth in terms of what you are eating.
>
> Jane: Yeah it would be something we'd do at the end of the day. We are really responsible and organized (laughs). It was quite hard to do! But yeah we would try and spend time at the end of the day just jotting everything down.
>
> Sandra: Plan for it. If you know you are going to go on a splurge this weekend then think about it on the Monday, not on the Saturday. Which I suppose, really, is sensible advice because you wouldn't be there if you didn't want to lose the weight. You know, it is up to you to plan it. It is up to you to stick to the diet if you want to lose weight.

As Foucault (1977) argued, timetables are the "first stage in disciplining time" by working to

establish rhythms and repetition. In *Discipline and Punish*, he specifically cites the opening-bell of

the school or factory as signifying the division of time and enabling the entrenchment of

disciplinary practices; this regularity of action means the body is "constantly applied to its

exercise" (p.151). The same can be applied to the aforementioned quotations: dieters are encouraged to rigidly structure their lives around eating, planning foods, scheduling times to eat and anticipating 'bad' days that are commonplace in dieting plans. For post-structuralists, such careful consideration and preparation of one's food intake is intrinsically linked to systems of power.

Indeed, the dieters treat their bodies as a 'machine' that is being encouraged to optimize its capacities, leading to a reprogramming of the way in which women see food and their bodies (Nast and Pile, 2005, p.252; Longhurst, 2001; Longhurst, 2005). Food and dieting are not simply "part of the day" for dieters, it becomes an area of focus in which the dieter's need to train the body and the mind. This obsessive and meticulous planning of one's food intake can be associated with signs of eating disorders. For example, sufferers of Anorexia Nervosa have a "bizarre preoccupation with food" in a relentless chase for a thin body (Bordo, 1993, p.55; Shilling, 2012). Yet, as feminists have argued, we need to blur the lines between what we consider to be 'disordered' and healthy eating; why is it unhealthy to starve oneself of food but it is healthy to spend hours obsessing over what to eat and when? In fact, Brown argues that most women spend so much time obsessing over their hatred for their body that it stops them achieving their full potential (Brown, 1985; Heyes, 2007, p.69). Bordo (1993, p.59) argues that, rather than the anorexic and bulimic signifying "faulty thinking", they are reflective of a normalization of a dieting culture in which total control is encouraged. Indeed, Rosie suggests that the constant desire to succeed in her weight-loss left her feeling very unhappy:

> On the diets, you end up eating things that you wouldn't normally eat like Warburton sandwich thins [...] so I'd take a picture of my meals for Instagram and track it all on my phone and if I forgot to track things on my

phone then i would have a bit of a stressful evening trying to remember how much stuff weighed. When I was really on it, I was weighing stuff [...] I was weighing it out and blah blah blah [...] and trying to do some exercise and panicking if I didn't [...]

Here, we can see how the structuring of one's time around food can become both all-consuming and exhausting. For many dieters, these practices continue over a lifetime; once member's achieve their 'target' weight, they are encouraged to remain 'on track' by continuing the programme either officially or unofficially. As Coleman (2010, p.266) suggests, dieting should not be considered a "one-off successful period of time" but rather "a process that is returned to again and again." Thus, once dieters leave their slimming groups, the panoptic lens is still omnipresent; they become an "objectified and controlled" source of dieting programmes even after they have reached their "goals" (Jardine, 2005, p.71).

Nevertheless, it is important to consider whether some elements of this position reinforces the feminist dichotomy of power. Here, it is useful to draw upon Deveaux's (1994) criticism of some post-structuralist feminist work on dieting. With a focus on Bartky's work, Deveaux suggests that this position can treat women as "cultural sponges" rather than "active agents, who are both constituted by, and reflective of, their cultural contexts" (p.217). This is supported by Jovanovski (2017, p.34), who contends that an overemphasis on the "despotic elements of women's restrictive food practices" has led to a narrow discussion of bodies and dieting. For her, Bartky's representation of women as "powerless and innocent victims of patriarchal social structures" has problematic consequences for feminist interpretations of the body (Jovanovski, 2015, p.217). Indeed, the "woman-as-panopticon" argument is seemingly reminiscent of some radical feminist work on the body (see: Jeffreys, 2005; Greer, 1971; Brownmiller, 1975; Currie, 1992). Heyes and Bordo (1993), for example, reveal that they were once active members of a commercial weight-loss

group despite being feminist scholars. In a similar criticism of some radical and post-feminist scholars, this suggests that some post-structuralist feminist scholars fall into the 'oppression' camp of the dichotomy of power.

Rather than arguing that dieters live 'under' the panopticon, some scholars need to draw distinction between the imprisoned soldier in Foucault's analysis of docile bodies and the dieter who can "withdraw at any time without explanation or penalty" (Jovanovski, 2017, p.34). Moreover, there were many moments throughout my conversations with dieters in which they contested the portrayal of them as vapid receivers of oppression. In some instances, participants were openly critical of dieting culture in general, expressing their disdain for *Weight Watchers* and *Slimming World*. Interestingly, these participants indicated that they would return to the programmes, despite their understandings of the gendered discourses intrinsic to dieting narratives. Here, we can infer that some post-structuralist feminists need to 'muddy the waters' when discussing panoptic power, dieting and the body; discourses that structure the "feminine" body are so pervasive that women who are critically aware can feel obliged to carry out self-surveillance practices. As Deveaux (1994, p.215) maintains, it is simplistic to view women's relationship to dieting as a "totalizing picture." Indeed, these inconsistencies are demonstrated in the following quotations:

> Rosie: every time I've stopped doing a diet, I have put on all of the weight and more. But even now, I'm like 'ooo I should probably do one of those diets' and I have to remind myself why I stopped doing them in the first place. On reflection, it's affected my relationship with food in a way which is quite difficult to prepare for. I'm probably going to be overweight [...] I look chubby, but you wouldn't say 'she looks morbidly obese' but I'm always going to be this way so I'm caught between caring and not caring, so I wish I hadn't done anything in the first place.

> Amanda: [...] you will at some point not lose weight, it will slow down, you will feel more depressed, then you start eating again because it is the only thing you enjoy and you've not been allowed to do it for however long. Then you can pay £15 to subscribe again a year later, like, it's a horrible loop. It makes you want to do it yourself but then you think, well, without the shame and it is a shame, because you do shame yourself. Because it's that thing of 'oh I won't do that because

> I've got to go and weigh myself, because, imagine the shame if you've put on weight. It shames you
> into doing it, it's self-policing.

These quotes demonstrate how dieters grapple with the complexities of dieting. The notion of being

"caught between caring and not caring" symbolizes the pervasive nature of panoptic power; dieters

may be critical of body narratives yet still feel compelled to lose weight. Here, we can draw upon

Bordo's (1993, p.30) work; after losing weight on a national weight-loss programme, her

colleagues viewed her choice as "inconsistent and hypocritical, given my work." This demonstrates

the difficult choice with which some women grapple: does one attempt to lose weight and be

considered a 'bad' feminist *or* reject dieting but endure the daily hostilities that come with being a

fat women? Rothblum (1994) approaches this question by arguing that women can "recognize the

social control of women's appearance" but still "act and look in ways that make us feel beautiful."

Indeed, as I noted in Chapter 3, my own desires to remain thin (at all costs) have often left me

feeling like a 'bad' feminist or a hypocrite.

Here, it is important to reflect upon Cressida Heyes' article '*Foucault Goes to Weight*

Watchers' (2007). Through an ethnographic study of *Weight Watchers*, Heyes explores the inner

conflict that arises from being a feminist who participates in dieting, noting:

> It feels terribly abject to hate one's body, and doubly so when as a 'third wave' feminist I often felt guilty
> about having what seemed like such stereotypically feminine, white, middle-class and heteronormative
> preoccupations.

Similar to this chapter, Heyes goes on to resist Bartky and Bordo's interpretation of the docile

bodies thesis, suggesting that this "thrall to an oppressive aesthetic" may create oversimplified

discussions of the body and power (p.64). Yet, unlike this chapter, Heyes draws upon Foucault's later work, *The Use of Pleasure* (volume 2 of *History of Sexuality*), noting how dieting is sold as a process of self-improvement. Indeed, she demonstrates how companies have repackaged the language of self-care used by feminists to encourage women to 'work' on themselves via weight-loss.

Thus, feminist research should not condemn or remove the agency of women partaking in practices of normalized femininity (Stinson, 2001, p.213). When one grows up in a culture of ubiquitous representations of idealized bodies, it's impossible not to be tempted by the idea that weight-loss will bring you happiness. We need to contest the idea that women are "fully complicit in their own subordination" (Sedgwick, 2014, p.28) and instead explore the unstable relationship that we have with dieting. Whilst it is seemingly impossible to exist outside the realm of the panoptic lens, this does not mean that women are blank canvases on which culture can be inscribed.

'Here I Am, Stuck in The Middle With You!' Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the complicated, often messy, relationship that women have with dieting and the body. Although there is a tension in feminist theory between the notion of 'oppression' and 'liberation', which plays out in dieting, this chapter explored how power exists in the everyday practices of doing 'femininity' (Bartky, 1990, 1997; Bordo, 1993; Sedgwick, 2014; Rothblum, 1994; Deveaux, 1994). In this sense, the chapter drew upon the intersections between post-structuralist feminist scholarship and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) to 'get past' the dichotomy of power within dieting.

In the first section of the chapter, I set out the 'oppression' thesis: for some radical feminists, dieting is an act of violence committed against the body that is a direct result of patriarchal power (Jeffreys, 2005; Dworkin, 1974; MacKinnon, 1989; Johnson, 1974). Rather than viewing dieting as a choice that can benefit the individual, these scholars argue that we should consider it an act of self-mutilation, on par with female genital mutilation (Jeffreys, 2005). Here, I explored some of my interviews with dieters in which they suggested that their experiences of the programmes were oppressive (Dworkin, 1974, p.33). For example, both Amanda and Shelley contended that being members of slimming clubs made them feel deeply ashamed about their bodies, leading them to damaging behaviours. Thus, these scholars would suggest that dieting is not about weight-loss per se, rather, it is about making women's bodies weak and passive to male structures (Johnson, 1974). In stark contrast, some post-feminist scholars view dieting and other beauty practices as a form of individualized empowerment for women (Wolf, 1993; Sommers, 1995; Paglia, 1992; Lumby, 1997). Instead of viewing women as victims of an oppressive form of power, they contend that femininity should be embraced and enjoyed; women should be allowed to choose to modify their bodies (Walters, 1999). For example, Laura's dieting journey suggested that women are able to feel powerful via dieting, repeatedly contending that weight loss gave her a 'confidence boost.' In this sense, these scholars agree that power is a force that can be wielded to embolden the individual.

Nevertheless, this chapter drew upon the 'meeting points' between *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and post-structuralist feminist work on the body to explore the everyday practices of dieting (Foucault, 1977). The body becomes an object of power that is transformed through self-surveillance (Grosz, 1994; Stinson, 1994; Heyes, 2006). Here, I noted that many of my participants engaged in disciplinary acts, through the monitoring of their food and changing bodies, as well as

the "confession" of such "progress" during the slimming meetings (Stinson, 2001). For example, as Shelley and Jane noted, the process involved the constant monitoring of one's food intake and planning for potential engagement with "bad" food. This structuring of time around food is important in establishing routines that work to discipline one's movements and thoughts (Foucault, 1977, p.151).

However, the final part of the chapter followed Deveaux's (1994) criticism of Bartky (1990, 1997), which contends that some post-structuralist feminist analysis of the body treats women like "cultural sponges." Here, I noted that it is important for feminist scholars to avoid falling into a description of power as an 'oppressive' force. For example, some analysis of panoptic power treats women as 'blank canvases' that absorb norms of femininity. Yet, in my discussions with dieters, it was clear that they were both active agents and conflicted in their relationship to the body.

Chapter 5
The 'O' Factor: Foucault, Race and Oprah's Body Journey

Within Eurocentric beauty ideals, thinness and whiteness are intertwined (see: Patton, 2006, p.41; White, 2010; Hammonds, 2004; hooks, 1981, 1989, 2000, 2006; Cooper, 2016; Davis, 2011; Rollins, 1991; Witt, 1994; Griffin, 1996; Shaw, 2006). This means that black women are subjected to disciplinary powers in a different - and often, more intense - way than white women. Throughout this chapter, I will draw upon the aforementioned scholarship and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* to reach conclusions about the historical and sociocultural messages that surround the body of Oprah Winfrey and her ties to *Weight Watchers*, noting how black women's bodies are often "written by other texts" (Hobson, 2012, p.50).

The first part of the chapter will situate Oprah Winfrey's dieting journey within the historical context of the black woman's body, noting that the impact of slavery on black bodies is yet to be undone (Hine et al, 1995, p.8; Poran, 2006; hooks, 1992; Collins, 1993, 2005). Most notably, the body of the black woman is often positioned into the binary of a 'Mammy' or a 'Jezebel .' The 'Mammy' figure acted as a juxtaposition for white standards of beauty, presenting black women as being 'cantankerous' servers and nurturers (Fleming, 2000, p.123; Reeve, 2015, p.175). In contrast, black women are often presented as hyper-sexualized 'Jezebel s' who will entice white men away from their wives. Despite both stereotypes being polar opposites of one another, they both exist to present black women's bodies as "out of control" and in need of discipline (Joseph, 2009, p.238; Lelwicka, 2002, p.58).

The following section will discuss the changing roles of black women in dieting discourse and how it has affected their disciplinary practices. Scholars note that the class mobility of black women has pressured them to comply with white standards of beauty, a shift that can be traced back to the 'Diet Dreams Come True' episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (Kyrölä, 2016, p.805; Thompson, 2009; Suddath, 2011). Here, I will draw on the work of Patton (2006) and Joseph (2009) to explore how the black woman's body became disciplined through the white, male gaze. Indeed, Oprah's partnership with *Weight Watchers* symbolises the shift in control of black femininity away from the Mammy/Jezebel binary towards Eurocentric understanding of beauty (Farrell, 2011, p.153; Joseph, 2009; hooks, 1989).

The next section will explore how the use of soul food in Oprah's *Weight Watchers* recipe book is deeply symbolic of a shift in the way that black women have been re-positioned in dieting discourse. For Thompson, black women are often positioned as 'good' or 'bad' consumers of soul food in neoliberal discourse, leading to a constant affirmation of the "proper social order" (Thompson, 2015, p.806; Magubane, 2008, p.234). The use of healthy soul food recipes demonstrate the ways in which black women have become intertwined with pervasive dieting discourses; soul food was a proud African American tradition with historical links to slavery, it's adoption within a *Weight Watchers* recipe book is representative of black women's increasing intertwining with body surveillance (Thompson, 2015, p.806).

The final section of the chapter, however, will explore the hostile environment that black women are often met with when they do conform to white standards of beauty. Arguably, Oprah can be considered as a 'modern Mammy' figure due to her body being considered as one of "excess" (Jean

and Feagin, 1998, p.1; Kuck, 2014). As black feminist scholars have argued, the Mammy's 'soft' figure brings white people comfort about their status as recipients of black women's "nurturing" nature. Thus, whilst black women are encouraged to discipline their bodies, when they do so they are met with disdain and resentment (Jewell, 1993, p.185; Harris and Watson, 2015, p.44; Fuller, 2001; Ritterhouse, 2009). Indeed, it seems that for Oprah and other black women, this represents a double burden. Whilst they are expected to discipline their bodies to meet heteronormative white standards, they are faced with resentment when they do lose weight due to the white discomfort that surrounds the thin, black woman (Harris and Watson, 2015).

The Mammy and the Jezebel : situating Oprah's Weight-loss Within Historical Representations of the Black Woman's Body

There has been a plethora of work from black feminist scholars about the significance of the disciplining of black women's bodies throughout history, which has often fallen into the binary stereotypes of the 'Mammy' and the 'Jezebel ' (Collins, 1986, 2002, 2004, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991, 1993; Taylor, 1998; White, 2010; Hammonds, 2004; hooks, 1981, 1989, 2000, 2006; Cooper, 2016; Davis, 2011; Rollins, 1991; Witt, 1994; Griffin, 1996; Shaw, 2006).

As Patton (2006, p.36) suggests, the black 'feminine' body been "inextricably bound" with notions of black inferiority and structural racism. Walcott (2003, p.89) supports this in the following quote, suggesting that black bodies have traditionally been treated as a "blank canvas to be written on and inscribed" by slavers:

> Slavery has had an enormous unacknowledged impact on how we might think about bodies in the West. The operationalization of power on bodies to mark, discipline and control can be understood as enacted through the very enslavement of bodies. Thus the discourse and realities have come to

mark how we see and think about bodies, especially black bodies, and blackness (…) ideas which tie black bodies to nature labour and savagery pervade our imagistic landscapes.

Here, Walcott (2003, p.89) lays out the ways in which black people were "subjected to certain regimes of truth" that positioned them as 'objects.' In stark contrast, white people have always been able to "constitute themselves as subjects." Therefore, black people are like the prisoner in the panopticon; they are the "objects of information, never a subject in communication" (Yancy, 2004, p.111). Elliot (2014, p.123) presents Foucault's (1977) work as making a distinction between "elegant means of control" and the discipline used to "maintain a system of slavery, which he sees as purely physical."

However, Yancy (2004, p.111) rejects the idea that slavery was an 'elegant' form of discipline, arguing that its effects are still being felt today. He contends that the first black body "placed in shackles" marked the disciplining of all black bodies as understanding the 'truth' of their "inferiority," leading to self-doubt and low self-esteem amongst the black community that still penetrates today's society. Additionally, Wanzo (2015, p.43) suggests that it is difficult for black people to "narrate history's role in shaping the present", especially when slavery and Jim Crow laws are treated in "mainstream politics as finite traumas." Indeed, scholars such as Ehlers (2010, p. 10) note that the impact of slavery on black bodies has 'yet to be undone':

> [...] black lives are still imperilled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery – skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery

Thus, slavery's impact upon how we "see and think about bodies, especially black bodies, and blackness" continues to live on in our "political and social imagination" (Ehlers, 2010, p.10;

Walcott, 2003, p.90; Yancy, 2012, 2016; Applebaum, 2010; Mohanram, 1999; Griffin, 1996; Patton, 2006). Likewise, black women experienced "the vicissitudes of slavery" through gendered disciplinary forces, meaning that white women and black women's experiences of gendered identity have been "reconstructed and represented in very different" contexts (Hine et al, 1995, p.8; Hine et al, 1995; Higginbotham, 1989; hooks, 1981; Collins, 1998).

Indeed, scholars such as Thompson (2015) point towards the fact that "public anxieties about body size" have traditionally centered towards White women. In contrast, fat Black women - such as Aretha Franklin, Queen Latifah and Angie Stone - were 'embraced' by the media and public, irrespective of the racism and sexism that permeated the United States. Despite this, in her autobiographical essay, 'Fat Is A Black Woman's Issue,' Retha Powers (1989) points out the exclusion of women of colour in Orbach's (1998) seminal text into women's "dieting and food obsession as normative female behaviours" (Wallace-Sanders, 2002, p.245). In Bordo's (2004, p. 63) work, she quotes Powers (1989) about a conversation that she had with a high-school guidance counsellor. The woman informed Powers that she did not need to worry about weight because:

> [...] black women aren't seen as sex objects but as women. So really, you're lucky because you can go beyond the stereotypes of women as sex objects…Also, fat women are more acceptable in the black community

Such assumptions are acts of racism that exclude black women's bodies from idealized beauty standards, implying that 'beauty' is reserved for white bodies only (Thompson, 2015, p.245; Wallace-Sanders, 2002, p.105; Witt, 1994). For Powers (1989, in Bordo, 2004, p.63) the apparent 'lack of pressure' to conform to a slender body forced her to obsess about the "dirty, sinful act" of

eating whilst managing an eating disorder that "she wasn't supposed to have" (Powers, 1989 in Bordo, 2004, p.63).

The notion that black women are 'excused' from beauty practices is deeply rooted within racist representations of their bodies as 'unfeminine.' When Sojourner Truth famously revealed her breasts and asked "ain't I a woman?" to an all-white anti-slavery rally in the 19th century, white men called out: "I don't believe you really are a woman" (hooks, 1981, p.159; Carby, 1996). Truth's speech is a damning indictment of white feminism[20] that "laid bare" the "racialized configuration of gender" and demonstrated the ways in which black women have had to fight for the "integrity of their bodies" (Wallace-Sanders, 2002, p.31; Hine et al, 1991, p.7; hooks, 1982, 1989; Brah and Phoenix, 2004). Indeed, it is widely recognized that many of the suffrage movement were White supremacists, with Davis (p.80) contending that they used race as a "trump card" to win the vote in the US[21] (McPherson, 2003,p.191).

Wallace-Sanders (2002, p.127) noted that Truth's speech is remembered by scholars as questioning the "white ladyship" of the women's movement. Moreover, in the 1970's, Judy Chicago attempted to "memorialize women's history" through an exhibition entitled: *The Dinner Party: A Feminist Statement* (Heller and Moran, 2012, p.32). At the installation, placemats were set for women with

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[20] Historically, the feminist movement has been imbricated in racist activism that prioritised the needs of white women only. For example, McPherson (2003. p.191) refers to a letter written by a North Carolina suffragette, after a visit to Cuba in 1914: "I would not want to live there! It's people are hopelessly mixed race - black and white with full unquestioned and unobjected to equality...and to this I seriously object forever. Is it necessary or desirable to degrade a superior race in order to elevate an inferior race?"

[21] Wilson (1996, p.114) notes that many White feminists within the suffrage movement supported lynching and racial oppression due to the fear of black men's threat to white, female "purity." She provides the example of Rebecca Latimer Felton, the first woman appointed to the U.S. Senate, who stated in 1897: "if it takes lynching to protect women's dearest possession from drunken, ravening human beasts, then I saw lynch a thousand a week if it becomes necessary."

intricate and original images of a vulva, except for Sojourner Truth who was represented via an image of her face. Such actions are symbolic of the ways in which black women's sexuality and bodily agency has been denied, especially by white feminists. At the time, it was suggested that perhaps white feminists cannot imagine that "black women have vaginas" (Cotton, 2007, p.127). Such defeminisation of black women's bodies has led to the continuous representation of them as "unsexed" (Tracy, 2009, p.117; Sharpe, 2003; Patton, 1999; Wyatt, 1997; hooks, 1981).

Shaw (2005) demonstrates how the cultural stereotype of the 'Mammy' character supported the "economic, gendered and racial oppression" of black women by being positioned as the opposite of white women's beauty standards. The first cultural representation of the Mammy was in 1914, when audiences were "treated to a blackface version of Lysistrata" in the play 'Coontown Suffragettes.' Bogle (2001, p.9) explains how the "group of bossy Mammy washerwomen [...] organised a militant movement to keep their good-for-nothing husbands at home." McElya (2007) notes that although this image was far removed from the images of black slave women, it has become symbolic of black womanhood throughout that period.

The stereotypical image of the Mammy is of a fat black women who (allegedly) happy to work for white people after the emancipation of slavery. As Fleming (2000, p.123) notes, the Mammy is the "perfect slave" and a nostalgic representation of societal racism (Crenshaw, 1995, p.432):

> The typical Mammy (…) was fat, very dark skinned, and always kerchiefed. She sang a lot too, since she was so happy taking care of her white folks. There was absolutely nothing about her that made her desirable and attractive. Rather, she was a figure of black womanhood that was essentially desexed.

This image of the Mammy "stems from the era of slavery" and seeks to control our understandings of black womanhood, whilst maintaining socioeconomic disparity: the Mammy "loves her white family more than her own" and is happy to accept her "subordination to White male elite power" (Glen and Cunningham, 2009, p.139; Collins, 2000). Wallace-Sanders (2002, p.2) notes that this myth of black womanhood has been "immortalized" through 1930s films starring actresses such as Ethel Waters, Louise Beavers, and Butterfly McQueen. Most notably, the 1936 classic 'Gone with the Wind' cemented the image of the Mammy within southern memory in the US. Within this film, Hattie McDaniel's character was known only as 'Mammy' and helped perpetuate the notion of the "faithful slave" (McElya, 2009, p.3). She is the "all-seeing, all-hearing, all-knowing commentator and observer,' who helps her mistress get dressed before encouraging her to eat more (Bogle, 2001, p.88). Indeed, such representations have had an immensely damaging impact for black women's understanding of their bodies. This point is best encapsulates by hooks (1981) cited in Crenshaw's (1995, p.432) work:

> The Mammy image was portrayed with affection by whites because it epitomized the ultimate sexist-racist vision of ideal black womanhood - complete submission to the will of whites. In a sense whites created created in the Mammy figure a black woman who embodied solely those characteristics they as colonizers wished to exploit. They saw her as the embodiment of woman as passive nurturer, a mother figure who gave all without expectation of return, who not only acknowledged her inferiority to whites but who loved them.

Indeed, white society embraced the Mammy's myth of black womanhood, because it compliments a "white hegemonic ideal of an acquiescent, subordinate, and nondisruptive version of black femininity." The most important part of the Mammy was her apparent asexuality, that poses "no threat" to white women (Shaw, 2006, p.20). In this sense, the Mammy purposely existed in opposition to white women; the "fat and servile" figure was "safe" to work in white households, as the husbands would not be tempted to stray from their wives (Folan, 2010, p.118).

Thus, the unsexed Mammy acted as a "shadow against which white woman's beauty may be foregrounded" whilst providing a comfort to many Americans due to her "contentment" with serving white people (Reeve, 2015, p.175; Bogle, 2001; Brown-Givens and Monahan, 2005). The offshoot of the Mammy was Aunt Jemima, referred to as "handkerchief head", a "sweet, jolly and good-tempered" maid (Bogle, 2001, p.9) Wallace-Sanders (2002, p.59) refers to the Aunt Jemima "doll family" as an example of the romanticization of plantation life; an image of Aunt Jemima with her husband "Rastus" and children - referred to as "comical pickaninnies" - were used to sell pancake mix.[22] She notes how the later packaging promised an "old time plantation flavour" that "was once available only to Aunt Jemima's master and his guests."

Today, the Mammy stereotype still haunts black womanhood. As Hills-Collins (2005) notes, despite not being "limited to domestic service," black women are often "treated as modern-day Mammy's" (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009, p.29). She suggests that if African-American women become leaders, they are "hampered by being treated as mammies and penalized if they do not appear warm and nurturing" (Oboe and Scacchi, 2011, p.192). Indeed, this is reflected in Hollywood, with actresses such as Queen Latifah often being positioned in roles that privilege her "happy service and unshakable loyalty" (Beaulieu, 2006, p.599). As Cunningham (2009, p.143) notes, in 'Bringing Down the House' (2003), Latifah's character initially resists the role of the Mammy, but eventually "yields to the need for her services by donning a maid's uniform" to serve and nurture the family. Likewise, in *Living Out Loud* (1998), Queen Latifah plays the "full-figured

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[22] The image of *Aunt Jemima* has been used to promote the sale of porridge, pancake mix and breakfast cereal; the packaging showed the "plump, happy, southern plantation cook", who became a "symbol of black deference and servility" (Verney, 2013, p.1914).

jazz singer Lizz Bailey, who befriends a white woman, Judith Moore." Through her friendship (and listening to her soulful singing), Judith becomes more powerful. Thus, Liz Bailey's role in the film is to assist and mentor Judith in realizing her potential "as a free white woman" (Carilli and Campbell, 2005, p.146).

Another prominent area in which the Mammy character is represented is through slim, black men wearing fat suits. For example, Martin Lawrence's character as the black grandmother character – Big Momma – in *Big Momma's House* is there to provide comedic value to the audience. Throughout, Lawrence wears a fat suit, with Big Momma's surprisingly able-body being the laughing point of the film; her body is intended to arouse shock and humour from the audience (Kyrölä, 2016, p.1). As Bogle (2001) notes, Big Momma is also "quick to nurture and protect and obviously without any kind of alluring sexuality," her body is there in the name of "Comedy of the Grotesque" (p.398).

Bell and Jackson (2013, p.9) have suggested that the thin black male depicting fat woman represents a "harkening back to the minstrel era." Although it is not white people "performing blackness in the overt minstrel tradition as a means of disempowerment," the array of actors performing female fatness for comedic value is "telling." (Brawner et al, 2015, p.240). Indeed, other films that are based around black men in fat drag, such as Eddie Murphy's Rasputia in 'Norbit,' symbolize a "cloak that enables mediation of gender and sexual identity" (Bell and Jackson, 2013, p.9). Moreover, for Mask (2012, p.16), these characters are "comedic caricatures of women" that produce harmful representations. Their bodies are:

> [...] coded as socially marginal or peripheral to a mainstream sexual economy and marriage market (as a consequence of being as older, overweight, African American and postmenopausal woman.

Thus, the 'sassiness' of such characters comes from the fact that they are "comedic characters of women" and therefore "literally and figuratively exist outside of this matrix as liminal figures" (Mask, 2012, p.160). Consequently, actors such as Lawrence and Murphy represent stereotypes of the Mammy "through fat-suit minstrelsy" and reaffirm the notion that fat black women's bodies are "asexual" and "not to be taken seriously" (Bell and Jackson, 2013, p.55).

In contrast to the stereotype of the Mammy, black women are often also positioned into the role of the 'Jezebel .' The Jezebel supported the idea of a "deviant black female sexuality," a "hoochie" with a "big booty" (Neubeck and Cazenave, 2011, p,35; Rollins, 1991, p.82; Vandamme, 2010, p. 36). As hooks (cited in Ashcraft-Eason et al, 2010, p.6) notes, black women's bodies were merged with notions of "animality and sexuality." Like the Mammy, such representations emerged during slavery when black women were presented as "sexually aggressive wet nurses" (Collins, 2002, p. 271). Indeed, the Jezebel is viewed as having both an "unquenchable appetite for sex" and a "conniving, lewd and aggressive" attitude towards others (Ashcroft-Eason et al, 2010, p.6). As Fox-Genovese (1988, p.292) describes:

> The image of Jezebel explicitly contradicted the image of Mammy [...] it presented a woman isolated from the men of her own community. Jezebel lived free of the social constraints that surrounded the sexuality of white women.

Through this stereotype, black women are presented as "manipulative toward men of all races, in competition with White women, and threatening to the traditional family unit" (Croom and Patton, 2011, p.60; Collins, 2009). Collins (1991, p.271) asserts that the paranoia that slaves would

"strengthen black family networks" through reproduction was justified by positioning them in the role of "wet nurse."

Arguably, the first recognizable image of the Jezebel within Hollywood was Nina Mae McKinney 'Chick' in 'Hallelujah!' To Bogle (2001, p.29), Chick represented "the black woman as exotic sex object, half woman, half child" in her depiction of the "full-bosomed, spicy cabaret dancer." Yet, whilst the image of the Mammy was dominant in popular culture, the Jezebel was most common in everyday items such as kitchen appliances and decorations. Indeed, *The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia* notes that "images of topless or completely nude African women were often placed in magazines and on souvenir items, planters, drinking glasses, figurines, ashtrays, and novelty items" (Pilgrim, 2002). For example, Brown and Stentiford (2008, p.658) describe "swizzle sticks" for stirring drinks called "Zulu Lulu," which depicted the "nude African figure, with prominent breasts and buttocks, in various stages of youthful to aging development."

Such images justified the "widespread sexual assaults by white men typically reported by Black slave women" (Collins, 2002, p.271). By labelling the victims as "instinctively promiscuous women," slave owners used the stereotype of the Jezebel to defend their trade: men looking for "illicit sex had to look no further than the slave quarters," meaning that white women would remain 'pure' and chaste for their future husbands (Mankiller et al, 1998, p.565). For example, even the abolitionist James Redpath (1859, p.141) once wrote that black slave women were "gratified by the criminal advances of Saxons." Thus, as Mitchell (2002, p.35) suggests, the Jezebel was presented as "animalistically and uninhibitedly" sexually liberated, when actually "her body became the site of White male licentiousness and economic desire."

Today, the notion that black women are "always ready for sex and seeking it out" still permeates

society and has been used to defend the rape and harassment of black women (Lamb, 2010, p.21).

As hooks (1989) contends, the Jezebel's body parts – specifically her breasts and buttocks – are

continually presented as being a total summation of her being, rendering her as "non-human and

closer to an animal" (Rollins, 1991, p.87). For example, when the tennis star - Serena Williams -

first appeared on the courts in 2002 wearing her "bleached blonde braids and a tight-fitting suit,"

she was met with shock and outrage (Hobson, 2003, p.87). The 'catsuit' worn by Williams inspired

both "admiration and disgust," with the focus on her "lewd" buttocks demonstrating the fear of

"black female deviance and hypersexuality" within white society (p.350). Moreover, in an interview

after the game, William's recalled that the outfit was 'sexy' but also allowed her to "run fast and

jump higher." This statement led to the following headline: "Cat woman pounces but beaten prey is

still a winner," supporting the juxtaposition of the 'aggressively sexual' and 'animalistic' Williams

in contrast with her 'delicate' competitors (Burrows et al, 2013, p.193).

Another example of this racialized discipline can be seen in the representation of the hip-hop star

Nicki Minaj, who scholars suggest has simultaneously submitted to and subverted the idea of black

female hyper-sexuality. For instance, White (2013, p.608) argues that Minaj's body (especially her

buttocks) were treated as a spectacle, with audience participants obsessing about whether it was

"real." White (2013, p.616) notes that this is similar to the treatment of the Hottentot Venus, an

African woman who was placed on display at a museum in London for audiences to "examine her

buttocks." After her death in 1816, she was dissected and her "genitalia, organs and skeleton" were

preserved in a French museum, demonstrating the disregard for black women's bodies and the

treatment of their body parts as 'other' (Wetmore, Jr, 2003, p.34). Arguably though, Minaj reclaimed the Jezebel stereotype through a variety of acts, most notably wearing speakers on her buttocks during a performance at the 2011 VMAs[23] (p.621). Minaj addressed the moral panic surrounding her body in the song 'Anaconda,' in which she states: "oh my gosh, look at her butt."

Consequently, although the Mammy and the Jezebel are situated in "opposition to each other," they are joined through a focus on black women's bodies as being "out of control" (Prater, 2004, p.75). Both stereotypes positioned the black woman as 'animalistic' and in need of the disciplining white gaze: the Jezebel 's 'primal' sexuality is controlled through sexual violence, whilst the Mammy's 'natural' instincts for nurturing are fulfilled via her submission to the white master.

Here, it is important to reflect upon the literature within intersectional feminist thought. As Crenshaw (1989, p.139) notes, intersectionality can be used to "denote the various ways in which race and gender shape the multiple dimensions" of black women's experiences. For these scholars then, the 'Mammy' and the 'Jezebel' stereotypes are products of being both black and a woman. It is the intersection between these two identities, therefore, that can assist feminists in "exploring the race and gender dimensions of violence against women of color" (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1242). As Hills Collins (1993, p.35), drawing upon Audre Lorde (1992), notes:

> While many of us have little difficulty assessing our own victimization within some major system of oppression, whether it be by race, social class, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age or gender, we typically fail to see how our thoughts and actions uphold someone else's subordination. Thus, white feminists

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[23] Another example is the song 'Bootylicious' by the 1990s group, *Destiny's Child*, which addresses problematic attitudes towards their body parts: "I don't think you're ready for this jelly, I don't think you're ready [...] my body's too bootylicious for you babe."

routinely point with confidence to their oppression as women but resist seeing how their white skin privileges them.

Thus, it is essential that feminist scholars recognize the "differences of race, sexual preference, class and age" in constructing one's body (Lorde, 1992, p.18). When white feminists speak of 'women' as a universal category, their language categorizes Women of Colour as an 'other,' whose "experience and tradition is too 'alien' to comprehend" (p.19). In terms of the following analysis of Oprah, then, this thesis explicitly explores the construction of her body through both blackness and womanhood. It does not seek to understand these identities as separate but, rather, intertwined and reliant upon one another (Crenshaw, 1991; Hills Collins, 1993; Lorde, 1992).

Controlling Oprah: Racialized Beauty Standards in Dieting

As has been discussed, black women have historically been positioned as either the 'Mammy' or the 'Jezebel,' tropes which exist outside the ideals of 'white femininity' and suggest that black women are 'excused' from beauty practices (Powers, 1989; Bordo, 2004; David et al, 2002; Evans & McConnell, 2003; Kelch-Oliver and Ancis, 2011, p.346). Despite this, they are still judged by conflicting and contradictory norms that discipline their bodies (Patton, 2006, p.35; Thompson, 2009; Sekayi, 2003; Craig, 2002). Indeed, Thompson (2009) notes that the way black women's bodies are disciplined has shifted dramatically: in recent years, the fat phobia that has been typically "attached to White womanhood" has begun to permeate the narrative surrounding black femininity (p.805). Bordo (1993) suggests that this is because the "hegemony of Western culture"

and "upward class mobility" have intensified pressure on black women to emulate White women's body standards[24] (Wallace-Sanders, 2002, p.245; McElya, 2009).

In her book, *Starving for Salvation: The Spiritual Dimensions of Eating Problems among American girls and women*, Lelwica (2002) explores the "cultural values and social conditions" that encourage women to chase thinness (p.4). She argues that the assumption that black women are "protected from Euro-American models of womanhood" is incredibly damaging and neglectful, providing the example of a former Wall Street analyst who translated the 'pressure-to-succeed' into the 'pressure-to-be-thin,' stating:

> Working for an investment bank had always been a primary career goal, I was going to be the best Black female analyst those bastards on Wall Street had ever seen. In addition to doing impeccable work, I felt it was imperative that I look impeccable at all times. That meant wearing a size four (p. 58)

Lelwica (2005) notes that the immense pressure to remain thin drove the woman to an eating disorder, leading her to lose both her job and sacrifice her mental health. Likewise, in her book about her struggles with an eating disorder, Armstrong (2009) suggests that she considered such problems to be reserved for white women, stating that "normal black women were born equipped to deal with the stress in their lives, and I decided I would be no different" (p.118).

Arguably, the moment in which dieting marketers saw black women as being "deeply concerned with their weight, just as white, middle-class women" can be traced back to the 'Diet Dreams

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[24] In *The Fat Black Woman Poems*, Grace Nichols attempted to subvert these Eurocentric standards of beauty. Indeed, one poem aims to emphasise the beauty of fat black women's bodies, reading "*beauty is a fat black woman, riding the waves, drifting in happy oblivion, while the sea turns back, to hug her shape*" (Farrell, 2011, p.153)

Come True' episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. In the now-legendary episode in 1988, Oprah

pushed a wagon filled with 65 lbs of animal fat onstage, representing the amount of weight she had

lost). In order to lose such an amount, Oprah claimed that she ran 6.5 miles per day and "consumed

nothing but liquids (Suddath, 2011). This episode was symbolic of the "hegemonic bodily

standards" which were being adopted by middle-class Black women (Thompson, 2009, p.805). For

example, research suggests that "risk factors associated with eating disorders" were far more

common among black women who were "younger, heavier, better educated, and more identified

with Euro American middle-class values" (Patton, 2006, p.35).

Many famous black women have documented their body-image issues, with Thompson (2015, p.

103) noting that many fat black performers have revealed slimmer figures[25]. She contends that the

"thinner Black woman marks a shift in the visual representation of Black womanhood." As Patton

(2006) suggests, black women are only presented as beautiful in the media when they "embody

whiteness" via straightened hair, lighter skin and slim figures (Moore and Kosut, 2010, p.346;

Craig, 2002). In contrast, blackness was "equivalent to ugliness," with many black women feeling

that they have to straighten their hair (Painter, 2006, p.60). For example, the politics of hair has

been crucial to maintaining white aesthetics of beauty. As Thompson (2009, p.831) argues, black

women who feel pressured into chemically straightening their hair do so because of a beauty

paradigm which privileges "white/light skin, straight hair and what are seen to be European facial

features." Indeed, hair is an important topic in black communities; historically, black women's hair

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[25] Musicians such as Missy Elliot, Aretha Franklin, Angie Stone and Jill Scott all lost a significant amount of weight between 2012 and 2013. In particular, Missy Elliott - a "veteran in the hip-hop industry" - faced backlash from fans who thought she was submitting to white body standards (Bezdecheck, 2011, p.30). Elliott mocked the shock coverage of her weight-loss in the song "Gossip Folks", stating: "*girl I heard she eat one cracker a day*" (White, 2013, p.43).

was referred to as "nappy," a derogatory term used to associate black women with ugliness (Banks, 2000, p.2).

Once blackness was juxtaposed with white beauty, a "socially stratified hierarchy began to take shape" (Thompson, 2009, p.834). As (Ray et al, 2008, p.91) argue, this has had an impact upon the black community: dark-skinned girls who are constantly told that they are "ugly, and experiences treatment that supports these views" begins to feel as such. Historically, this has been met with some resistance, most notably through the 'Black is beautiful' mantra of the Civil Rights Movements in the 1960s, in which activists presented "black women with tightly curled hair, dark skin, and full lips" as beauties (Craig, 2002, p.108). The production of black culture, such as the magazine 'Essence' - produced by and for black women - aimed to mainstream black identity and challenge white beauty standards (Hill and Rabig, 2012, p.7).

During this time, black women's bodies were centred in beauty ads, reflecting the "cultural interplay among politics, marketing and consumer culture" (Henderson, 2010, p.1). Most notably, the movement emphasised the importance of natural 'Afro' hair for black women, hair straightening "came to be equated with self-hatred by those in the Black Power movement" (Tate, 2012, p.37). Of course, it was "much more" than hair, the end goal was to "move black people" to a place where they were "proud of black skin and kinky or nappy hair" (Banks, 2000, p.43). Indeed, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Angela Davis' Afro became an iconic symbol of affirmed blackness (Ogbar, 2005, p.144). Nevertheless, Wallace (1979) notes that black women became aware that "assimilation of hairstyles and dress" were necessary for success, meaning that many black women "found that it was easier to don wigs, weaves, or undergo expensive chemical

processes" in order to mirror white hairstyles (García, 2012, p.128). This is symbolic of the

normalization of white beauty standards amongst black women, as hooks (1995, p.122, quoted in

García, 2012, p.128) states:

> Once again the fate of black folks rested with white power. If a black person wanted a job and found it easier to get it if he or she did not wear a natural hairstyle, etc. This was perceived by many to be a legitimate reason to change

Thus, white beauty standards were cemented as the norm. Today, for example, straight hair is

"privileged over natural styles" and black women are often subject to negative feedback based

upon their hair. For Thompson (2009, p.840), this is demonstrative of the pervasive nature of white

aesthetics, in which black womanhood becomes "blighted" by the prioritization of whiteness (Jean

and Feagin, 1998, p.75). In a study by Leeds (1994) on black women's beauty practices, it was

noted that many of them absorbed such Eurocentric ideals; whilst they expressed that those norms

were unfair to women, they "valued lighter skin, "straightened their hair and slim bodies (Herring

et al, 2004, p.1997).

Thus, the black female body is often disciplined through a "straight, white male gaze" and can face

severe punishment for fatness. Joseph (2009, p.237) notes how black women are often "consumed

and spat out" by the media if they do not meet white bodily standards. A notable example of this is

the coverage of Gabourey Sidibe's performance in Precious, a film about an 'obese,' impoverished

girl growing up in Harlem during the 1980s. Stoneman (2012, p.197) notes that, despite the films

critical acclaim, reviewers were seemingly unable to discuss the film without reporting their

outright "disgust" at Sidibe's body. He refers to 'New York Times' articles that recall their

"repulsion" at the sight of her, describing her head as a "balloon on the body of a zeppelin, her

cheeks so inflated they squash her eyes to slits" (p.178). Meeuf (2017) suggests that such disdain

for Sidibe's body was deeply wrapped up with race and class, stating that it created divisions over

which black bodies should be cherished, and those that should be punished[26] (p.63). He states that:

> The moral panic in the US media over obesity has only intensified the stigma against overweight
> black bodies, marking them as objects of revulsion and deploying their images to signify the horrors
> of low social class

Thus, when black women in the media do not fit the stereotype of the Mammy, their bodies are

treated as "grotesque" and "strange" (Hobson, 2003, p.87). Therefore, chasing weight-loss may act

as a "rejection of otherness through which standard visions of womanhood are defined" (Lelwica,

2002, p.58). This message of controlling one's body is prevalent in Oprah's first *Weight Watchers*

(2015) advert after announcing her partnership with the company. In the clip, Oprah speaks over a

montage of 'fat' images of herself wearing baggy clothes that conceal her body, stating:

> Inside every overweight woman, is a woman she knows she can be. Many times you look in the
> mirror and you don't even recognize your own self because you've got lost…buried…in the weight
> that you carry

Here, Oprah discusses her body in terms of its 'excess' that needs to be controlled. The suggestion

that a woman who gains weight becomes 'lost' and a 'failure' plays into typical binary narratives

about the body (Bartky, 1997; Bordo, 2004). To be thin is "proof of virtuous exertion," of control

and - most importantly - heteronormative attractiveness (Lelwica, 2002, p.122). Indeed, a refusal to

conform to such standards brands women as "outcasts" and/or re-writes their narrative as victims of

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[26] Another example of Sidebe's body being read through a racialized, classist lens can be seen in her
account of an experience at a designer store in Chicago. She notes that she was turned away by the shop
assistant, assuming that Sidebe was a "thief or a waste of time." She ponders: *"does it matter whether my
waist is wide or if my skin is black as long as my money is green?"* Arguably, this reaffirms the notion that
beauty should only be available to white, thin bodies (hooks, 1989; Collins, 1991).

their own bodies (Orbach, 1998, p.24). For black women, whose bodies are presented as "embodying disobedience" through their very existence, weight-loss is a method for conforming to white paradigms of beauty (Farrell, 2011, p.153; Joseph, 2009; hooks, 1989). This is demonstrated in the next sentence of the advert, when the music intensifies and becomes more uplifting as the images in the advert change to be of a now-slim Oprah exercising and looking happy. This section of the advert attempts to represent Oprah's transition towards dieting and exerting control over her body. She talks about the different methods that she's used to lose weight, suggesting that *Weight Watchers* has been her last opportunity to achieve her weight-loss goals, stating:

> Nothing you have ever been through is wasted. So, every time I tried and failed. Every time I tried again and every time I tried again has brought me to this…most powerful moment, to say: if not now, when?

Here, Oprah suggests that *Weight Watchers* has provided her with new ability to take control over her eating habits and her body. This enforces scholar's arguments about the fat, out-of-control, black woman's body in need of discipline (Joseph, 2009; Neubeck and Cazenave, 2011, p,35; Rollins, 1991, p.82), as well as Thompson's (2009) argument that black women are being forced into embodying whiteness through weight-loss.

Arguably, much of Oprah's career has been told through a narrative of dieting, in which she has punished herself for regaining lost weight. This can be seen in Lowe's (2001) biography of Winfrey's life, there is a timeline that documents all the important dates in her career. Next to notable accomplishments such as "signed the National Child Protection Act" and "won Best Talk Show Host" is detailed information about her weight and diets, like "began to lose the nearly 80 pounds she gained following her liquid diet" and "regains 70 pounds" (p.178). Likewise, within

Harris and Watson's (2007) book, *The Oprah Phenomenon*, they note that Winfrey's inability to maintain a low body weight led her despair, citing a recording in her diary

> I'm thoroughly disgusted with myself. I couldn't even get thin for the anniversary show. Where is my resolve? Every day I awake with good intentions and then I fail.

Thus, an inability to 'control' her body has overshadowed much of Oprah's career, demonstrating how black women in the public eye are encased by socio-cultural discourses (Bartky, 1997; Bordo, 2004).

Oprah as the modern-day Mammy? Neoliberalism and Soul Food

The stereotype of the Mammy presents black women as having a direct link with food; the Mammy's "principal occupation is to cook wholesome meals that sustain the family" (Piatti-Farnell, 2011, p.59; Thompson, 2015; Witt, 1994; Wallace-Sanders, 2008). Often, black women were expected to serve 'soul food.' Soul food was created when African American slaves transformed the "cast-off foods" given to them by their masters into "gourmet cuisine" (Thompson, 2015, p.802). This diet included mustards, kale, turnips, collard greens – referred to as "greens" – as well as gizzards, hearts, livers and chicken backs (Middleton, 2007, p.viii). Prior to the 1960's, soul food was stigmatized due to its "association with the slave diet." Yet, during the Black Power movement, soul food became a symbol of African Americans strength and pride in their identity (Thompson, 2015, p.802; Williams-Forsen, 2006; Poe, 1999).

However, scholars such as Ferry (2003, p.56) argue that representations of soul food reinforce the stereotype of the Black woman as only finding "pleasure and happiness" when "providing the restorative broth of soul food to her loved ones." Indeed, Witt (2004) notes that some Black

Muslims view soul food as "the diet of a slave mentality" whilst Eldridge Cleaver famously stated that "the eating of soul food is counter-revolutionary black bourgeois ideology" (Alkon, and Agyeman, 2011, p.11; Wiggins, 1990, p.83). Arguably, such representations can be seen in modern films and television. Most notably, the 2011 film 'The Help' was heavily criticised by the Association of Black Women Historians for its reliance upon the "Mammy" stereotype via the use of food. Arguably, this is demonstrated through the character Minnie, a maid to white people, who – as the "selfless Mammy and angry black woman" – will help "everyone and everything" whilst serving white women fried chicken (Verderber et al, 2013, p.57; Garcia et al, 2014, p.1; Glenn and Cunningham, 2009). Garcia and Young (2014, p.1) suggest that Minnie is representative of America's obsession with a "big black other" that helps define the white body. Similarly, critics of the 1997 film 'soul food' suggest that it "contradicts the original symbolic expression of soul food as a source of freedom, power, action and identity" by using food as a method to "keep African-American women chained to a metaphoric plantation kitchen and garden" (Verderber et al, 2013, p. 57). For example, Vester (2015) contends that the film positions black women's sole responsibility as "keeping the family together" through the use of soul food (Brown, 2015, p.131).

In Oprah's *Weight Watchers* dieting book, many of the foods that she presents are reinvented – 'healthy' – versions of soul food recipes, with ingredients such as collard greens, cornbread and brined chicken, foods that were central to the cuisine. Seemingly, Oprah's *Weight Watcher's* version of soul food is symbolic of black women's positioning in neoliberal dieting discourse. As Foucault (1977, 1980) contends, power underlines all "our knowledge and language" (Vincent, 2009, p.178). Indeed, the discourse that surrounds Oprah as a caring, nurturing 'Motherly' figure may have

cemented her as a modern-day-Mammy[27] (Magubane, 2008). As Haag (2004) notes, the

foundations of *The Oprah Winfrey Sho* were built upon the positioning of Oprah as "having a

relationship" with her audience members that was similar to female-friendship:

> She brings us the intimate, the private, making it public but with intimate trappings, sending back to the private realm of the home, further blurring those already fuzzy distinctions. She is our Mammy, our therapist, our cheerleader, our moral conscious, our role model, and our harshest critic when it is appropriate. Only a good friend could tell a friend when she is not as cute as she can be. (p.120)

The intended juxtaposition between the Mammy and the white woman works to "symbolize the

oppositional difference of mind/body and culture/nature thought to distinguish black women from

everyone else." Such positioning harks back to historical representations of black womanhood that

were created by white people to bring them comfort; the Mammy figure is submissive and has "few

attachments of her own," allowing her to dedicate her life to supporting white people (hooks, 1982,

p.84). Phelps supports this notion, contending that "she is the good black mama who takes care of

white kids" [28] (Nelson, 2007, p.xiv).

In this sense, Oprah is accepted within neoliberal culture because she can reaffirm binaries

regarding the "proper social order" (Magubane, 2008, p.234; Harris and Watson, 2015). For

Thompson (2015, p.806), the use of soul food in dieting discourse is demonstrative of the ways in

which black women are often positioned as either 'good' or 'bad,' dependent upon their diets. She

argues that the adaptation of the cuisine into a dieting recipe demonstrates the ways that middle-

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[27] 'The Oprah Winfrey Show' was famous for its "compassionate, empathetic and ultimately uplifting" style (Stafford, 2016) that encouraged audience members to "live their best life" (Verdier, 2015). For example, Oprah was prone to spontaneous acts of generosity: in one famous clip, she surprises her guests with free cars, shouting "you get a car! You get a car! You get a car!"

[28] Oprah's brand of "confessional television" was said to bring the "black girlfriend experience to white Americans", encouraging guests to reveal intimate details about their lives and sharing her own experiences with the audience (Harris, 2010).

class, black women are "increasingly imbricated in the neoliberal and postfeminist" focus on body surveillance. Within her book – that includes a variety of Weight Watchers versions of soul food – she states:

> [...] how exhilarating to suddenly think I might be able to stop being a slave to yo-yo dieting, that I might be able to live freely and independently, eating the way I chose in order to fuel my life! I could be free from the burden of stressing out over what to eat next, free from the guilt of regretting what I'd just eaten. Somewhere buried beneath the decades of trial and error – the seesawing between fat and fasting, feast and famine, the shame and fear and frustration – was a belief that I could find balance and satisfaction with food without having to declare war on myself. I dreamed of détente, of eating with pleasure, ease, and maybe even a hint of joy. (Winfrey, 2017, p.1).

This is symbolic of the binary oppositions created between black women who follow diets as 'good subjects' who are 'exercising discipline' over their bodies in contrast to 'bad' black bodies that eat traditional ('unhealthy') soul foods. As has been discussed, soul food recipes have direct connotations of freedom and resistance for black women's bodies. The adaptation of soul food into a dieting recipe that helped Oprah lose weight demonstrates the ways that middle-class-black women are "increasingly imbricated in the neoliberal and postfeminist" focus on body surveillance (Thompson, 2015, p.806). Seemingly, soul food's cultural significance is used to assist middle-class-black women in disciplining and maintaining more acceptable – or 'whiter' – bodies.

The pressure on black women to lose weight is demonstrative of the ways that fatness is viewed as an "individual failure" throughout neoliberal cultures (Bordo, 2004, p.803). Scholars such as Zine suggest that in capitalist cultures, the "bodies of African American women" are wielded in order to "communicate and reinforce ideologies about how to properly motivate and discipline the self" (Magubane, 2008, p.221). In an interview on *The Ellen Show* in 2016, Oprah suggests that *Weight Watchers* wanted her as a partner due to her methods of "self-empowerment" and "self-

enrichment." As Mugubabe (2008, p.222) suggests, such language is demonstrative of the ways in which black women are often positioned as "preaching the gospel of self-help" through talk shows.

Indeed, Oprah promotes the concept of an "enterprising self," referring to an individual who capitalizes on opportunities and rejects "negativity" (Block et al, 2013, p.1). For example, in 1994, Oprah announced that she wanted to shift the focus of her TV show – which helped guests "overcome their problems" via self-esteem building – away from what she referred to as "victimization" (Aschoff, 2015). Peck contends that this position – and indeed, all of Oprah's enterprise – should be understood as an "ensemble of ideological practices" which "help legitimize a world of growing inequality and shrinking possibilities" by shifting responsibility onto individual's determination and motivation (or lack of) (Peck, 2015, p.217).

Such narratives are bolstered by Oprah's own story of growing up in poverty; her experiences are recalled as a victorious symbol of the American dream (McLeod et al, 2014, p.547). For example, one soup recipe comes with a description of Oprah's childhood memory of her mother – a maid for a white family – being unable to afford to buy the ingredients for soup. Winfrey continues to state that she "now has soup everyday" which gives her an "instant feeling of well-being" and reminds her that "if we're smart and prepared and very determined, every once in awhile we actually do get the life we wanted" (Winfrey, 2017, p.1). This statement encapsulates the ways that Winfrey supports the notion of a meritocratic West that "rewards individual effort" regardless of class, race and gender (Harris and Watson, 2015, p.73).

The soul food soup symbolizes black women's ability to shift their economic circumstances and to 'improve' their bodies to fit white standards of hegemonic beauty. Such rhetoric has a damaging impact for black women: they are made to feel that they can improve themselves, but only by subscribing to hegemonic beauty and thinness. Yet, regardless of 'hard work,' Eurocentric standards of beauty will potentially still be unavailable for women of colour. Thus, the pursuit of such an appearance is not only futile, it also works to overlook the "social policies and political ideologies" that suppress them (Thompson, 2015, p.805; Collins, 2014).

In this way, women such as Oprah – as well as other 'self-help' gurus such as Tyra Banks – are "cast as the feminine voice and gaze of the Panopticon" by being encouraged to simultaneously "chastise and advise" as well as to "criticize and cajole" (Magubane, 2008, p.221). As Foucault suggests:

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribed in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection (Foucault, 1977, p.202)

As Hills Collin's (2004) argues, the "modern day Mammy" has been "resurrected" as a symbol of middle-class black womanhood, built to negotiate a balance between nurturer and an inspiration for black women to "consume their way to happiness" (Magubane, 2008, p.222; Brunsdon and Spigel, 2007, p.79). Thus, some scholars suggest that Oprah's job is to "remind White Americans how to police themselves" (Magubane, 2008, p.222). In terms of dieting, "thin or dieting black bodies" represented by women such as Oprah have "shifted the parameters of black women's bodily ideals" and encouraged them to carry out disciplinary behaviours expected of white women (Thompson, 2015, p.806).

Nevertheless, when black women do conform to white bodily standards, they are often met with feelings of discomfort and uncertainty from white society. As has been discussed, the notion of 'laziness' in fat black woman – "the Mammy, matriarch, welfare recipients" – have been integral to the "political economy of domination fostering black women's oppression" (Jean and Feagin, 1998, p.1). Thus, when black women do conform to Eurocentric bodily standards, they are treated with suspicion. Indeed, some scholars suggest that Winfrey was forced to "bend to the concerns of whites" by adopting her body and behaviours to fit with dominant white society (Henderson, 2010, p.1). As Jewell (1993, p.185) contends:

> Oprah's reduced size after dieting was consistent with the image of White womanhood; yet she was visually unsatifying to White Americans who associate obesity in the African American woman with wisdom, caring, understanding and the capacity to be emotionally soothing and nurturing

The 'physical excesses' of the 'cantankerous' Mammy are translated as being non-threatening to a white audience in the same way that Winfrey's weight troubles were understood as making her 'more human' to her audience. In this sense, Oprah's success is deeply intertwined with her embodiment of the Mammy: her fatness is deeply symbolic of comfort to white America. This can be seen in media discussion of Oprah's body, which is seemingly accepting of her fatness, as seen in headlines: 'Oprah Winfrey, the comfort queen' (Shapiro, 2014) and 'Oprah Winfrey doesn't care how much she weighs' (Medrano, 2017), both of which contribute to the image of the desexed Mammy who is 'untouched' by white beauty standards. Paradoxically, such a positioning may have subjected Oprah to more European-style beauty norms, pushing her towards weight-loss.

Nevertheless, Oprah's weight-loss can be read as a rejection of the Mammy image, which may have led to white Americans feeling unsettled or suspicious of her 'new' body. Most notably, when Winfrey revealed her sixty-five pound weight loss during the 'wagon-of-fat' episode, the show received complaints about how quickly she had lost weight, with some viewers suggesting that they did not like the slimmer Oprah (Jewell, 1993, p.185; Harris and Watson, 2015, p.44). Likewise, the following quote from Jackie Stallone encapsulates the images of black women's bodies that white people are uncomfortable with:

> When Oprah got thin [...] her personality went down the drain with it. She used to remind me of Aunt Jemima – I kind of liked her. Then when she was trying to look like Janet Jackson it didn't work.

This quote demonstrates how Oprah's reputation as a beloved figure is heavily reliant upon her positioning as the nurturing Mammy. The idea that her "personality went down the drain" with her weight-loss symbolises the threat that white America may have felt when she did not fall into the Mammy or Jezebel binary.

In this sense, black women are in an extremely difficult place in terms of the body: they have to negotiate the pressures of fitting white aesthetics whilst remaining non-threatening to whiteness. Again, Jewell (1993, p.185) states that it came as "no surprise" when Oprah regained the weight and "vowed never to diet again," suggesting that she had come to accept her "large stature." Indeed, in 2011, Oprah reflected upon the 'wagon of fat' scene on an episode of *The Oprah Show*. She stated:

> I actually thought at the time [...] being thin made me better, I wanted so desperately to be in a Size 10 jeans.

Winfrey explains that shortly after the episode aired, she gained five pounds and rejected an invite

to a friend's party out of punishment for being "too fat, not good enough" (Oprah Winfrey

Network, 2011). Appearing to tear up in the clip, Oprah condemns the "egotistical" mindset that

she held at that time, suggesting that she was both shallow and arrogant to chase weight-loss.

Arguably, Oprah's 'confession' at her desire for thinness repositions her as a Mammy: she is

apologetic for chasing Eurocentric bodily aesthetics which removed her from the "natural" and

"down-to-earth" role that white women appreciated her for (Henderson, 2010, p.1). In this sense,

the representation of the white woman as "thin, controlled and feminine" is completely dependent

upon the positioning of the black woman as "fat, hyper-sexual, or a-sexual" and "unruly

(Vandamme et al, 2010, p.36). Scholars such as Witt (1999) and Collins (2000) have argued that

such discourses have a detrimental impact upon black women's lives, seen in the lack of research

conducted into eating disorders amongst black women.

The Discourses of Oprah's Body: What Can We Learn About Dieting and Power?

Undoubtedly, Oprah Winfrey is a power-house whose charisma and charm has inspired a

generation of young, black women. Her work as a chat show host, director, author and

philanthropist has cemented her as the world's most successful African American woman. Yet, the

fact that her incredible success can be viewed through a timeline of dieting reveals a political

symbolism about black women's bodies in the public sphere (Bordo, 1993; Deveaux, 1994).

In the first part of the chapter, I situated Oprah Winfrey's dieting narrative within a sociohistorical

discussion on black women's bodies. Most importantly, the history of black women's bodies has

been affected by the devastation of slavery, in which the effects are still being felt today (Hine et al,

1995, p.8; Poran, 2006; hooks, 1992; Hills-Collins, 1993, 2005). Here, drew upon the work of Thompson (2015), Wallace-Sanders (2002) and McElya (2009) to suggest that the Mammy stereotype has dictated the way that society views black women's bodies. Not only is the Mammy 'content' with looking after White people, she is always "cantankerous" and unsexed (Sekayi, 2003; Patton, 2004). This image sits in opposition to the stereotype of the Jezebel , a hyper-sexual and 'dangerous' black woman who exists as a threat to White womanhood (Joseph, 2009; Lelwicka, 2002). Throughout these narratives, the central theme is that of the need to "control" the black woman's body (Malson, 2003; hooks, 1992), a central message in Oprah's *Weight Watchers* campaign; with the use of *Weight Watchers*, she was able to "regain control" of her body.

In the second part of the chapter, I reflected upon the changing roles of black women in dieting discourse today. Most notably, Oprah's 'Diet Dreams Come True' episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* marked a change in the disciplining of black femininity. As scholars suggest, black women today are expected to comply with white standards of beauty, rather than being positioned as 'outside' these norms. Here, I reflected upon Oprah's partnership with Weight Watchers as being deeply symbolic of changing nature of control placed upon black women. Rather than being viewed as 'exempt' from beauty, black women are encouraged to modify their bodies to appear more white (Farrell, 2011; Joseph, 2009; hooks, 1989).

However, neoliberalism has dramatically changed the way that black women's bodies are represented and understood. The chapter focused on the use of soul food in demonstrating how black women's bodies have been encouraged to adapt to Eurocentric beauty ideals. Drawing upon Thompson's (2015, p.806) work, I suggested that the shifting of soul food from a symbol of African

American women's creativity during slavery towards a dieting food in *Weight Watchers*

demonstrates the changing discipline of black women's bodies (Magubane, 2008). Alongside the

self-help discourses espoused by Oprah, demonstrates how black women are now expected to

conform to white standards of beauty (Hills-Collins, 2004). Nevertheless, when black women do

lose weight, they are often treated with suspicion and confusion from White society. For Oprah

especially, she existed as a modern Mammy who is always readily available to comfort and nurture

white Americans. Thus, her dramatic weight loss countered the image of the Mammy's traditionally

"soft" figure that is brimming with "excess," meaning her 'new' body received a hostile reception

(Jewell, 1993; Harris and Watson, 2015; Fuller, 2001; Kowalski, 2009).

Chapter 6
Fat Activism and Body Positivity: freedom from dieting?

> When I look at photographs of my 22-year-old self, so convinced of her own defectiveness, I see a perfectly normal girl and I think about aliens. If an alien – a gaseous orb or a polyamorous cat person or whatever – came to Earth, it wouldn't even be able to tell the difference between me and Angelina Jolie, let alone rank us by hotness. It'd be like: "Uh, yeah, so those ones have the under-the-face fat sacks, and the other kind has that dangly pants nose. Fuck, these things are gross. I can't wait to get back to the omnidirectional orgy gardens of Vlaxnoid."
>
> The "perfect body" is a lie. I believed in it for a long time, and I let it shape my life, and shrink it – my real life, populated by my real body. Don't let fiction tell you what to do. In the omnidirectional orgy gardens of Vlaxnoid, no one cares about your arm flab.
> Lindy West (2016)

For me, this quote encapsulates the way that bodies are constructed through discursive texts and how these discourses inform us that fat bodies are repugnant and pitiable. Without such language, we would not feel repelled by our own or others "arm flab," wince at the sight of our stomachs in the mirror and salivate over the bodies of women who have reached 'perfection.' Indeed if, as Lindy West suggests, an alien species were to watch us constantly monitor our bodies and scrutinize the bodies of others, it would all seem incredibly strange and pointless. Throughout the research process of this thesis, I kept ruminating over the following question: what happens if you aim to reject these understandings of fatness and instead attempt to *celebrate* the fat body?

Thus far, this thesis has explored the feminist dichotomy of power through an analysis of discourses surrounding dieting and the body. As I set out in Chapter 4, women are subject to disciplinary discourses that encourage an omnipresent regulation of their bodies (Foucault, 1977). Throughout this chapter, I will speak back to the dichotomy of power by questioning how ideas of oppression and liberation play out within resistance to dieting and the representations of the fat female body. This will be done through an analysis of the methods of fat activists and body

positivity activists, both of whom share the following goal: they want fat women to feel good about themselves, reject dieting and to be free from stigmatization throughout society. However, like all social movements, the fat movement has always had both a radical and a mainstream branch (Haralovich and Rabinovitz, 1999, p.182). Whilst fat activism aims to resist overarching structures that oppress the fat body, body positivity activists view power as residing within the individual, and individuals possessing the potential for liberation.

Firstly, this chapter looks to fat activism's radical roots, noting how some members of the movement view power as an oppressive force governed by patriarchy (see: Schoenfielder and Wieser, 1983; Brown and Rothblum, 1989; Bovey, 1994). This is similar to the work of some radical feminist arguments (see: Greer, 1971; Turner, 1984; Dworkin, 1974), meaning that these fat activist's consider the fat body to be "mutilated" by patriarchal practices such as dieting and weight-loss surgery (Zimmerman, 2013). For them, fat women's only option is to dismantle patriarchal, capitalist structures that systematically oppress them (Farrell, 2011; Rothblum and Solovay, 2009; Cooper, 2016). In this section, then, I will draw upon Cooper's (2016) analysis of groups such as The Fat Underground, who viewed the fat woman's body as a threat to patriarchy (Rothblum, 2009). Likewise, I will note how their methods of subverting "oppressive spaces" are present in fat activism today, as discussed in my interviews with fat activists (Sykes, 2016; Monaghan, 2013). However, radical fat activism has faced much of the same criticism as radical feminism; scholars such as Cooper (2016) have noted that whilst radical fat activists have made a significant contribution to the movement, their position also has the potential to be exclusionary and essentialist.

Next, I refer to body positivity activism, which contends that fat women can achieve liberation via self-love (see: Wann, 1998; Crabbe, 2017; Baker, 2015; Stanley, 2017). Similarly to elements of post-feminist rhetoric, this line of argument posits that fat women have the ability to 'choose' to accept and love their bodies (Wann, 1998; Williams, 2004). The internet has allowed for the creation of a range of "safe spaces" for fat women to learn to celebrate their bodies through practices such as 'fatshion' (Pause and Wykes, 2016; White, 2014; Dickins et al, 2011). Likewise, reclaiming one's sexuality is an intrinsic part of body positivity: liberation is seen as possible through embracing the naked body (Czerniawski, 2015). Nevertheless, scholars such as Murray (2008) contend that it is impossible to simply 'forget' dieting cultures as fat women because of the pervasive discourses that construct their bodies (Cooper, 2016).

As Foucault (1977) suggests, our knowledge of the world is constructed through discursive texts, meaning that fat activists should analyze the "regimes of truth" which give meaning to fat women's bodies (Wright and Harwood, 2008, p.19). Rather than seeing power as a unified force that one can wield or resist, it is important to recognize the everyday, dislocated nature of power. Thus, some fat activists see the deconstruction and subversion of the connotations of "fat" as an important tool. For instance, to "speak fat" is a useful method for interrogating discourses surrounding the fat body (Sedgwick, 1993; Murray, 2005; Cooper, 2016). By unashamedly proclaiming fatness, it is not possible to dismantle oppressive structures or fully liberate oneself, but it does work to deconstruct discourses that create a binary between 'acceptable' and 'not acceptable' bodies (Moon and Sedgwick, 2010). Overall, this chapter speaks back to the question of oppression and liberation by contending that post-structuralist fat scholars have a deeper analysis of fat bodies and power through their discussions of power's complexities.

The Oppressed Fat Body: Fat Bodies Under Patriarchy

As Rothblum and Solovay (2009, p.151) note, whilst fat men are certainly stigmatized, anti-fat bias

is "particularly salient in the lives of fat women." Thus, for some fat activists, power resides within

patriarchal structures that attempt to rework the body to meet unachievable beauty standards (see:

Schoenfielder and Wieser, 1983; Brown and Rothblum, 1989; Bovey, 1994; Louderback, 1970).

Within *Fat Activism: A Radical Social Movement*, Charlotte Cooper (2016) takes the reader on a

journey through fat activism's rich history to the present day[29], noting how much of fat activism has

roots in the second-wave of feminism. In Chapter 2, I drew upon the work of radical feminist

scholars who argue that the body is a site of oppression (see: Greer, 1971; Turner, 1984; Dworkin,

1974; Jeffreys, 2005). Likewise, when referring to the body and fatness, scholars such as Brown

and Rothblum (1989, p.20) define fat oppression as:

> The less-than-subtle message that women are forbidden to take up space (by being large of body) or
> resources [...] fat oppression also serves to divide women and drain energy and resources from
> women's lives. The weight-loss industry, which preys upon the fear of fat fostered by fat-
> oppressive-attitudes, robs women of millions of dollars yearly which could be spent in other, non-
> self-destructive manners. This industry, and fat oppression in general, encourage competition
> between women to be "the thinnest of them all," a race which has deadly outcomes [...] which have
> at their core the terror of becoming fat.

In this sense, some fat activists align themselves with radical feminists, who view power as an

oppressive force that "works upon" the body (Brown and Rothblum, 1989). In fact, fat scholars

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[29] The fat movement is often considered to have "two basic approaches." The first is the approach embodied
by the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA), who are committed to protesting "weight-
based discrimination" and promoting "body positivity", whilst the more radical side of fat activism challenges
the very structures of society (Haggerty and Zimmerman, 1995, p.291). However, Cooper (2016, p.86) notes
that fat activism is a radical social movement because: *"it is not easily compartmentalised, it bleeds through
many boundaries, it has many interests. Fat activism cannot conform."* Thus, when referring to fat activism
throughout this chapter, I am not discussing fat activism as a monolithic essence. Rather, I mean to talk
about *elements* of fat activism in order to speak back to the question of oppression and liberation. When
referring to the fat movement, I mean to encompass both body positivity and fat activism.

such as Cooper (2016) have been critical of second-wave feminists' apparent dismissal of fat

activists' contributions to the feminist movement (Hester and Walters, 2016). As Farrell (2011, p.

140) notes, fat activism was intrinsically linked to second-wave feminism in the late 1960s, citing

the writer Susan Stinson, who suggested that: "there was a lot of pushing the boundaries of what

women should look like [in second-wave feminism], and fat was included in that."

Most notably, groups such as The Fat Underground (FU) and the Fat Women's Problem-Solving

Group were groups with a "cogent and radical analysis of fat oppression" (Burgand et al, 2009;

Hester and Walters, 2016). Born out of radical and Marxist feminism, such groups asserted that the

fat female body's oppression was directly linked to other forms of oppression, noting the direct

links between fat hatred and capitalism. Consequently, in November 1973, the FU released the "Fat

Liberation Manifesto," which set out the group's beliefs about the dieting industry's capitalization

on fat hatred. Freespirit and Aderbaran, the authors of the manifesto, noted their cause to be "allied

with the struggles of other oppressed groups against classism, racism, sexism, ageism, capitalism,

imperialism, and the like" (Smith,2009, p.184; Rothblum and Solovay, 2009, p.264). This is

encapsulated by the conclusion of the manifesto, a subtle rephrasing of Marx's call to the working

class:

FAT PEOPLE OF THE WORLD UNITE, YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE!

Here, it is clear that these fat activists see power as an oppressive force that aims to remould the

body to meet the thin-ideal. Thus, in their eyes, liberation can only be achieved by dismantling

patriarchal structures that suppress fat women (see: Schoenfielder and Wieser, 1983). Similarly to

Jeffreys (2014) and Brownmiller (2013), some fat activists viewed dieting and weight-loss surgery

as being forms of "mutilation" that paralleled practices such as "foot-binding and clitoridectomy" (Zimmerman, 2000, p.291). Such behaviours are symptomatic of life under patriarchy, in which a woman's body needs to be attractive in order to "catch a man and be assured of economic survival" (Dworkin, 1989, p.29; Thunder in Schoenfielder and Wieser, 1983).

Consequently, for the Fat Underground, "radical therapy" was essential in dismantling oppressive structures. This refers to a type of treatment that "put the focus of change on society, not on individuals" (Rothblum and Solovay, 2009, p.4). In a practical sense, this meant confronting "doctors, psychologists, and public health officials" about their ideas of fat oppression, most notably the idea of "mystified oppression," the idea that weight-loss is in the fat person's best interests ("for their own good"), meaning that it is often difficult for fat people to speak up for their rights (Farrell, 2011, p.143). Within the manifesto, Freespirit and Mayer cited the "mystified science" of fitness and health as providing industries with the justification for upholding oppressive structures and practices (Zimmerman, 2000, p.291). Indeed, Farrell (2011, p.143) notes how the manifesto cited "special enemies" - such as the dieting industry and the medical establishment - as colluding with financial interests to "continue the oppression of fat people." This is demonstrated in the following passage from the manifesto, cited in Rothblum and Solovay (2009, p.341):

> We are angry at mistreatment by commercial and sexist interests. These have exploited our bodies as objects of ridicule, thereby creating an immensely profitable market selling the false promise of avoidance of, or relief from, that ridicule.

The manifesto sets out a "cogent and radical analysis of fat oppression" that sought to liberate fat women from the pervasive pressures to lose weight (Mayer, 1983, in Hester and Walters, p.18). As Cooper (2016) notes, the reaction to the death of Mama Cass Elliot, a popular singer of the

'sunshine pop' era, demonstrates the daily humiliations experienced by fat women that were

discussed in the Fat Manifesto. As a fat woman, Elliot had been attacked for her weight throughout

her career by the press. Prior to her death, she had lost 80lbs on a self-starvation diet, which

probably led her to a fatal heart attack. Despite this, the press fanned the urban myth that Elliot had

died whilst choking on a ham sandwich, or that she "died from choking on her vomit after stuffing

herself with food" (Farrell, 2011, p.144; Murray, 2008, p.102).

Cooper (2016) notes that the rumours surrounding Cass Elliot were typical of the stereotypes

associated with fat and femininity; fat women are pitiful, laughable and "reckless" overeaters who

do not "deserve respect in life or in death" (Saguy and Ward, 2011, p.3; Gailey, 2012). She furthers

this by suggesting that Elliott did not choke on a sandwich, rather she: "choked on the culture, on

the stale empty air and worthless standards of our conditioning" (Cooper, 2016). When talking to

fat activists, it was clear that many of them had experienced intense shame and stigma surrounding

their bodies at the hands of the culture that Cooper describes:

> Jessica: when I was younger, people didn't need to say 'hey, you're fat and worthless' [...] just 'hey, you're fat' was enough to make me cry
>
> Molly: [...] I don't know if P.E teachers don't like fat kids but a lot of people don't like fat people [...] I think there is that thing that people think that if they make you feel bad about being fat then you'll just stop being fat but the thing is [...] you already feel bad about being fat [...] you couldn't really make it much worse, because you already feel horrible.
>
> Lucy: I started dieting when I was seven years old [...] voluntarily, I would say. In the sense, that [...] it was my idea and I thought it was a great idea and of course I was seven, so it [...] only happened because everyone else thought it was a great idea also. I think as a seven year old I thought that if I lost weight, I would have friends. That's how I, sort of, framed it for myself [...] I remember having very vivid, almost like superhero fantasies of [...] you know, what it would be like when I was thin.

In this sense, fat women are encouraged to hate their bodies and to view thinness as the only route

towards happiness. Thus, for some fat activists, it is essential that fat women shine a light on the

pervasive oppression that hounds their existence. At the Women's Equality Day celebration in Los Angeles in 1974, The Fat Underground entered the stage wearing black armbands and holding their clenched fists above their heads in solidarity with Mama Cass Elliot, their "fallen fat sister" (Schoenfielder and Wieser, 1983, p.xiii). Their performance was styled as a funeral procession, aiming to symbolize the "genocide" committed against fat women's bodies by the patriarchal medical establishment and dieting industry (Farrell, 2011, p.144; Cooper, 2011; Murray in Murray, 2008).

Such a stance aligns itself with the work of some radical and Marxist feminists, who view power as residing in the overarching system of patriarchy (see: Jeffreys, 2005; Dworkin, 1975; Greer, 2004; Millett, 2000). For The Fat Underground, the fat woman's body was a direct threat to male-dominated society, meaning that fat women are forced to endure a "lifetime of humiliation" because of the societal fear that surrounds their "strength and sensuality" (Rothblum, 2009, p.143). For example, the Women's Equality Day protest bears resemblance to the Miss America Pageant protest discussed in Chapter 2, in which feminist activists threw away symbolically "oppressive" items encouraged by the beauty and dieting industry (Banet-Wieser and Portwood-Stacer, 2006).

Additionally, The Fat Underground would disrupt diet group meetings throughout the 1970s, with the aim of dismantling the industry. When talking to Rachel, a fat activist performance artist, some of her activism seemed to align itself with tactics used by The Fat Underground. For example, she noted that directly protesting the dieting industry is a creative way of approaching fat-phobic industries. She stated:

It can just be really fun […] I used to do this thing, which is a bit of a dick thing to do, like I would go to like Slimming World meetings with biscuits under my coat. At the end of the meeting, I would be like 'hey! I'm making a show about fat. Would anybody like to have a cup of tea and come talk to me?' and there would be people that were really angry […] but I was so like, angry about those things and I still am.

As a performance artist, Rachel's work aims to carve out space for oppressed bodies. Indeed, her interruption of the Slimming World meetings is not dissimilar to the protest at the Women's Equality Day celebration; both involve direct action to shine a light on fat women's subjugation from industries. This performance-style activism that aims to disrupt oppressive spaces is common in the movement, another notable example being that of the '*Fattylympics.*' In 2012, the Olympics were held in an area of East London, which soon became heavily saturated with fat-shaming images (Sykes, 2016, p.1). Organized by Charlotte Cooper, the goal of the *'Fattylympics'* was to "satirise and protest" the games with stalls and non-competitive games and activities, such as a "Mass Show of Disrespect" in which the group "mooned" or swore at the Olympic stadium, whilst singing a *'Fattylympics'* anthem[30] (Monaghan et al, 2013, p.1). The purpose of this was to reclaim the space designated to athletic bodies and create a "celebration [...] of fat bodies and the fat lives they lead" (Pause and Wykes, 2016, p.77; Cooper, 2013).

Indeed, in 1983, *Shadow on a Tightrope: Writings for Fat Women on Fat Oppression* sought to shine a light on fat women's experiences of oppression under patriarchy. Edited by members of 'The Fat Underground,' the anthology of personal stories, poems and articles was published by the Rotunda Press, the first "fat woman's press in the UK." The book aimed to share fat women's stories of the shame, guilt and self-hatred that is projected upon them by thin-centric society,

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[30] The lyrics are as followed: *when you're looking in the mirror and you don't like what you see, try to dream of social justice. Try to dream of being free. Trapped inside the shadow of a corporate beast, you don't have to fuck people over to survive. You can try a different way, maybe today you'll learn a new way to be alive. Let's try to dream it, together. Let's dream it together, today* (Cooper, 2013)

hoping to "help women recognize the reality of fat oppression in their own and other women's lives" (Schoenfielder and Wieser, 1983, p.xxi). One chapter, written by Vivian Mayer, denounces the mainstream feminism of the time for failing to recognize the plight of fat women:

> If you have any doubts, a random handful of women's magazines from any grocery store will make it clear that fat is one of the biggest issues on women's minds. Almost every issue of every women's magazine carries an article on how to lose weight. Fear of fat is so entrenched in the American mind that even the most radical women, who have spent years exploring and rebuilding women's consciousness through the Women's Liberation Movement, have failed to spot the fraud (Mayer, in Schoenfielder and Wieser, 1983, p.3)

Indeed, for Mayer, some radical feminists did not align themselves with the oppression of fat women's bodies. Rather, they were afraid of becoming fat themselves: even women who dedicated their lives to "rebuilding women's consciousness through the women's liberation movement" can be seen at revolutionary meetings drinking "diet soda to avoid being fat" (p.3).

Fat hatred of women is so pervasive, therefore, that even some radical feminists attempted to lose weight. As Thunder (in Schoenfielder and Wieser, 1983, p.214) contends, feminist circles often encouraged fat women to lose weight, suggesting that whilst "dieting women receive support", fat women are made to feel that "thin women would prefer it if we would just disappear."[31] In this sense, Cooper (2013) argues that *Shadow on a Tightrope* was an essential piece of literature in reassuring fat women that they were not alone and that they had reasons to be angry at society, as well as at mainstream feminism.

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[31] Cooper (2010) problematizes feminist work on the body and slimness from scholars such as Bartky (1990, 1997), Bordo (1993), Chernin (1983) and Wolf (1990) for encouraging the medical treatment for the "severely obese" whilst maintaining a critical stance on the "origins and effects of the global obesity epidemic." For some fat activists, this contradiction still positions fat people as being "diseased" and excludes them from feminist rhetoric.

Indeed, *Shadow on a Tightrope* placed sexuality at the core of their fat feminist activism in the 1960s and 1970s, resisting the notion that the sexual revolution should be reserved for thin feminists only. As Scott-Jones (in Schoenfielder and Wieser, 1983, p.216) recalled, fat girls were permitted to "cheer the participants on but never to join in." Thus, *Shadow* inspired fat women to be unashamed about their sexuality, contending that part of fat women's oppression was their "status as social pariahs." For example, in *Shadow*, authors pen-names aimed to reclaim fat women's sexuality such as Elana Dykewoman and Thunder.

Moreover, *Shadow* encouraged the lesbian separatism that was prominent in some radical feminist circles (see: Dworkin, 1989; Bunch, 1976). Indeed, Dworkin (1989) suggests that lesbianism was the "only way for women to gain control of their bodies." For the activists behind *Shadow*, whilst thin lesbians are able to "move easily in a patriarchal society," fat lesbians' bodies are a rebellious affront to male domination. Thus, as Thunder (1983, p.214) suggested, there needed to be a greater sense of pride amongst the fat lesbian community. This call to arms led to a range of DIY publications and zines based around fat sex.

As Duncombe (2014, p.7) argues, this was an attempt to generate space for disempowered women to create their own culture rather than consuming the mainstream, oppressive narratives. For instance, Nony Lamm creates the zine *I'm so Fucking Beautiful*, which acted as a rejection to

"bullshit" mainstream feminist views on the body, citing Orbach's *Fat is a Feminist Issue* as being

particularly problematic[32] (Hester and Walters, 2016, p.25).

However, the most influential fat activist zine came from a fat liberation group in San Francisco

during the 1990's. The zine – *FaT GiRL: A Zine for Fat Dykes and the Women Who Want Them* –

challenged the dominant narrative that reserved sexuality for thin bodies only, often featuring

pictures of fat women "enjoying sex and food, often both at once" (Moore and Kosut, 2010, p.373;

Hester and Walters, 2016, p.3). Likewise, *FaT GiRL* often celebrated its "mixed heritage" of the fat

liberation movement and the lesbian community (LeBesco, 2004, p.49; Moore and Kosut, 2010, p.

373). The purpose of this type of fat activism, then, is to resist oppressive structures that encourage

women to hate their bodies, as Rachel suggests:

> So, I really love swimming [...] when I swim I feel like those hippos in Fantasia with the tutus, they are like my favourite thing in the world. I used to do this aquafit class and I still do it, it made me feel just elegant and it made all of my body feel just lovely. And I remember being next to a friend as we got out of the pool and they said 'ugh, I'm just carrying so much dead weight' and I remember thinking that was so violent - why would you refer to bits of your body as dead? All of it is alive, all of it is present. Anyway, that's me being a bit of a hippy. But fat activism doesn't allow me to slip back into those patterns of hate, they are really easy to slip back into. Everything around you wants you to slip into them and it comes with the promise of happiness [...] like, fall in line and you'll be happy, eat better and you'll be happy, lose weight and you'll be happy. And fat activism says 'no you won't.' But fat activism goes further and says 'and you know you won't.' And that's what it is for.

Similarly to some elements of radical feminism, parts of this position encourage fat women to see

dieting as an act of patriarchal dominance; fat bodies are moulded by oppressive forces and

encouraged to lose weight in order to reach the thin-ideal (see: Brownmiller, 1975; Jeffreys, 2008;

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[32] *Fat is a Feminist Issue* was a seminal text by Susie Orbach, first published in 1988. Cooper (2016, p.98) noted that after picking up a copy, she felt more alone than ever about her fatness, suggesting that similar feminist texts left her feeling "shamed by the assumption that my fatness was pathological and it took me a long time to release myself from its grip." This was due to FIAFI's assertion that it was possible to lose weight permanently and that fat women were "compulsive overeaters."

Millett, 1970). In this sense, remembering the radical, core principles of fat activism encourages

Rachel to be critical of the structures that oppress the fat female body. However, Cooper (2016) is

critical of parts of radical fat activism for the same reason that scholars such as Raun (2016) and

Serano (2013) are skeptical about elements of radical feminism.

Whilst it is important to recognize the important contribution that radical fat activists made to fat

activism and feminism, it is essential to be wary of the "essentialist, fundamentalist and separatist"

views that have been critiqued by women of colour, sex workers and trans activists (Hester and

Walters, 2016, p.15)[33]. Cooper (2016) argues that fat activism can be understood in "waves" much

like the feminist movement, with parts of the third wave embracing queerness as their foundation

for fat activism (Moen, 2017). Cooper's "fat queer girl-gang," *The Chubsters*, were inspired by

gang wars in New York between groups such as *The Sluts*, *The Glitter Girls*, *The Blades and The

Ponies* (Del Mar, 2008). Along with her fat activist friends, Cooper's girl gang created 'snarky,

mean and deadpan' personas with names such as *The Beefer*, *Unskinny* and *Butch Husky* (Cooper,

2015). For Cooper, *The Chubsters* purposely defied "concrete definitions" and allowed participants

to "embrace freakhood", opening up fat activism to be inclusive of diverse bodies, especially the

LGBTQ community[34] (Rich, Monaghan and Aphramor, 2010, p.184).

The Liberated Fat Body: Self-love and Empowerment

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[33] When quoting fat activist participants in this section, I am not suggesting that they align themselves with the radical, separatist views of some activists and feminists. Rather, I am using quotes that speak back to the question of oppression and liberation.

[34] Cooper (2016) refers to the 'Hamburger Queen' show as a piece of fat activist performance art that embraces queerness and fatness as its foundation. Describing it as an "eye-popping, dragging, fleshy, unapologetic embodied weirdness" that "creates space" for everyone to enjoy, the show attempts to subvert oppressive spaces through spectacle. Indeed, in our interview, Rachel cited the Hamburger Queen show as a space where she could feel comfortable in her body: "my body just felt normal, didn't feel like a big deal."

In contrast to fat activism's radical opposition to oppressive structures, body positivist activists believe fat women can achieve freedom through self-love and acceptance (see: Wann, 1998; Crabbe, 2017; Baker, 2015; King, 2016). The world of body positivity has its roots in feminist online spaces, especially social media sites such as Instagram (Sastre, 2014, p.929). In her work on the history of fat activism, Cooper (2016, p.15) notes that fat activism and body positivity are sometimes used interchangeably despite their various differences.

Most importantly, the main division between fat activism and body positivity is their position on how to counteract the discrimination felt by fat women. In contrast to fat activism's radical opposition to oppressive structures, body positivity can be understood as the desire to create individual self-love through self-help. Arguably, this stance is not dissimilar to some post-feminist discourses that encourage women to embrace femininity, their bodies and their sexuality in order to achieve personal empowerment (see: Roiphe, 1993; Wolf, 1999; Sommers, 1995). The most prominent example of this is Marilyn Wann's *FAT!SO?* which proposed that fat women needed to recognize and embrace their inherent beauty, stating:

> You can face your fears. You can dispel that cloud. And you don't have to change the world to do it. You don't even have to change your weight. You just have to change your attitude. It'd be my honor to act as your friendly tour guide on the trip from the old attitude (fear of fat) to the new attitude: flabulousness! (Wann cited in Murray, 2006, p.158)

For Wann, reclaiming the word 'fat' and embracing the body is the "miracle cure" that you've been looking for (Crabbe, 2017). Indeed, she suggests that making choices is a key part of fat women's liberation: one can choose to "celebrate [their] unique body" and choose to believe that they have done nothing wrong (Wann, 2005, p.60). Thus, like the post-feminist scholars cited in Chapter 2,

some body positivity activists contend that the fat body can be a vessel for liberation from oppressive structures. As Williams (2004) notes, it is important for fat women to simply let go of one's self-hatred and "love yourself just as you are" (p.184). This can be achieved by re-educating oneself about fatness, refusing to diet and supporting other fat women (p.183). The internet, and more specifically social media, is a useful platform for carrying out these actions. As Wann (2005, p.61) notes, feminists should be "smart and skeptical enough" to see through "the lies that justify fat hatred."

It is essential, therefore, that feminists "recognize the witch hunt" that justifies the treatment of fat women by "celebrating everyone's unique body" (p.62). A notable example of this in practice can be seen in the National Association for the Advancement of Fat Acceptance (NAAFTA) within the US, which have the mission of "eliminating discrimination based on body size" through providing fat people with the "tools for self-empowerment" (Tischner, 2013, p.15). Founded in 1969, the organization promotes these goals through "advocacy, education, and support." For the latter goal, NAAFTA aims to "raise the self-esteem of fat people" through community events that encourage fat-positive attitudes. Indeed, in my interview with Lucy, she noted that as a member of NAAFTA, she had often attended fat women's gatherings that were intended "for meeting people to date."

Today, the *Fatosphere* acts as a hub for body positivity, providing fat women with a safe space online. The *Fatosphere* refers to a collection of websites and blogs for fat women to share their experiences, connect with other fat women and become confident in their bodies (Pause and Wykes, 2016, p.77; White, 2014; Dickins et al, 2011). Indeed, for Harding and Kirby (2009, p.1), the *Fatosphere* allowed them to stop hating their bodies. In *Lessons from the Fatosphere*, they

suggest that the online community's first step in helping fat women achieve body-love was by

creating an "anti-weight loss zone", meaning that members had to follow a "no-diet talk" rule:

> There is no talking about how you just lost forty pounds on the latest diet or even how you only
> want to lose a few pounds for your 'health.' It means no diet talk, period. In the early days of our
> blogs, this was a really controversial position to take. A lot of dieters felt alienated by the no-diet
> talk rule. But we both realized what a difference it made when we and our readers weren't being
> constantly bombarded with crap about how great dieting was (p.1)

Consequently, the *Fatosphere* provides users with the opportunity for "self-expression" and "being

heard" away from discussions about weight-loss, allowing members to escape the ubiquitous nature

of diet-talk that exists in wider society (Pause and Wykes, 2016, p.1). One participant, Lucy, cited

similar methods of empowerment as being useful, through the website: *Fuck yeah, fat PhDs!* The

website was dedicated to rejecting stereotypes about fat women as unintelligent or lazy by

showcasing the range of fat women who possess doctoral degrees. Lucy suggests that the website

acts as a source of pride and comfort for fat women, allowing them to feel comfortable in their

bodies:

> [...] the Fuck Yeah Fat PhDs is a lovely project for empowering the people who are involved in it or
> the people who might be ready for that sort of empowerment.

In this sense, body positivity is perceived as a source of empowerment and liberation for the

individual. Additionally, this can be seen through 'Fatshion,' a plethora of websites dedicated to

size-acceptance for plus-size women (Grundy, 1991, p.78). Similarly to post-feminist scholars such

as Roiphe (1993), supporters of 'Fatshion' suggest that embracing one's body and sexuality is an act

of empowerment. As Tischner (2013, p.67) argues, the option to "express one's self" via clothes is

often restricted to thin women, relegating fat women to a "uniform of leggings and baggy t-shirts."

Thus, rather than dressing to "flatter" one's shape, fat women need to wear clothes that will help them to love their bodies (Tovar, 2012, p.1). For example, "fatshionistas" such as Tess Holliday - a model and social media figure - rebuke normative assumptions about fat women's bodies by modelling clothes designed for slim women[35]. In 2012, Holliday started the #effyourbeautystandards campaign[36], stating:

> I don't know about you, but frankly I am tired of getting told what curvy/fat/plus size girls are 'allowed' to wear [...] for everyone that says you can't wear a bikini, show our tummies, wear a pencil/form fitting skirt, wear sleeveless tops… YOU can! [...] stop hiding your body because society tells you to.

For fat women to achieve self-love, they need to recognize and embrace their inherent beauty. As Sastre (2014) argues, such a stance aims to expose the "dangers and fallacies of normative constructions of beauty," blogs such as *Stop Hating Your Body* and *Body Revolution* encourage readers to "be brave" and "join the body peace revolution" (p938). Likewise, websites such as *The Body Positive* proclaim to be creating a world in which "people are liberated from self-hatred." In this sense, body positivity can mean anything from celebrating one's "lumpy bits" to refusing to diet. Indeed, in recent years, body positivity has become a media buzzword and has been positioned into mainstream discussions about the body (Crabbe, 2017). For instance, one article in *Cosmopolitan* magazine details how women covered themselves in glitter and posed naked "for body positivity," suggesting that they were able to feel comfortable and beautiful in their naked figures (Beck, 2017). Likewise, in 2017, *The Independent* reported that models "of all sizes" had transformed Times

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[35] Other notable "Fatshionistas" include Nadia Aboulhosn, Amanda Skater and Ashley Graham, who are professional "plus-size" models. In particular, Ashley Graham made headlines when she was featured on the front of a *Sports Illustrated* magazine cover, which aimed to show diverse bodies by proclaiming *"beauty is not a cookie cutter"* (Feldman and Oliver, 2016).

[36] The '#' symbol (hashtag) allows social media users to *"recover, reply [...] or follow conversations about a certain topic"* (Ozok and Zaphiris, p.6).

Square into a "body positivity catwalk." The organizer, KhrystyAna, suggested that it was an act of

embracing "all kinds of beauty" (Ritschel, 2017). As Grogan (p.192) suggests, focusing on "body

appreciation rather than body dissatisfaction" allows women to maintain body satisfaction in

societies where the "ideal is slender/muscular and their bodies do not correspond to this ideal."

Arguably, this position is similar to some post-feminist scholars, who suggest that women need to

embrace and enjoy their bodies in order to achieve liberation (see: Lumby, 1997; Roiphe, 1994;

Wolf, 2013; Sommers, 1995). For Lucy, choosing to give up dieting and accept her body was an

empowering experience. She explained to me how, as a musician, embracing her fat body helped

her feel comfortable in herself:

> Lucy: [...] it was absolutely a moment of huge liberation for me and absolutely a sense of [...] these walls just coming down [...] you know, the idea that I could actually choose to not do something that the entire world was expecting me to do [...] so it was actually a choice.
>
> Interviewer: I read the piece about your album cover and how you initially felt that if you had your picture on the album cover that you thought people wouldn't buy the album [...] but then you decided that they would. Was that a liberating process?
>
> Lucy: Yes, that was something that was liberating. Also, I don't know if you have seen the album cover but [...] I'm not actually wearing any clothes [...] which you can't totally tell from the cover but it was a huge body liberation thing to be photographed wearing no clothes [...]

In this sense, Lucy felt empowered by refusing to diet and celebrating her naked body through her

art. For many body positivity activists, being comfortable in one's fat naked body is important in

creating self-love. Indeed, for Heather McAllister, discussions of body liberation are pointless if

they are focused on the "neck up." In 1999, she founded burlesque troupes for fat women, the most

notable being the *Big Bottom Revue* and *Big Burlesque* (McAllister in Rothblum and Solovay,

2009, p.305; Hester and Walters, 2016, p.1; Lupton, 2012, p.8). Using the art of the strip tease, fat

burlesque performers are able to "present, define and defend their sexualities" (McAllister in

Rothblum and Solovay, 2009, p.305). During my interview with Jessica, who refers to herself as a

'Body Love Activist,' she explained that burlesque had been a liberating process for her. After

moving to New York City to pursue a career in theatre, she felt disheartened by the lack of diverse

bodies in the business. Eventually, she joined the New York School of Burlesque, which

encouraged her to think about the body in terms of liberation:

> That was the turning point for me to start to do body positivity because performing burlesque as a
> fat person went hand in hand with talking about body shame [...] so I fell into it [...] and then I felt
> like I couldn't stop talking about it [...] I thought 'I need to be loud about this and I need to be loud
> about it all the time.

For Jessica, "publicly claiming sexual agency, desire and desirability" within a society that brands

fat women's bodies as desexed is an emancipatory process (McAllister in Rothblum and Solovay,

2009).

Like Paglia's (2011) call for women to use their bodies as a force for power, fat burlesque allows

women to escape stereotypes surrounding their bodies. Indeed, Jessica pointed towards one

performance that felt particularly liberating for her. In a dance named 'yes!', Jessica performed a

strip tease whilst writing the word 'no' on parts of her body that she found shameful and

unattractive. Throughout the piece, members of the audience were invited to come to the stage and

wipe the negative words from her body, replacing them with the word 'yes.' The performance, she

explained, finished with her standing naked on stage covered in the word 'yes.' She explains how

the performance was a liberating experience that allowed her to accept her body:

> [...] so there is this part in the act where I pull my underwear down and I have 'no' written on my
> belly and that was a big deal for me when I made the decision to put it there [...] I almost cry when I

do that sometimes still in the act [...] I've spent so much of my life being mad at my upper arms, or 'oh if this one thing would go' or my double chin [...] and to be able to stand in a group of people, write 'yes' on myself and then let other people write 'yes' on me too [...] that was something really special for me [...] I stopped trying to be anything other than how I feel in my body [...] being able to call myself 'fat' and stop scrambling to be able to not call myself fat, I've gotten so much more done, it was taking up so much of my time!

In this sense, liberation from body-shame was possible for Jessica by "redefining" fatness as a beautiful entity to be embraced (Czerniawski, 2015, p.20; Burgard et al, 2009, p.305).

However, scholars such as Cooper (2016, p.15) contend that encouraging fat women to simply "make peace with their bodies" and to stop "apologizing for who they are" is a watered down version of fat activism that does not take into account the pervasive nature of dieting culture. Murray, for example, argues that the concept of loving one's body "mirrors diet culture with its fantasies of transformations and happy endings" and ignores the extensive nature of fat-hating society. In this sense, such an individualistic positioning of "the mind over the body" is "mythic," as it ignores the "culturally and historically specific discourses" that shape fat women's lives (Murray, 2008, p.170). She notes:

As a fat girl, I still found myself choosing the table in the restaurant facing the wall, and cutting the size tags out of my new clothes. Eschewing ingrained body knowledge about the offensiveness of the fat female body was not as easy as changing my mind (Murray, 2008, p.17)

For these scholars, body positivity lays the responsibility for "empowerment" at the feet of the individual, instead of recognizing the pervasive structures that shape women's bodies. As Luck (2016) notes, whilst body positivity has its "origins in the feminist movement," companies co-opt the movement by positioning buying their products/services as empowering "catalysts for a revolution in the way we see women's bodies." Ultimately, this means that body positivity messages "serve the same beauty standard that they attempt to resist" (p.1). For example,

companies often proclaim that they are going to use "real girls" in their advertising campaigns, yet the women in the adverts are "if not supermodel-thin, still well below the size of the average woman" (p.2).

Thus, in the same way that scholars criticize post-feminist discussions of individualized 'empowerment' (see: Whelehan, 2000; Levy, 2006; Harris, 2004), some see body positivity as only allowing fat women 'control' and 'choices' if they are the 'right' kind of fat. For instance, Crabbe (2017) notes that body positivity can be "deceptive", allowing women to have curves if they are in "exactly the right places and only in exactly the right proportions."[37] Rachel supported this notion, suggesting that body positivity activism upholds oppressive norms about the necessity of female "beauty." She stated:

> I think body activism is massively different [to fat activism] because I think that is when you look at the playing field as a whole, so - how do we talk about our bodies in ways that aren't tied to weight, in ways that aren't tied to value? That, for me, is kind of the realm of body positivity. If you are crossing body positivity and fat activism, that allows quite a lot of fat-phobia to seep in and you've got to be really careful with it.
>
> Interviewer: I went to see Charlotte [Cooper] speak actually and she said that body positivity is kind of like Spice Girls version of fat activism. So, you know like The Fat Underground - that comes from punk and is more aggressive?
>
> Rachel: Yeh, 'I can still be beautiful' sort of thing. And it is that thing of like, can we get past that? Why do you need to feel that you need to be beautiful? Can we start picking apart what beauty is?

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[37] In 2014, Meghan Trainor's song All About that Bass was hailed as a body positivity anthem, with the lyrics encouraging women "not to worry about [their] size" and the suggestion that men "like a little more booty to hold at night." However, not only does the song imply that men need to validate women's beauty (Michaels, 2014), Trainor also sings about having curves "in all the right places", suggesting that a fatness is acceptable if it still meets Eurocentric beauty standards.

In this sense, the body positivity movement can be accused of "forgetting about the very bodies that it was created to protect" (Young, 2017)[38]. Recently, online fat activist spaces have protested the mainstreaming of body positivity, suggesting that it is becoming "meaningless." In one blog, Dionne (2017) suggests that accepting fatness is "no longer a huge part" of body positivity. Citing the fat activist Enneking, she states that body positivity focuses on individual's experiences and perspectives, rather than viewing women's bodies as an "incredibly political" area of contestation.

This lack of a radical vision has caused deep divisions within the fat movement, most notably in the criticisms of NAAFTA in the 1970s (Galley, 2014; Cooper, 2016). Farrell (2011, p.141) argues that the founder, Bill Fabrey, was "uninformed about the ways that fat oppression intertwined with other forms of cultural oppression" [39]. As a heterosexual white man who was "sympathetic to the situation of his fat wife," Fabrey was unable to create an inclusive movement with a clear purpose. Indeed, in our interview, Lucy noted that NAAFTA "couldn't decide whether it was an activist group or a social group."[40]

This contestation between 'oppression' and 'liberation' can yet again be seen in Johnson and Taylor's (2008) comparison of *Dove's* 'Campaign for Real Beauty' and the "Pretty, Porky, and

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[38] In 2017, Stephanie Yeboah criticized a book called 'Body Positive' which documented the authors journey from being "an anxiety-ridden party girl, battling with mental health and an unhealthy relationship with eating" to finding "happiness, calm, direction and self-love" through weight-loss. Yeboah contended that body positivity should not be about celebrating the dieting industry, suggesting that it has been "hijacked" by people who "fall within what society considers beautiful" (Young, 2017)

[39] Infighting within NAAFTA eventually led to the formation of the Fat Underground in the 1970s, led by Summer-Vivian Mayer (known by the name "Aldebaran") (Farrell, 2011, p.142).

[40] Likewise, the "dating scene" in NAAFTA was arguably filled with "rampant sexism." As Scott-Jones (1983, p.218) suggested, the women in the organization were there for "self-appointed studs out to score with as many fat women as possible" or to service a "relationship with a guy who couldn't get thin women to go to bed with him for one reason or another." She suggests that a focus on individual "acceptance" and a lack of radical vision allowed oppressive structures to be reproduced within the organization.

Pissed Off" (PPPO) group. The former was a corporate campaign that "claimed to oppose restrictive feminine beauty standards", whilst the latter was a "grassroots fat-activist organization." For these scholars, *Dove's* campaign preached the ability to achieve self-love through the "purchasing of beauty products," whilst reinforcing the "hegemony of beauty ideology in women's personal lives." In contrast, PPPO offered an attack through the use of "countercultural activism" that encouraged fat bodies to "revolt" against oppressive systems. Here, the lines between the 'radical' roots of fat activism and the seemingly 'diluted' body positivity activism is clearly drawn.[41]

Deconstructing Fatness: Post-structuralist Analysis of Fatness

As post-structuralist feminists argue, power works through women's bodies in a 'push and pull' motion, meaning that the body is neither 'oppressed' or 'liberated' (see: Butler, 2011; Bartky, 1997; Bordo, 1990; 2004; Grosz, 1994; Davis, 2013; Heyes, 2007). As Foucault (1977) suggested, nothing can "escape the gaze of the omnipresent" force of panoptic society (1975; McCahill, 1998). The 'power/knowledge' regime, the unflinching gaze that produces knowledge about the individual and society, enforces the structures of power and the "management of individuals" (Kupchik et al, 2009, p.5). These systems of power exist in the everyday, meaning that they are almost impossible to resist (Crowley and Mitchell, 1994, p.182). Indeed, the nature of self-surveillance in dieting means that a lifetime of body-shame and surveillance cannot be reversed by fat activism or body positivity; power is is an insidious force that is not as simple as 'oppression' or 'liberation.'

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[41] It is important to state that there are a number of fat activists who are not typically "bound to official organizations." Most notably, the work of Cooper (1998, 2016) and Murray (2008) have battled fat phobia and fat discrimination through writing books and carrying out direct action (Tischner, 2012, p.16).

Thus, in terms of the fat movement, power works through activist's bodies, meaning that gendered dieting narratives are difficult to escape. On a practical level, this means that fat activists may feel torn between wanting to liberate oneself or dismantle oppressive structures, and being tempted by the promises of dieting. As the fat activist Williams (in Edut, 1998, p.185) notes: "I still have those moments of insecurity, the feelings of inadequacy, and the loneliness." In this sense, whilst the fat movement "wants you out - out and proud - with no grey areas," fat women still have to live in a society that enforces normative understandings of 'feminine' bodies (Murray, 2008, p.137). This was touched upon in Cooper's (2016) and Murray's (2005) criticisms of body positivity, in which they suggest that self-love is difficult to achieve in a society that hates fat women.

This debate has divided much of the fat movement, especially around the subject of weight-loss surgery. For example, when Samantha Murray, a prominent fat activist and scholar, announced that although she "embraced the aims of various forms of fat activism", she also felt "ambivalence towards her body." When her doctor offered her weight loss surgery, she knew that her "politics would be compromised" but went ahead with the procedure (Murray, 2005, p.878). For scholars such as Throsby (2008, p.129), the act of weight-loss surgery enables fat women to "participate in the normatively prescribed work of disciplining the body." Other fat activists share this view, considering weight-loss as a form of treachery to the movement. For example, when one woman shared her experiences of weight-loss surgery on the *Fatosphere*, a commentator questioned her credibility and suggested that she be removed from the site:

> Go away. You are not in charge. You do not speak with or for us. You do not belong here. You are not in the Fat Acceptance movement (Meleo-Erwin, 2011)

Such a position supports the view that the fat body is 'oppressed' and can only be 'liberated' via full self-acceptance and/or the dismantling of oppressive structures. As Cooper (2016) notes, fat women can support fat activism but still seek weight loss as a way of putting "an end to their suffering as fat women." This demonstrates the complexities surrounding power and the fat body, being involved in the fat movement does not stop one from being affected by panoptic forces. For some, this can create a double burden, as Molly notes:

> [...] even though my policy would be like 'no way, I'm not going to diet' [...] I still like [...] like my body when it gets smaller or I like [...] eat really healthy one day and I think 'oh I did really well that day' and I do find it really hard to get away from that completely [...] I stopped eating sugar recently because it was giving me these like weird headaches [...] but there was this part of me which was like [...] this might make me lose a bit of weight [...] that little voice never really goes away no matter how much you try and tell yourself 'that's stupid, I should just do what and eat what I like' and I think there is that voice saying [...] no matter what you eat, you still police what you eat [...] and still think about how other people see you […]

She continues:

> [...] I'm not sure if I can myself an activist, I'm kind of someone who would like to consider themselves as liberated and activist but I don't feel that I am a fat activist [...] it's like another thing that you can fail at. I try not to be too harsh about the fact that I don't like my body and I suppose that I would always say: oh, but I'm not an activist because there are so many better activists out there.

Molly's suggestion that "it never really goes away" symbolizes the ubiquitous nature of panoptic forces, implying that it's impossible to simply "liberate" oneself from the impact of cultural norms, especially as a fat woman in a thin-centric society." Moreover, Sastre (2014, p.939) contends that the work some body positivity websites do "echoes the therapeutic intervention offered to contestants on makeover shows", placing the responsibility of change onto the individual. For instance, asking fat women to "confront" their insecurities shifts the focus from the "modification of one's body to the modification of one's relationship to one's body." Indeed, she draws upon Bevir (1999) and Fraser's (1989) suggestion that it is impossible to detach oneself from the "matrix

of hegemonic norms" that exist around the body, even if one dedicates their life to such a cause (p. 939). Rachel supported this idea when reflecting on being a fat activist performance artist. She stated:

> [...] I don't think any of my work makes me feel liberated, because of re-opening that wound. You can make the space as safe as you want but we've all got to go outside afterwards and I can't make outside safe for me or for any of you.

For Rachel, fat activism is seemingly an outlet for her complex relationship to her body: it is a simultaneously painful and joyful experience. As Foucault (1977, p.202) argued, power is dislocated and ever-changing, meaning that it cannot be a straight-forward path from oppression towards liberation. Indeed, some fat activist scholars have situated their work within such post-structuralist definitions of power (see: LeBesco, 2004; Wright and Harwood, 2008; Murray, 2008). Such an approach involves the contestation of normative discourses surrounding the fat body. For instance, in Murray's (2008, p.3) work, she explores the various ways in which discourses present the fat female body as being "appalling in her excesses" and "almost subhuman."

Thus, the "roots of fat stigma run deep," with scholars such as Farrell (2011, p.170) noting that it has been given a "new dose of fertilizer" through faux-concerns regarding the "obesity epidemic." She cites the example of Camryn Manheim, an American actress who penned a memoir called "Wake up, I'm Fat!", which detailed her joy at finding the fat acceptance movement. Later, however, Manheim was featured in advertisements for "cholesterol-lowering drugs", firmly stating that she was "not a proponent of fat acceptance. As Tischner (p.138) contends, the "normalizing and regulating gaze" discussed by Foucault (1977) is particularly pertinent when analyzing the

discourses that surround the 'obesity epidemic,' with strict disciplinary powers intensifying fat women's suffering. For example, some fat activists have criticised the language that constructs the "obesity crisis", suggesting that it's "strong roots in medicine [...] drug companies, food producers and retailers" relies on the stigmatisation of fat people (Cooper in Rich et al, 2011). To refer to someone as 'obese' suggests that they are 'diseased' and possess an 'abnormal' body.

Here, it is important to reflect upon some of the literature within critical obesity studies, which further critiques the rhetoric surrounding the 'obese' body and the presumed benefits of dieting. As Monaghan (2008, p.2) contends, the labelling of the 'obese' body as a public health issue simply works to "reinforce and actively foster cultural disdain" towards fat bodies, rather than "correct" a perceived health problem. Indeed, as Aphramor (2005, p.317) demonstrates, diets have an incredibly high failure rate, with the majority of individuals regaining weight within two years. Thus, she contends that the pressure on fat individuals to lose weight is both unhelpful and cruel:

> [...] I am not suggesting that every fat person is healthy, anymore than every lean person is, but I do maintain that a continued focus on weight loss even on the basis of staggering failure rates alone is simply unethical.

Indeed, for Gard and Wright (2005, p.3), discussions of 'obesity' are "more to do with preconceived moral and ideological beliefs about fatness than a sober assessment of existing evidence." For instance, Rothblum and Solovay (2009, p.115) explore how representations of childhood obesity are entangled with deeply gendered "mother blame," in which working mothers are chastised for "allowing their children to watch too much television, for not having their eating habits more closely monitored and for relying on convenience foods for meals."

As Rothblum and Solovay (2009, cited in Lupton, 2013, p.5) further suggest, this is why some fat activists reject terms such as "normal weight" and "overweight" because they "suggest that there is an ideal, non-deviant weight to which people should aspire." It is important to problematize these terms in order to counter their use in stigmatizing "particular bodies" (Cooper, 2010). For example, the suspicion of medical understandings of fatness lead Bacon (2008) to write *Health at Every Size*. Based upon a "scientifically tested program," the book aims to debunk weight-loss myths and encourage individuals to "break free of the weight-loss mentality and embrace the health-and-happiness mentality." In a practical sense, the *Health at Every Size* (HAES) involves finding health through acceptance of one's body and acknowledging that "good health can best be realized independent from considerations of size" (Bacon, 2008, p.257).

Similarly, some fat activists encourage a critique of the discourses that construct the fat female body in particular. For example, Evans and Cooper (2016, p.233) cite Sara Ahmed's (2017) description of the feminist 'killjoy'[42] to suggest that fat activists can act as a "critic who pipes up and disrupts from the margins, a figure who understands that the mainstream is overrated." As Cooper (in Ellison et al, 2016, p.143) argues, fat activism takes place in "micro-moments" which can seem "unheroic." Rachel supported this sentiment, arguing that one of the core tenants of fat activism should be:

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[42] Ahmed (2010) describes the figure of the "feminist killjoy" as becoming the "problem you create." By this, she means that feminism can often involve "upsetting the situation" by "speaking up, or speaking out." She states: *"[...] the feminist subject 'in the room' hence 'brings others down' not only by talking about unhappy topics such as sexism but by exposing how happiness is sustained by erasing the signs of not getting along. Feminists do 'kill joy' in a certain sense: they disturb the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places. To kill a fantasy can still kill a feeling. It is not just that feminists might not be happily affected by what is supposed to cause happiness, but our failure to be happy is read as sabotaging the happiness of others."*

> [...] reminding people that it is still not ok to make fun of fat people [...] I'm aware that it is very vocal activism. And when I say vocal, I mean that it is literally saying stuff. I feel like so much of activism happens in the home, so much of it happens in conversations and in just not letting that comment go.

In this sense, fat activism can involve an interrogation into the "regimes of truth" which construct our knowledge of fat women's bodies (Wright and Harwood, 2008, p.19). As has been discussed throughout this thesis, the discourses surrounding "fatness" in women conjure up stereotypes of lazy, unattractive and desexed "losers" (Cooper, 2009, 2016). For some fat activists, then, it is important to view 'fat' as a description of one's body, rather than being synonymous with negative connotations (see: Pausé, 2012; 2015; Murray, 2005; Saguy and Ward, 2011; Mack, 2007; Sedgwick, 2003). This demonstrates the importance of interrogating language by some fat activists, with scholars such as Sedgwick (1993) aligning themselves with Foucault's analysis of discursive "truths."

As Murray (2005, p.266) explains, the negative discourses that surround fat women in Western societies inform our knowledge about their bodies. This elicits a response from society that is "dictated by the way this discourse has asked us to read the fat body as a site of moral and physical decay." For some fat activists, then, 'speaking fat' provides them with the possibility of overturning "the negative response" to fat female bodies by rewriting the discourses that surround them. This position is encapsulated in 'Two Whole Cakes' by Kinzel, in which she describes her reasons for referring to herself as fat in public:

> I speak fat like a language, like a reminder, like a flag of conquest. I wield it like a weapon, like a narrow spear driven into soft spaces between armored plates, so that people listen with my point pricking in their sides. How do I say it? I spit the word with eagerness and joy, eyes alight with the anticipation of how those who hear will react. I see the reactions of the folk who are unaccustomed to the word: they jump as if electrically shocked, they startle, and whatever they were thinking of is

suddenly wiped from their minds - did she just call herself fat? (p.111)

In this sense, activism can happen on the micro-level by deconstructing discourses about the body and fatness. As Sedgwick (1993, p.230) and Murray (2005), argue, this is a process that all fat women need to do, called "coming out" as fat. In the same way that members of the LGBTQ community "come out" to their family and friends, "coming out of the fat closet" involves speaking openly about one's fatness in social situations. In her text, Sedgwick (1993, p.230) affirms the importance of "coming out" as a fat woman:

> It is a way of staking one's claim to insist on, and participate actively in, a renegotiation of the representational contract between one's body and one's world.

For fat activists, this acts as a powerful tool in deconstructing "society's narrow ideals" of accepted bodies (Zagarri, 2010, p.136). Although a fat body is not a 'hidden identity' - indeed, fat bodies are "hypervisible" - coming out acts as a "de-stigmatization strategy" (Saguy and Ward, 2011, p.2). On a practical level, this means "naming oneself as fat despite its obviousness, to express one's knowingness" and "demanding to be publicly seen and respected as fat" (Moon and Sedgwick, in Kyrölä, 2010, p.1). Indeed, in my conversations with fat activists, the importance of "speaking" fat was a prominent theme:

> Molly: [...] admitting that you know you're fat was a big thing for me [...] I sort of think there is a thing of being fat and sort of pretending that you don't know about it [...] look, I know that you know I'm fat and I know I'm fat.
>
> Lucy: [...] I actually kind of enjoy how awkward it makes other people feel [laugh] no, I don't want other people to feel bad or uncomfortable about addressing it but for a lot of people they aren't used to people owning it [...] even people who I have known for years who know I am an activist in this area will be like 'oh no no no, you are not fat!' [...] and I'm like 'stop it' and I will ask them [...] why? Why do you feel you need to make me feel better about this?

Moreover, Rachel referred to a part of her performance piece as subverting the discourses that surround the fat body:

> I had balloons full of coffee - I loved doing that bit - they are full of coffee, cream and glitter. Then you popped them. I say my name, my age, my weight and my dress size. So it is really like, this is where I'm at, this is my body. And then I say 'I'm fat.' When I saw this, there is a glitter balloon. And then I say all the things that I'm not: so, I'm curvy, I'm not obese, I'm not a big booty mama, not carrying a little bit extra, I didn't eat all the pies, I'm not a booty gal. All of these fucking euphemisms. I'm none of these things.

Here, Rachel demonstrates how "speaking" fat can be used to subvert discourses around the fat body. LeBesco (2004) extends this definition to suggest that an integral part of "speaking fat" is a rejection of the "on-the-way-to-thin" discourse that pervades fat women's lives (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 2; Murray, 2005). As Pause (2012, p.47) notes, this is referred to as 'covering,' a tactic that fat women use to "reduce the tension between their stigmatised identity and disapproving society." A major part of covering is being openly ashamed about one's size, informing others about one's dieting plans, withdrawing from society and generally accepting that they "do not deserve the same rights as others" (p.48). Thus, it is not only important to state 'I am fat' in social situations, it is also essential to be unapologetic about one's fatness with statements such as 'I'm most likely going to stay fat.' In this sense, fat activists should "muster courage" to criticize dieting discourses. Whilst this does not mean that liberation is possible, it works to shine a light on the discursive texts that construct our knowledge about the body (Saguy and Ward, 2011, p2).

The Fat Body is... ?

This chapter has spoken back to the dichotomy of power in dieting by exploring how ideas of oppression and liberation play out in the fat movement. Rather than viewing power as a unified force, it is important to recognize the complex, everyday discourses that construct the fat woman's body and inform our knowledge about femininity (Murray, 2008; Tischner, 2013; Wright and

Harwood, 2008). In the first section, I explored the radical history of fat activism, noting that some

fat activists in the 1960s and 1970s aligned themselves with elements of radical feminism that view

power as an oppressive force governed by patriarchy (see: Schoenfielder and Wieser, 1983; Brown

and Rothblum, 1989; Bovey, 1994). As has been discussed, activist groups such as The Fat

Underground were built upon the notion that fat women's bodies threaten male dominance and are

capable of dismantling the structures that subjugate them (Cooper, 2016). For example, the funeral-

march procession that members of The Fat Underground carried out for Mama Cass-Elliot

represented their understanding of power; they saw her death as being symbolic of the oppression

created and sustained by industry (Sykes, 2016; Cooper, 2016). Today, some fat activists take part

in similar practices, such as the *'Fattylympics'* which aimed to subvert oppressive spaces for

marginalized bodies (Monaghan et al, 2013). Moreover, scholars such as Cooper (2016) have

criticized mainstream feminism for its lack of recognition for fat activism's contribution to the

second-wave movement. Indeed, Mayer (1983, p.3) furthers this by suggesting that many radical

feminists were fat-phobic, meaning that fat women were often marginalized within feminism

(Schoenfielder and Wieser, 1983, p.214). As the chapter noted, *Shadow on a Tightrope* was

instrumental in reclaiming fat women's sexuality, whilst critiquing parts of radical feminism

(Cooper, 2016; Hester and Walters, 2015; Moore and Kosut, 2010; LeBesco, 2004).

In contrast, body positivity encourages fat women to learn to 'love themselves' through

individualized acts of empowerment (Wann, 1998; Crabbe, 2015; Baker, 2015; Stanley, 2017;

King, 2016). Most notably, Wann (2005, p.60) and Williams (2004) argue that fat women can

'choose' to reject dieting culture and embrace their bodies. This body positivity movement has

strong ties to online spaces, with blogs such as the *Fatosphere* encouraging fat women to love their

bodies. One example of this in action is through *Fatshion*, the celebration of fat women wearing clothes "reserved" for thin women that arguably allows fat women to embrace their beauty (Sastre, 2014; Crabbe, 2017). Such a position is similar to some post-feminist rhetoric of emphasizing one's femininity in order to achieve empowerment (see: Lumby, 1997; Roiphe, 1994; Wolf, 2013; Sommers, 1995). Indeed, in my conversation with Jessica, she suggested that embracing her naked body on stage was an important part of reclaiming her "sexual agency" and "redefining" female fat as something to be celebrated (McAllister in Rothblum and Solovay, 2009). However, criticism has pointed towards the co-opting of the movement by companies, meaning that body positivity seemingly serves the same interests as the dieting and beauty industries (Luck, 2016, p.2).

There are clear lines drawn between parts of fat activism and body positivity: whilst the former encourages a radical dismantling of oppressive structures, the latter views women as possessing the power for liberation. The final section of this chapter, however, drew upon fat activist work that aligns itself with post-structuralism (Murray, 2016; Throsby, 2006). Like Foucault (1977), they contend that our understanding of fat women's bodies are created and sustained through practices of discourse that are ever-changing (Wright and Harwood, 2008; LeBesco, 2004; Murray, 2008). Thus, fat activism should be based upon the deconstruction of these discourses, through the process of 'speaking fat.' As has been discussed, this refers to fat activist's challenging the language that surrounds the word 'fat' and reclaiming it as a description, rather than a loaded term (Cooper, 2009; Saguy and Ward, 2011; Sedgwick, 2003). The demand to be simultaneously acknowledged as fat and respected counters the stigmatization of female fatness (Moon and Sedgwick, 2010, p.1). For some of my participants, 'coming out as fat' is an integral part of their fat activism that disrupts normative understandings of fatness. Whilst they recognize that these actions will not 'liberate'

them from 'oppressive' structures, the process of 'speaking fat' works to subvert discourses of

fatness and provide some comfort to fat women.

Chapter 7
The Body, Power and Dieting: Beyond the Binary

> Rosemary: Hal, do me a favour and stop saying that I'm pretty and that I'm not fat, OK? Because it makes me uncomfortable.
>
> Hal: Um, OK. You have a problem with compliments?
>
> Rosemary: Look, I know what I am and I know what I'm not. I'm the girl who gets really good grades and isn't afraid to be funny. And I'm the girl who has a lot of friends who are boys and no boyfriends. I'm not beautiful and I never will be, and I'm fine with that. But when you go around saying that I'm something that I'm not, it's just, it's not nice.

In this film, *Shallow Hal*, Hal has been entranced into seeing the inner beauty that exists within the most 'ugly' women. This means that through his "altered vision," fat (ugly) women appear thin and "beautiful." Throughout the film, the audience is shown the truth about Hal's skinny and beautiful girlfriend. 'Fat Rosemary', played by Gwyneth Paltrow in a fatsuit, is consistently juxtaposed with the actress' own idealized body (Rothblum and Solovay, 2009, p.282). On the surface, the film speaks to notions of 'inner beauty' and the importance of character. However, the film hinges on the perceived ridiculousness of Paltrow in a fat suit, as well as the concept of a fat woman being romantically engaged. In one scene, we watch 'Skinny Rosemary' approach a swimming pool, then are shown the back of 'Fat Rosemary' as she thuds along the diving board. The way that the low angle of the camera hovers over the rolls on her legs is reminiscent of the reveal of a monster within a horror film. This is supported when Hal's stares as 'Thin Rosemary' prepares to dive are juxtaposed with the gawps of the man next to him, the audience are encouraged to laugh at the important distinction between Hal's lust compared to the man's disgust. Whilst the former represents 'deceit,' the latter is symbolic of the 'truth' about fat women's bodies. Indeed, until the end of the film, we don't see Rosemary's 'real' body in full and are instead treated to glimpses of her flesh, as well as obvious jokes about furniture notwithstanding her frame. Despite the 'happy

ever after' ending, with Hal seemingly repenting for his shallow behaviour, we are implicitly reminded of the consequences of female fatness. With a wink and a nudge, it is implied that 'Fat Rosemary' is the freak of the circus and a heterosexual man's worst nightmare; she is what every young woman should fear becoming. As Richardson (2010) suggests, Rosemary's character seeks "forgiveness" from the audience for her fatness through her personality. Rather than promoting a body positivity message, then, the film implies that a woman's "charming characteristics" can act as an "excuse" for her body. Such representations symbolize the fear that surrounds women's bodies and the reason why so many women relentlessly chase thinness; fatness leads to a lifetime of humiliation and othering.

Nevertheless, 'Fat Rosemary's' conflicted approach to her body speaks to this thesis. In the aforementioned quote, she is positive and resilient about her body in the face of horrific discrimination, but, she also appears self-conscious (commenting on how she "shouldn't" eat fast-food) and hurt after she is the victim of abuse in the street. Indeed, Rosemary is seemingly aware of gendered discourses that construct her body but is still unable to separate herself from the culture of thinness and dieting. Similarly, the participants in this thesis were all conflicted about their body and its positioning within dieting discourses. Whilst it is possible to see 'through' dieting discourses, it is often impossible to resist the promises that they tempt us with; weight-loss could be the difference between a life as 'Skinny Rosemary' and 'Fat Rosemary.' Thus, this thesis set out to further research of *why* women diet, *how* they diet and *what* this could tell about the body's relationship to power. Through in-depth interviews with dieters and members of the fat movement, I contend that women's understanding of the body is fraught with contradictions and complexities.

In simple terms, women diet because of the discourses that construct their bodies; they are encouraged to endlessly modify themselves until they reach the 'ideal', with thinness being associated with 'success' and fatness synonymous with 'failure.' This argument has been recognized in much feminist literature (see: Wolf, 1989; Orbach, 1978; 1986; Chernin, 1994; Brownmiller, 1984; Jeffreys, 2005; Greer, 1971; Millett, 1980; Roiphe, 1994), yet, my work noted that women are not simply passive 'dupes' or empowered individuals in dieting. Rather, the analysis demonstrated how the 'feminine' body is subject to a range of disciplinary powers that encourage relentless acts of self-surveillance.

Within dieting, this plays out through processes of 'confession' under a narrative of the body 'journey' towards 'success' (Bartky, 1997; Bordo, 2003). Dieters confess their 'sins' and are encouraged to monitor their every mouthful whilst tracking their weight-loss progress religiously. The structuring of time was a prominent theme that arose from my discussions with dieters; the body becomes split into the 'before' and 'after', whilst the members are encouraged to plan their eating and exercise arrangements around a strict schedule. For example, in Chapter 4, I noted how the use of time-tables structures dieters lives; their days are centred around food preparation and planning An obsessive preoccupation with one's food is encouraged and celebrated within the group meetings, in which dieters reflect upon their food schedules and plan for what they could do 'better.'

Like Foucault's (1977) description of the school or factory bell, this preoccupation demonstrates the ways that dieters bodies are disciplined through the division of time. Their bodies become tightly controlled through self-surveillance and remaining 'on track' with the 'plan.' Yet, the thesis

noted that many are aware of the gendered nature of their actions, leading to much confusion and frustration with regards to the lasting desire to lose weight. For black women, such disciplinary practices stem from racialized power structures, meaning that their weight-loss 'journeys' are deeply embedded within socio-cultural constructions of black femininity. In Chapter 5, I explored the racialized and gendered representations of the 'Mammy' and the 'Jezebel', noting their influence upon dieting discourses today. Whilst black women were 'exempt' from dieting due to the positioning of their bodies in opposition to 'white beauty', Winfrey's weight-loss and subsequent alignment with *Weight Watchers* is deeply symbolic of the changing disciplinary forces that construct black femininity (Collins, 1986, 2002, 2004, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991, 1993; Taylor, 1998; White, 2010; Hammonds, 2004; hooks, 1981, 1989, 2000, 2006). Returning to the question of oppression and liberation, the thesis explored the fat movements divisions between body positivity and fat activism, in their different outlooks on dieting (Cooper, 2016). Here, I suggested that whilst on the surface these women reject dieting, they cannot escape the pervasive nature of disciplinary. For example, some 'fat activist' participants noted that they regularly felt tempted to lose weight.

Using the intersections between Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and the wealth of post-structuralist feminist scholarship for its methodology, this thesis contends that gender is constructed via discursive acts and texts (see: Butler, 1990, 1993, 1997; McLaren, 2012; Ramazanoglu, 1993; Bordo, 2003; Bartky, 1990, 1997). At the heart my methodology, then, sat a mistrust of overarching 'truths' and 'facts,' instead favouring an interrogation into the production of subjects through discourse (Foucault, 1980, p.85). Although at first glance, Foucault's work is not feminist, the 'meeting points' between Discipline and Punish and post-structuralist feminism provided me with a strong analytical tool to underpin the thesis and framed my approach to methods (Hesse-Biber,

2013, p.46). Indeed, in Chapter 3, I reflected upon the difficulties of using Foucault's work within a feminist thesis, with some scholars contending that his gender-blindness is incompatible with feminist scholarship (Balbus, 1987; O'Brien, 1999). However, as I suggested, it is important to view Foucault's work as a tool for aiding feminism; we can wield his theories of power to contribute to our own work on gender and the body, especially when exploring every day instances of power within practices such as dieting (Brooks, 2002; Sawicki, 1991).

Moreover, I reflected upon the difficulties of choosing semi-structured interviews as my primary method, highlighting Foucault's (1977) attack on the prioritization of 'experience' (Fadyl and Nicholls, 2012, p.25). Nevertheless, I smoothed out this "sticking point" by drawing upon Gavey's (1997, p.464) advice for researchers to treat interview responses as a construction of their own subjectivity, rather than 'evidence.' Thus, I carried out ten interviews with dieters and members of the fat movement with the intent of understanding their daily practices of self-surveillance and their understandings of their bodies. This was coupled with a post-structuralist feminist discourse analysis, in which I sought to deconstruct the languages surrounding the body and dieting.

As I noted in Chapter 4, an essential part of this project was the process of reflexivity; for feminist scholars, it is important to interrogate one's position and privilege in relation to the research project. Whilst most feminist scholars seek to establish a relationship based upon "empathy and mutual respect" (England, p.243), it is important not to assume that our femininity dissolves unequal power imbalances. For instance, my position as a white, middle-class woman is important to consistently reflect on, especially when exploring discourses of black femininity. Likewise, as a slim woman, I needed to question whether it was appropriate for me to use terms that are integral to

the fat movement. In order to answer the question of whether I was doing research 'outside of my lane,' I drew heavily from Daigle's (2016) work on narrative. Using my privilege, my work aimed to shine a light on stories that are otherwise overlooked, rather than drawing my own conclusions about other women's lives. This challenges the 'academic voice' and carves out a 'more interpretative' process of writing within the social sciences.

This chapter reflects upon the findings, contributions and limitations of the thesis and suggests potential avenues for further research into gender, the body, dieting and notions of power. In the first section, I reiterate the importance of this thesis in speaking to feminist dichotomies of power. Through the project's analysis of the body's complex relationship to dieting, I drew upon a wealth of post-structuralist feminist thought and explored the ways that the dichotomy of power over-simplifies notions of power (Bartky, 1997; Bordo, 1994; Sawicki, 1991). Here, I note how my extension of Deveaux's (1997) criticism of the 'woman-as-panopticon' model contributes to post-structuralist feminist discussions. Moreover, the chapter sets out the empirical contributions of the thesis, highlighting the importance of my conversations with dieters and members of the 'fat' movement.

An In-Between Body: Contributions of a Post-structuralist Feminist Discussion of Power

It is important to reflect upon the contributions that this thesis offers to theoretical and empirical work on gender, the body and power. Most notably, this project speaks to the dichotomy of power within feminist theory, which has often structured debates within feminism and led to some friction within the movement (Alcoff, 1988; Flax, 1987; McRobbie, 2004; Keller, 2015). For some radical

feminist scholars, power is a soley 'oppressive' and masculine force that has subjugated women's bodies throughout history (see: Finn, 1985; Attwood, 2004; Dworkin, 1989; Harper and Tiggemann, 2008; Penny, 2011; Levy, 2006), whilst post-feminist scholars contend that power can be wielded for feminine 'empowerment' via individual acts (see: Wolf, 1999; Roiphe, 1993; Sommers, 1994; Paglia, 1990). Therefore, throughout this thesis, I have sought to 'muddy the waters' in feminist discussions of the body. By this, I mean to suggest that elements of feminist theory needs to reconsider its understanding of power's relationship to the body. Whilst there has been a wealth of Marxist, post-colonial and post-structuralist feminist positions that transcend this dichotomy, there is seemingly little to no work that speaks directly to this dichotomy through the lens of dieting.

In speaking to this dichotomy, I drew upon post-structuralist feminist work on dieting to contend that it is overly simplistic to consider power as a monolithic essence (Bartky, 1997; Bordo, 2003; Sawicki, 1991). In contrast, power is a force that works 'through' us, it is not something that can be wielded or that is only used against us. Indeed, this thesis contends that power exists within us, working through our daily actions and movements. In terms of dieting, this means that women are not simply 'oppressed' or 'empowered,' but that weight-loss narratives create a 'push and pull' motion for power. Nevertheless, in Chapter 4, I extend Deveaux's (1994) criticism of Bartky (1997), in which she suggests that some post-structuralist feminists have the tendency to fall back into binary understandings of power, . Most notably, Bartky's (1997) analysis of dieting seemingly suggests that women are both passive and unaware of their actions in weight-loss. For example, I note that women who have been members of *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers* feel

simultaneously inspired to lose weight *and* aware of the gendered reasoning behind such desires, which often leads to feelings of guilt and embarrassment.

Here, it is important to discuss the differences between this thesis and *Foucault Goes to Weight Watchers* by Cressida Heyes (2007). As I discussed in Chapter 4, this article is an important piece of research, in which Heyes discusses her time as a member of *Weight Watchers* and explores the complexities that surround the dieting body ("I was both enthralled and repulsed by Weight Watchers") (p.65). Whilst Heyes and I reach similar conclusions about the potential simplicity of Bordo and Bartky's 'docile bodies' thesis, our work is different in the following ways. Firstly, rather than drawing upon *Discipline and Punish*, Heyes draws on Foucault's later work to discuss the manipulation of feminist understandings of 'care of the self.' In contrast, my thesis has spoken directly to the dichotomy of power within feminist theoretical debates, seeking to expand and 'muddy the waters' in discussions surrounding the body. Arguably, whilst Heyes inadvertently achieves a nuanced discussion of the body and dieting, it is not the goal of *Foucault Goes to Weight Watchers*. Secondly, as will be discussed later in this chapter, my use of empirical cases provide my work with unique voice that adds weight to my analysis of the theory. Although Heyes and I have similar understandings of the body, my thesis throws up original insight through its use of empirics.

The next theoretical contribution of this thesis is the discussion of race in Chapter 5, which addresses a gap within *Discipline and Punish*. Many scholars have noted that Foucault's (1977) work lacks analysis of diverse bodies, with his conversations about discipline seemingly including that of white, male figures only. Through an extension of Davis' (2003) and James' (2005) criticism of Foucault's panopticon prison, this chapter drew upon black feminist scholarship (see: Collins,

1986, 2002, 2004, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991, 1993; Taylor, 1998; White, 2010; Hammonds, 2004; hooks, 1981, 1989, 2000; 2006; Cooper, 2016; Davis, 2011; Rollins, 1991) to fill the gap in conversation on panopticism, gender and race. Indeed, the lens of dieting provided me with a useful tool for analysing the way that disciplinary power impacts black women's bodies. As I demonstrated, the discourses that construct Oprah Winfrey's dieting journey are symbolic of the way in which representations of black femininity work to support idealized white bodies (Hine et al, 1995; Thompson, 2015; Wallace-Sanders, 2002; McElya, 2009; Sekayi, 2003; Patton, 2004). The chapter explored the way that the black woman's body is discussed through the binary of either hyper-sexuality or a desexed 'nurturer.' For Winfrey, her body was positioned in the latter category, with her weight-loss being presented as a threat to white power structures. Indeed, Winfrey's dieting journey is deeply symbolic of the ways that black women's bodies have been disciplined throughout history, with Eurocentric norms positioning black femininity in opposition to 'white beauty,' whilst simultaneously fearing their adoption of whiteness (Patton, 2006; Thompson, 2009; Sekayi, 2003).

Additionally, this thesis makes empirical contributions to the work on dieting and the body. Most notably, although some feminist scholarship has involved interviewing dieters, there has seemingly been no research that compares the responses from members of dieting clubs and the fat movement. Indeed, Cooper's (2016) work on fat activism was the first of its kind to document the history of the fat movement, demonstrating the division between fat activism and body positivity. This split spoke to the 'oppression' and 'liberation' dichotomy, which enabled me to explore the complex relationship that members of the fat movement have to their bodies. For example, the conclusions that were reached in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6 are similar; both sets of women were conflicted about

their bodies and found it impossible to resist dieting culture. Whilst one may presume that fat

activists are 'liberated,' whilst dieters are 'oppressed', the interviews suggested that all women

have 'messy' understandings of the body. Thus, the use of interviews allowed me to demonstrate

how feminists need a more nuanced discussion of the body than the dichotomy of power, noting

that this divide is pervasive throughout resistance to dieting as well.

My findings are important for a number of reasons: firstly, the project sets out how dieting and the

disciplining of the body can control women's existence, creating a life based upon the relentless

pursuit of 'improvement' in the form of constant self-surveillance. This impacts the way women

perceive themselves and the way that they consider others; the thesis has demonstrated how fat

women's bodies are positioned as the antithesis of femininity and 'beauty,' leading many women to

self-starvation in an attempt to avoid the humiliation that fat women experience. Whilst this thesis

has not directly been about the gendered nature of eating disorders, its importance lies in the fact

that the high levels of women with Anorexia Nervosa can be linked to the discourses that surround

the body (Cooper, 2016; Bordo, 2004; Carson, 1993; Hesse-Biber, 1996; Orbach, 1986; Seid, 1986;

Chernin, 1981). Thus, the project has attempted to blur the lines between what we consider to be

'disordered' and 'ordered' eating, suggesting that dieting normalizes unhealthy obsessions with

one's food and body. Secondly, the thesis spoke to the dichotomy of power that exists in feminist

theory. As has been discussed, this has created deep divisions between feminist academics, with

scholars such as Jeffreys (2003, 2005, 2008) being completely distinct from post-feminist

understandings of the body from academics like Sommers (1995).

Indeed, feminist scholarship has, at times, been divided. For example, Alcoff (1988) even suggested that the movement reached a crisis point in its identity after the second-wave of feminism. Likewise, Williams (1997, p.212) contends that whilst feminism has "never represented a coherent ideological approach to understanding society," the end of the 1960s meant that it could "no longer even pretend to have this goal." She explains how this division was based upon the difference between "sexual equality" and "women's difference from men." Yet, at its heart, these discrepancies in the movement are based upon opposing views on how power operates.

In terms of power and the body, feminist scholarship on topics such as sex work and beauty have led to some contestations within "legal, medical, moral, feminist, religious and social debates" (see: Smith et al, 2015, p.1). Although there is a range of feminist positions that resist this dichotomy, there is little to no research that spoke directly to the question of 'oppression' and 'liberation' via an exploration into dieting. This thesis, therefore, explored this debate through the lens of women's dieting practices, demonstrating the importance of a nuanced debate on the body. It spoke back to this discussion through an extension of Deveaux's (1994) criticism of some post-structuralist feminist work, suggesting that some feminist scholars need to be wary of falling into binary discussions of power and the body.

Picture Imperfect: Room for Improvement and Further Research

Arguably, one limitation of this research is the lack of diversity within my participants: with one exception, all of the interviewees were White British. As Hesse-Biber (2010, p.258) notes: "no research is perfect, all research includes some unintended error." Indeed, the limitations of one's project carve out space for further research and open new doors for untouched questions. Due to the

post-positivist nature of this project, I was not seeking to generate a "representative sample" or present my findings as "evidence" (Foucault, 1977, 1980, p.85; McRobbie, 1982; Hesse-Biber, 2013). It is, however, important to reflect upon the voices included in the text and how this can be improved (McCall, 2005; Hesse-Biber, 2013).

In future research projects, I will reconsider my methods for approaching potential participants, aiming to include a diverse range of voices. This is not with the intention of shifting my work towards generating positivist 'facts,' but rather, hopes to create research that includes the voices of the women it writes about. This is especially true in Chapter 5, in which I analyse the discourses surrounding black women's bodies through a discussion of Oprah Winfrey's weight-loss journey. Whilst this case study was useful for understanding how discipline *may* impact black women's bodies, it is equally important to bring in the voices of Women of Colour (WoC) into discussions about dieting. Here, I would suggest that more research needs to be conducted into the disciplining of WoCs bodies via slimming programmes. For instance, how do WoC negotiate *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers* and how is this tied into sociocultural issues of gender and race. Additionally, this gap opens the door for more research into how other bodies understand dieting and discipline, such as disabled women. Despite this, it is important to remember that one's research is an "ongoing and continuous" path towards a reflexive practice; it is essential to always place oneself within the research and be aware of differing power dynamics (Metta, 2010, p.278).

Another notable drawback of this research was that I only focused on dieters on *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers*, which both have similar programmes. I did so because the structuring of the diets includes both the interaction with a group and independent weight-loss, yet it may have been

useful to explore how practices of self-surveillance play out in on a starkly different programme, such as The Cambridge Diet[43] or The 5:2 Diet.[44] As demonstrated in Chapter 4, an important part of the research was understanding the interconnection between the group 'confession' and body monitoring, but a contrasting case study may have complimented my analysis. This opens new questions for further research: for instance, how important are the group dynamics in encouraging self-surveillance? How does self-surveillance operate in less structured diet plans? Likewise, I explored how dieting discourses have religious undertones, such as 'sinning' and being 'wicked' (Bordo, 2004; Bovey). This was covered briefly, but more research could be conducted into the implications of such language within different diets. In particular, 'clean' eating would be an important case study in understanding how the 'feminine' body is constructed via disciplining, religious messages.[45] It would be interesting to see how the 'Clean Eating' movement differs to structured company dieting plans and whether this changes the level of self-surveillance experienced by women.

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[43] Unlike *Slimming World* and Weight Watchers group meetings, The Cambridge Weight Plan provides "one-to-one support to create a personalised weight-loss plan." Each dieter has their own consultant, who helps them through four stages of weight-loss preparation. The purpose of the programme is to provide "stabilisation and long-term weight management" (Cambridge Weight Plan, 2018).

[44] The 5:2 diet is not tied to a particular company, but was released by a "diet guru" in The Fast Diet. Dieters are encouraged to consume a "normal amount of calories" for five days of the week and then fast for two days of the week by eating 25% of one's original intake. This is specified as 500 calories for women and 600 calories for men throughout the day (Fisher, 2013).

[45] In recent years, the "clean" eating movement has become a dominant trend on social media websites, particularly Instagram (Blair, 2017). At its heart, clean eating is about eating nothing but "whole" or "unprocessed" foods (Wilson, 2017), a lifestyle which has been encouraged by "wellness" bloggers such as Madeleine Shaw and Amelia Freer (Niven, 2017). The diet's underlying messages of purity and cleanliness suggest interesting discourses relating to femininity and the body. There has been some work conducted into this, such as Berlia et als (2016, p.143) exploration into clean eating within yoga spaces. Through their auto-ethnographic approach, they interrogate the links between "yoga, body politics, mindfulness and social change" in order to understand clean eating's impact upon women's bodies.

One other idea that emerges from the thesis which merits further research is the role that social media plays in self-surveillance and dieting. Throughout the project, participants noted that much of their 'tracking' took place online, with Instagram and Facebook communities set up by *Weight Watchers* and *Slimming World* acting as support groups for members. In the following quote, for example, Rosie notes how she used new technologies to keep track of her food intake:

> So I'd take a picture of my meals for Instagram and track it all on my phone and if I forgot to track things on my phone then I would have a bit of a stressful evening trying to remember how much stuff weighed.

Seemingly, for younger members of *Slimming World* and *Weight Watchers*, social media has replaced writing down one's food diary. However, the interactive aspect of Instagram and Facebook raises interesting questions about how dieting communities have evolved and what this means for body politics. For instance, do online groups mirror face-to-face meetings *or* does the accessibility of social media create new dynamics? If so, how does this impact practices of self-surveillance undertaken by dieters, if at all?

There has been some research into the body and social media, with some scholars suggesting that new technologies intensify women's desire for unachievable beauty (Perloff, 2014; Fardouly et al, 2015; Tiggemann and Slater, 2013; Mabe et al, 2014). Indeed, scholars such as Lupton (2013, 2016) have contended that the self-tracking nature of new technologies, like MyFitnessPal, have turned the feminine body into a 'quantified' self. Yet, Miller et als (2016) work into 'why we post' seeks to disrupt normative understandings of social media as 'individualistic' and 'narcissistic', instead focusing on the complexities that surround the communities within online spaces. It would

be interesting, therefore, to situate an extension of this thesis within this literature in order to understand the changing nature of dieting.

Watching our Weight? Reflecting on the Thesis

This chapter has acted as a reflection upon the thesis findings and contributions feminist understandings of the body and power. Overall, it sought to reiterate the underlying argument of the project: the body is a site of contestation and ever-changing power structures that work 'through' us (Foucault, 1977). In terms of dieting, this plays out through women's simultaneous 'need' to diet and frustrations with being unable to accept 'larger' bodies. Of course, feminist scholars have long argued that women diet because of constructions of 'feminine' thinness as being symbols of success and hetero-normative beauty (see: Wolf, 1989; Orbach, 1978, 1986; Chernin, 1994; Brownmiller, 1984; Jeffreys, 2005; Greer, 1971; Millett, 1980; Roiphe, 1994). Yet, this thesis speaks to a wider debate about what this means about the nature of power and its relationship to the body. Whilst the aforementioned scholars seemingly agree that dieting is a product of femininity, they are bitterly divided with regards to what this tells us about power. As I have discussed, for some radical feminists, dieting is simply a product of patriarchy; an oppressive, overarching power structure that subjugates women (see: Dworkin, 1989; Harper and Tiggemann, 2008; Penny, 2011; Levy, 2006). In stark contrast, a number of post-feminist scholars view practices such as dieting as a tool of power; women can individually 'empower' themselves by embracing traditionally 'feminine' processes (see: Wolf, 1999; Sommers, 1994; Paglia, 1990; Roiphe, 1993). Thus, the thesis sought to 'bridge' the gap between this dichotomy and demonstrate the complex and confusing relationship that women have to their bodies.

Additionally, this project made a theoretical contribution to the gaps on race within Foucault's *Discipline and Punish.* By grounding my discussion within the wealth of black feminist thought on the body, the thesis spoke to Foucault's race and gender blindness (see: Collins, 1986; Crenshaw, 1991; Taylor, 1998; White, 2010; Hammonds, 2004; hooks, 1981, 1989, 2000; Cooper, 2016). Within Chapter 5, I explored the discourses surrounding Oprah Winfrey's body and dieting, noting that black women's bodies have been continuously juxtaposed with notions of 'white beauty', meaning that they were 'exempt' from dieting (Hine et al, 1995; Thompson, 2015; Wallace-Sanders, 2002; McElya, 2009; Sekayi, 2003; Patton, 2004). In recent years, however, the pressure for black women to conform to 'white' bodily standards has intensified meaning that Winfrey's weight-loss is deeply symbolic of black women's positioning in history.

Next, the chapter reflected upon the potential areas of improvement and openings for further research. Although the thesis was grounded in a post-positivist methodology, it is important to consider the voices included within the work (McCall, 2005; Hesse-Biber, 2013; McRobbie, 1982). Here, the chapter suggested that an in-depth exploration into Women of Colour's practices of dieting would further contribute to filling the gaps within *Discipline and Punish*. Moreover, I welcomed more research into other dieting practices, such as the 'clean eating' movement, which raise interesting questions about the nature of religious discourses in weight-loss. Finally, the chapter highlighted the need for more work into online dieting communities; the responses from participants opened up questions about how whether new technologies have changed our relationships to our bodies.

Indeed, politically, this thesis speaks volumes about women's status in society today. Our bodies are permitted in space on the precursor that we are thin, white and consistently aware of the foods that we consume. When a fat woman loses weight, she is 'welcomed' into this inner circle and congratulated on entering the 'promised land' of heteronormative beauty, where the possibilities of success and happiness are endless. This dream is *so* powerful that many women spend most of their lives monitoring their bodies, an all-encompassing and exhausting form of work that tarnishes memories and experiences ("I was so much thinner back then" or "in my twenties, when I was thin").

It is pertinent, therefore, to end the thesis with a quote from Roxane Gay's *Bad Feminist*, in which she explores the complex relationship that many women have with feminism, leading them to feel guilty about potentially 'bad' choices that seemingly contradict their ideals:

> I embrace the label of bad feminist because I am human. I am messy. I'm not trying to be an example. I am not trying to be perfect. I am not trying to say I have all the answers. I am not trying to say I'm right. I am just trying - trying to support what I believe in, trying to do some good in this world, trying to make some noise with my writing while also being myself: a woman who loves pink and likes to get freaky and sometimes dances her ass off to music she knows, she knows, is terrible for women and who sometimes plays dumb with repairmen because it's just easier to let them feel macho than it is to stand on the moral high ground.

As a woman who fears becoming fat herself and who consistently engages in bodily discipline, I often felt like a hypocrite within my own work and an overall 'bad' feminist. At times, I have felt unqualified to speak on this topic, fearing that others would point out my love of running or my

avoidance of 'bad' foods as symbols of my feminist failures. This applies to other areas of my life too, particularly past versions of myself that I am ashamed or embarrassed of, where my actions have been distinctly 'unfeminist.' Here, I like to reflect upon Gay's sentiments and consider feminism as a process of growth; whilst we cannot ever expect to untangle the web that gender sets for us, we can try to learn how it shapes our lives and our society. Indeed, in terms of the body and dieting, resisting the cultural norms that construct femininity is often impossible, meaning that I often agreed with my thesis in theory but not in practice. Nevertheless, the process of the researching and writing of this thesis has been an emotional and cathartic journey. It allowed me to reflect upon why I feel compelled to discipline my body and why this doesn't necessarily make me a 'bad feminist.' Moreover, I now understand my mother, my sister and my childhood friends more than I did before and was able to situate their experiences within these gendered discourses on the body. In a sense, this project was for them and for all the times in the day that these funny and intelligent women poke their stomachs, refuse to go out because they 'feel fat' or anxiously calculate the calorie content of their meals. Whilst I do not suggest that my work has the ability to alleviate such suffering, it has given me the ability to view their actions with a fresh lens, whilst opening the doors for my future work into the body and power.

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Appendix 1: Interview questions for members of Slimming World and Weight Watchers

1. What is your dieting history? Please talk me through past experiences of dieting and your reasons for doing so.

2. What was the process of dieting like?

3. How did you feel before and after dieting? Did you notice any difference in the way you felt in your body?

4. What does your daily exercise and diet routine look like?

5. What methods do you use to track yourself?

Appendix 2: Interview questions for members of the fat movement

1. What is your dieting history? Please talk me through your experiences of dieting and your reasons for doing so.

2. How did you become a member of the fat movement?

3. What does fat activism/body positivity mean to you?

4. What are the daily practices of being a fat activist/body positivity activist?

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet

Working title: "Using Foucault's theory of self-surveillance to explore the relationship between the beauty ideal, the dieting industry and body dissatisfaction amongst women."

<u>**Overview of the project:**</u>
The project will use Foucault's theory of self-surveillance to understand women's relationship to dieting and the body. Within his work, *Discipline and Punish*, the theorist Michel Foucault explored the differing ways that power has "operated on the body" throughout history. His work demonstrates how one's body is turned into a 'subject' and an 'object' through "modes of discipline and punishment," modern society shapes its individuals through "integration into uniformity." In other words, the use of language and images can cause individuals to watch – or "survey" – themselves until they conform to societal norms. This theory will be useful to understand how language and images used by the dieting industry cause women to 'watch' and transform their bodies to fit in with the societal view of a 'normal' body. Although there is a significant amount of work surrounding beauty and the body within feminism, there is little research on the body that speaks directly to debates on power within feminist scholarship. Due to the rising numbers of eating disorders amongst women, there is a need for more investigation into the methods employed by the dieting industry and the ways in which women make sense of gendered notions of the body.

<u>**Participation:**</u>
You have been invited to participate in this study for one of the following reasons:
- You are a member of a *Slimming World* or *Weight Watcher*s group. Your group will have been identified on the company's website and I will have contacted your group leader to forward you the project's details.

- You consider yourself to be a "fat activist" and work within the performing arts. If you live in Brighton, I will have identified you with the help of Abigail Butcher – a theatre producer – who will have previously worked with you or sent me your official website. If not, I will have found your work through internet searches of fat activist performers/writers.

- You are a government official who favours "nudge" policies. I identified and contacted you via your party's official website.

- You work for a dieting company within the marketing department. I identified and contacted you via your company's official website.

Your involvement in this study is voluntary; if at any point during the process you wish to withdraw from the study, you can do so without providing the researcher with a reason. Before making a decision, the participant should allow themselves time to consider the following risks that come with being part of the study:

- The questions will be of a personal and potentially sensitive nature; the interviewer will ask you about your experience with dieting and your body, focusing on any experiences of body dissatisfaction that you may have had and how you overcame/plan to overcome these issues. For example, the researcher will ask dieters questions about their reasons for joining *Slimming World/Weight Watchers* and how they have felt about their bodies since being on the programme. When interviewing individuals involved in fat activism, the researcher will ask questions about why they decided to get involved with fat activism and how they have felt about their bodies since being involved in this type of direct action/performance.

- The structure of the interview will be a "walking interview." This means that you will meet the interviewer in a location of your choice – such as a café or pub – and be asked some questions within this location. Next, you will walk through the local area whilst being asked some more questions. The purpose of conducting an interview in this manner is to understand the your relationship to the environment (what body language do you use when walking past other people/establishments?) and to prompt your answers using the surroud