I: What does it feel like to go on a diet?

Lydia: The first thing I do when I think about starting a diet is I bake a batch of chocolate chip cookies or go out and buy a box of Mrs. Fields cookies. Because I'm angry about denying myself and just the thought of weeks and weeks of denial pisses me off. So what I do, instantly, when I start to think about a diet, which I can understand why there's so much publicity why diets don't work, if I'm thinking about dieting, then I think about how hungry I am all the time. And that's on my mind all the time, how hungry I am. And how I have to fight that hunger. And it becomes a battle. Who's going to win? I lose most of the time. And then there goes the self-esteem, further and further away. I do so many other things well. Why can't I do this well too? And so then, what I end up thinking is, that all the things that I do well, are a farce. And that this failure is the real me. Then I say to myself, I shouldn't be eating this. But I deserve it because I had such a shitty day. So I use food to justify filling in the emotional empty spaces. Or the frustration and the anxiety. Disappointments. I turn to food in all those cases. And I think at forty-five too, you start thinking about unfulfilled expectations, um, dreams that never came true. Those kinds of things, like not accepting of where I am, physically, emotionally, my career, just a general dissatisfaction with myself. And then, what I have is a cycle in that I then start getting angry with myself for not breaking it, for not breaking that cycle.

Lydia's tattered self-esteem is reproduced throughout most of my interviews with both men and women who conceptualized their bodies as overweight. In their discussions of themselves and their bodies, they continually articulate brutal internal conflicts and self-esteem issues. Lydia here is both angry and resistant, and oppressed and accommodating. She defiantly bakes or buys cookies when she thinks of dieting. With cookies she assails the probable hunger and deprivation
she will endure. She has to “fight that hunger,” a hunger that is both physical and emotional and it becomes, in her words, “a battle.” Her use of a battle metaphor reveals her multiple and contradictory selves. In her conquer and surrender analogy, she is defeated by a fragmented self. The hunger and deprivation and denial take their toll. Her anger is turned inward, and into acquiescence and a lowered self esteem. She states, “I lose must of the time.” But who is this “I” that loses? Who or what is winning?

Beyond the psychological theorizing about these internal dynamics is a larger cultural discourse that needs to be addressed. What are the cultural resources used by the overweight in their explanation of themselves? What social texts do they use in their judgments? One purpose of this paper is to explore these questions, not through speculative social criticism, or through myopic psychoanalysis, but through an in-depth ethnographic focus on the normalizing disciplines used by the overweight on themselves.

**BATTLE METAPHORS**

The “battle of the bulge” is a well-known cliché in American culture. Many of the overweight I interviewed use the words “battle,” “struggle” and “fight” when they discussed their efforts to transform their bodies. Their bodies became embodied battle sites as they fought with fragmented and multi-sided selves. Their internal voices urged them to sacrifice and “win,” or negotiate a “surrender.” No truce or peace though is ever accomplished, no treaty or compromise is ever reached. The battle only reverses direction as invalidated strategies are exposed on their naked bodies.

The battle identified by Lydia is reproduced by 59.9 million adult Americans currently attempting to transform their bodies. This intimate battle for self-control illustrates the power of hegemony articulated by Antonio Gramsci. The individual’s motivations and guidelines are integral to the elusive and relatively invisible power of social control under capitalism. Social control is embedded “inside” the individual, personalized as “self-control” as individuals monitor and judge their bodies and their behaviors in accordance with cultural criteria. Physical coercions no longer have to be applied as individuals “beat” themselves, “fight” themselves, “threaten” themselves, and attempt to manipulate themselves voluntarily.
Institutional frameworks establish the criteria with which individuals come to rule themselves. The “knowledge” with which individuals come to perceive and evaluate their behavior, the resources with which they come to reinterpret their actions, the information with which they come ultimately to manage themselves, are effective in keeping the individual focused on themselves and thus less critical of the social structure. The perception of the overweight individual as “the problem,” as dysfunctional, directs the overweight towards individualized remedies and non-disruptive solutions. When the individual fails at resolving “his” or “her” problem, responsibility is again attributed to the specific individual, disregarding the 59.9 million of individuals who “fail” in unison. As Lydia said, “I lose most of the time.”

The other half of Lydia’s fragmented self within the battle analogy asserts itself through commodification. Lydia resists through baking or buying cookies. Many of the overweight I interviewed actively communicate their defiance with symbols structured through a consumption economy, creating meaning out of the forms it provides. Food consumption comes to be a form of self-realization, a method of declaring autonomy. Revolt for these overweight then comes to be the rearrangement of food as a subversive code, a code that ultimately reveals both the fetishization and displacement of objects produced for the market, and the hierarchically arranged social relations embedded within the production process. The individualized act of practicing resistance through food consumption can be seen as reinforcing the macro-level patterns of domination and subordination. From a structuralist perspective, the phenomenological experience of protest through the language of commodities is also an act of participation in a set of shared symbols and meanings. Lydia reveals her location within a consumption economy by using Mrs. Field’s cookies for a seemingly oppositional meaning.

My analysis of the overweight, though, should not suggest that they are social dupes. The analysis of Lydia’s commodification of self-assertion, her resistance through cookies should not deny the real, phenomenological sense of rebellion and defiance, the frustration and depression experienced by the overweight in their acts of resistance and moments of self-mastery. Those interviewed articulated critical insights into their own oppression. Their insightful critiques of society are embedded in their discussion of themselves and their life worlds. But
their perceptions and condemnations of the larger structure were usually screened through a vocabulary and language that succeed in reinforcing their subordination. Most individuals within a hegemonic culture find it difficult to translate the outlook implicit in their experiences into a conception of the world that will challenge that hegemonic culture (Lears). If discrepancies between the two are observed, the larger social system is rarely held accountable. Instead, individuals use the language and vocabulary of permissible discourse which, in American culture, focuses on the individual as the problem in need of correction.

But this filter of responsibility does not negate the insights and critiques the interviewees articulated and expressed towards the cultural system. The challenges of the overweight may be re-directed and shunted into other passive and acquiescent forms, but the evaluative judgments are not suppressed.

Don: And of course you have the, what do you call it, Madison Avenue, and the, what the majority, the masses consider attractive, acceptable. Because, granted, I am turned on by somebody who’s attractive, who’s not three or four hundred pounds, you know. I don’t want to ah, you know, particularly date a girl who’s three or four hundred pounds. A girl who’s enormously overweight I would not find, I would not date.

I: And why is that?

Don: Because it doesn’t appeal to me. And of course I try to look on the other side of the track. This girl, would she go out with me because I’m over three or four hundred pounds? Probably not.

I: Can you be proud of yourself at your weight now?

Lydia: No.

I: How come?

Lydia: Well, it came from that “thin is in.” I mean if it weren’t for the way society looks at me, I wouldn’t care that I was 127 instead of 107. I mean, I really don’t care. Inside my deep dark self. That I don’t. But when I go to put on clothes that are a size nine instead of a five or a seven that I want to wear, I go “I’m so fucking ugly.”
Don and Lydia vacillate in their reading of the cultural mandates. “Objectively” they can decode the mandates. Don admits he still is caught up in appearance norms dictated by Madison Avenue. Lydia acknowledges a split between the way society looks at her and what she feels “inside her deep dark self.” They understand how much of their own self-rejection is influenced by social appearance norms that invalidate their bodies. Yet the objective awareness and understanding of the source of their rejection does not empower these individuals to counter that rejection. Don understands the bigotry against obesity, while also acknowledging that he too judges, condemns and rejects heavier people. Lydia’s twenty pounds is not significant to her, “if it weren’t for the way society” perceives her.

So where do these images come from? What are the elusive images used by Don and Lydia in their rejection of themselves? Madison Avenue and the media are continually cited by the people I interviewed. Media icons like Heather Locklear, Meg Ryan, the model Elle McPherson, and the women on the television show Friends are identified as sources of both inspiration and resentment. The overweight realize the media have set the ideal standards of attractiveness, and also recognize those images are deceptive and unreal. The overweight I interviewed acknowledge the images that are held up as the ideal, the images that are used to guide people are basically unattainable— and yet those images are still the illusion with which they must negotiate.

The icons used as metaphors of health, style, beauty are unreal, based on ideals that are fabrications of a beauty myth. The beauty industry eliminates from photographed models the perceived imperfections of an illusory ideal by re-touching or air brushing the dark circles or wrinkles around a model’s eyes, removing facial blemishes, rashes, even the protruding ribs of too-thin models. But the overweight individuals, in their internal dialogues, use the re-touched icons, these simulations of reality, to fuel their battle with themselves. Their seemingly inner private world is infiltrated by a mediated world of continually happy, thin, economically successful beautiful people. Their subjectivity has been colonized, saturated, populated by unrealistic views. The responses of an authentic self vanish in a simulacrum of beauty image ideals. The structure upon which the illusion is built is also an illusion, perpetually reinforced through consumer demand for “escape” from their daily lives and the problems that generate the supposed bodily imperfections.
It is this toleration and participation in the self-alienating pretense that preserves the status quo and the power of normalizing disciplines inherent in a hegemonic culture. These overweight individuals have internalized the hegemonic struggle, punishing themselves for their failure to acquire the cultural badges of success even as they recognize that those badges are a sham. They have internalized the dominant culture, judging themselves and others even as they see through the pretensions of the standards used in the judgment. In one breath they are condemning societal influences and in the next, they are condemning themselves for being affected by those same pressures. Understanding the elements of social control does not free them from the effects of those elements. Knowledge, insight, and awareness do not provide freedom.

Their personal turmoil has a broader social significance. It is the perpetuity of their effort, their need to bring this "waywardness" back into line that is the core of Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Individuals continually must be "won back," must be seduced into controlling themselves, managing themselves to meet the needs of the social structure. They counsel themselves against rebellion, against insubordination, against mutiny. I asked the interviewees what they said to themselves when they wanted to transform their bodies.

Monica (Weight Watcher Lecturer): It's hard. I've been as much as ten pounds over goal. And then I just kind of go, "You can't get up there and tell those people how to lose weight if you're eating your head off." And that generally gets me back, and I get back on program. And I lose the weight. Harry: You're thinking there it is, that it's not good for you. It always stays in the back of your mind what's good for you and what's not good for you.

In counseling themselves against insubordination, these individuals attempt to transform their bodies through bolstering the cultural mandates that, as Harry suggests, are supposedly operating automatically within them. They are attempting to win their own consent. They are discussing with themselves the values, the goals, the rationales for maintaining their discipline. Monica is the epitome of the contested soul, as she councils others on how to lose weight while she is "eating her head off." This realization is, for her, the impetus to keep
herself "under control," which helps her win her own consent. Harry acknowledges that the voices "always stay in the back of your mind."

Underlying all these strategies for self control is the issue of behavior control and the attempt to enforce a particular type of behavioral conformity. These individuals are attempting to transform their bodies with corrective techniques that promote obedience, advancing a body that appears to heed the cultural mandates, a body that looks like it complies with the rules and orders and priorities dictated by others.6

Self-control is, in this sense, a paradoxical injunction, since obedience becomes compliance rather than self-control.7 Conforming to the rules and expectations of others is accomplished by allowing the mandates to function automatically within the self. The only way to actually be "in control" of their bodies is to defy the mandates, to mutiny, to be "out of control." "What the hell" becomes, in this sense, liberation.

Terry: I’ll be sitting there thinking, “No,” you know, “You really shouldn’t do that.” But then I think, “Oh, what the hell. Screw it all. I’m going to eat it anyway.”

Mandi: But I ate it. I figured what the hell. Since the diet was coming up soon, but it wasn’t there yet, a couple of pounds one way or another doesn’t make that much difference.

John: The fact is, I don’t want to have to think about it. I think, “Screw you! How dare you tell me I can’t have this now.” So I tend to do whatever I want to do and I try to be responsible. But it’s an artificial type process. I mean “I really shouldn’t do that. No, I’m not going to be good and not do that.” I put all these rules on myself, you know, “Oh, that was good of you.” I give myself a pat on the shoulder and then go reward myself with some Mrs. Field’s chocolate chip cookies, you know. (Laughter)

“What the hell,” “What difference does it make?” “I’m going to eat it anyway.” These are refrains, voiced in unison as the overweight rebel and resist the expectations of themselves and others. They question the restrictions imposed upon them and through them. At this interface between the conflicting macro-level injunctions and their seemingly private intimate world, they seek release and a silencing of the multitude of voices screaming for control. That release though is entrapping, the
silence is never heard as the cycle begins again. Their rebellion cannot be unfettered from the reins of the internalized control as they hate themselves for their mutiny. And the "battle" begins again.

As Foucault established, power and pleasure do not cancel each other out (Foucault 1980). The extraordinary efforts that are invested in the hopeless task of eliminating the excess weight, and the unremitting cycles of weight gain that are generated from those efforts, create the proliferation of targets for the weight control industry rather than the disappearance of bodies that carry excess weight. Institutional supports for both the whetting of appetites and the creation of uncompromisingly thin "ideal" body images that cannot accommodate those appetites, permits the proliferation of institutional power, its multi-faceted tentacles reaching ever more widely, deeply, and thoroughly into the individual. Pleasure and power pursue each other, overlap and reinforce one another. As demonstrated by Jody in the next quote, pleasure and power are linked together by complex, positive mechanisms of excitation and excitement (Foucault 1980, 48).

I: What do you say to yourself?
Jody: "You want to be thin and here you are eating all this food. You're never going to be thin. You have no self control! You have these images but you take no effort to look like that. You just keep stuffing your face with food!" And I just continue eating. I have these little voices in my head that are screaming at me to stop eating. "It's too fattening!" But I just continue eating because I like it.

Jody's words document the complexity of the intimate battle for self control. She articulates the competing discourses between her ideal body image and the pleasure and excitation of consumption, between the multiple pleasures grounding her competing desires. These multiple pleasures and the accompanying discord between her fragmented selves generate a continuing internal dissonance that makes her a prime target for the weight control industry to "fix." Jody, like most of the overweight I interviewed, sought assistance to help silence the battle between the "little voices screaming to stop eating" and their desire to consume. This assistance could be from medical professionals, weight loss clinics or groups, psychotherapists, and/or pharmaceuticals. According to the people I interviewed, transforming the body through monitoring the
ratios between food consumption input and exercise output is usually complimented by the use of prescribed pharmaceuticals.

Individual drug use is said to be the most distinctive feature of the modern therapeutic state and is the "marvelous irony of modern life" (Waitzkin 151). Self-medication is part of a process whereby individuals, as the troubled agents of society, treat themselves as if they have the problem. In this context it has been said that if organized religion was the opiate of the poor and the oppressed, then today's medicine is the opiate of the sick and the frustrated. Psychotropically induced tranquility preserves dreams of secularized happiness. It highlights the drive to be in control while out of control, to be calm in a state of crisis, to be alert while deadened.

The metaphor is actualized in the use of drugs for those attempting to transform their bodies - the tranquilizers, the diet pills, the steroids, the anti-depressants - the use of which directs an individual's distressed and frustrated behavior into safe, acceptable, and nondisruptive channels. Through chemically altering their bodies/minds, overweight individuals can starve or animate their bodies while eliminating the experience of hunger or fatigue, or the necessity to confront an oppressive social system. Focusing on themselves and their bodies as the problem, they attempt a self-transformation in order to more closely conform to cultural ideals.

Ron: I'm also on an appetite depressant pill. And those, I don't know if they're, ahhh, if they work or not. But while I'm on the diet, it keeps me thinking about the diet when I'm taking the pill. It might be water pills for all I know. Or sugar, or whatever. So who knows. But they do control me.

Janice: I'm thinking about going you know, back to my diet doctor and getting diet pills. The last couple of times that I have gotten them, um, my, you know, my migraines were really intense. I mean, I know they aggravate them. And I get nauseous, sick to my stomach. And I don't have the money to go back. But I'm, you know, really considering it. Because I'm ... because it worked. It got me down to where I wanted to be.

Again, as Foucault has illuminated, the power of medical knowledge is to discipline individuals by having them control themselves. Relying on
medical knowledge that is both describing and constructing a "normal" body, the overweight survey their "abnormalities" and self-medicate their bodies into eating less through the use of appetite-depressants or exercising more through the use of steroids or amphetamines. If an "ideal" body is constructed, then those who have trouble realizing that body are supplied with the substances and techniques which will facilitate the struggle towards that objective. These overweight individuals willingly self-medicate themselves and thus attempt to meet cultural standards. They are active in the creation of their own docility. Instead of questioning the standard itself, chemical substances are supplied so individuals can attain those standards. Drugs can be supplied to alter the body so the individual can be calm while in crisis, in control while they are not, alert when they are tired, full when they are hungry, sleepy when they are awake. Xenical, Viagra, and Prozac are all current examples of how the body can now be chemically altered to better meet socially constructed ideals.

These chemical substances, whether diet pills, steroids or anti-depressants, collapse a complex series of political and social questions. As hegemonic forms of social control, the use of drugs depoliticizes the socio-structural issues involved, and mutes the potential for action by individuals to change the conditions that are troubling them. The medicalization of social problems aims toward individual adjustment and mutes potential resistance, as individuals voluntarily medicate themselves, alter themselves to meet unrealistic targets, to transform themselves as the problem in need of correction. The overweight declare in union with Lydia, "I am the problem." These micro-level processes tend to reinforce macro-level patterns of domination and subordination in society. It is a bio-chemical readjustment of the body/mind.

While conventional interpretations of the health profession regard prisons, medicine, and psychotherapy as rational and progressive, Foucault, by contrast, claims that these "advances" do not liberate the body from external control, but rather intensify the means of social regulation. From the prison institutions, to the doctor in the community, to the psychiatrist, to Oprah, to weight loss organizations, mechanisms of social control are highlighted to help individuals learn to monitor their own or others physical and mental well-being. It is these micro-mechanisms of power that play an increasing role in the management of people's lives through direct action on their bodies. They operate not
through a code of law, but through a technology of discipline, not by punishment but by conformity. Social control is not a static set of mechanisms with which individuals are forced to comply, but a dynamic social practice, constantly in process, constantly reproducing itself in the ordinary workings of these institutions. But social control works at this macro-institutional level only because it works similarly at the micro level of the individual, working "automatically" on and through the individual, as Harry suggested above, as they voluntarily work at keeping themselves in line.

Diet pills, steroids, Viagra, Prozac all help individuals chemically sculpture the constructed ideal, further eroding the distinctions between the authentic and the artificial, between the lived experience and the mediated/medicated experience. It is these internalized community standards operating through the individual that generate the seeming invisibility and indirectness of social control. Social control measures that are self-initiated maintain a relatively smooth-functioning social order that supports the hierarchical arrangements. And it is these micro-mechanisms of power, complexly interrelated in the fields of medicine, psychotherapy, and consumer mandates, that play an increasingly important part in the management of overweight people's lives through their direct action on their own bodies.

The management of the overweight body is a prime target for medicine, psychotherapy and consumer mandates to "fix" through individualized voluntary efforts. Assumed is the conceptualization of the body as an object that can be transformed, that can be modified through individual will.

Responsibility for controlling the body through will power is assumed by the overweight. Many of the overweight conceptualized their bodies as inanimate machines, subordinated to their wills/minds. As has been discussed by many cultural theorists, the body/machine metaphor is and has been dominant in western philosophical worldviews. The overweight in fact used the body-as-machine to explain the distinction between "a fine tuned" thin/fit body and being out-of-shape and overweight. The body-as-machine metaphor was replicated each time they described their somatic or psychological states in mechanistic terms: their bodies were "worn out", "wound up", "run down". And reflecting the transformation of the culture from a mechanistic to electronic orientation they also described themselves as "turned off", "tuned it", "charged", and "energized". The machine
metaphor gave their conception of their bodies has having an on-off state, a level of efficiency, a productive capacity, an internal mechanism, a source of energy, and an operating condition, which function as the primary evaluative mechanism. The machine-as-the-standard developed into an aesthetic, a compelling icon, a value towards which they aspired. The technology metaphor had come to define the “good”, had constructed what they thought a healthy or “fine-tuned” or “well-running” body, family, group, and society ought to be.

Far from how the body actually performs, the body-as-machine metaphor is also applied when the body “breaks down.” Inherent in this rationality of the machine metaphor is the concept of the body as comprised of interchangeable parts. When something goes wrong with the body, the focus is on the malfunctioning body part. If a machine part is old, it can be replaced or upgraded. So too now with body parts: Medicine has perfected kidney transplants, liver transplants, cornea transplants, heart transplants, etc. Which raises the interesting question: If all of a person’s body parts were eventually replaced, would that individual still be the same person?

Robert J. White, a medical research scientist, has “successfully” completed a body/head transplant on a monkey – the monkey opened its eyes and responded to external stimuli, though it could not move its arms or legs. White has stated that soon this experiment will lead to a human being able to get out of bed and function as one whole “total” individual. White’s work is the epitome of the concept of the body/machine composed of interchangeable parts, with the mind remaining as the definition of the person. The body is exchanged, interchanged, with the identity of the person supposedly unwavering and stable.

What happens though to the “reality” of gender identity if male and female bodies are switched? What happens to the reality of race in American society if an African-American head can be transplanted onto a white body? The collapse of these seemingly stable boundary markers leads to questions surrounding the distinctions upholding mind/body dualisms, and gender and race signifiers. What are the criteria for normalizing disciplines when gender and racial boundaries become blurred, when the body is no longer a stable entity?

Dr. White’s experiment highlights the growing sense of a malleable embodied identity, illustrating the erosion of distinction between embodied existence and its transcendence. As Susan Bordo suggests,
Gradually and surely, a technology that was first aimed at the replacement of malfunctioning parts has generated an industry and an ideology fuelled by fantasies of rearranging, transforming, and correcting, an ideology of limitless improvement and change, defying the historicity, the mortality and indeed, the very materiality of the body. In place of that materiality, we now have what I will call cultural plastic. In place of God the watchmaker, we now have ourselves, the master sculptors of that plastic (245-46).

Collapsing the distinction between authentic and the artificial, the human body is decentered as transcendence becomes highlighted. This kind of transcendence challenges the stability of human identity as located in the body. This type of transcendence also suggests a form of perpetual self-rebirth, a re-birth that becomes the site of cultural anxieties and social disruptions.

Computer-mediated communication is one site where these boundary transgressing problems are currently emerging. The body, its absence, or its virtual malleability, is central to contemporary notions of cyberspace. It is the ability to interact with others, not as a physical presence, but as an “essence” crossing temporal, geographic, spatial, and visual boundaries, that is one of the defining characteristics of computer-mediated communication. Identity is supposedly performed independently of fixed bodily attributes because the physical body no longer limits who one is or can be, or where the image can be seen. Individuals are able to (re)present themselves as young or old, male or female, attractive or ugly, abled or disabled, of any color or size, in any part of the world.

The boundaries between the fictive and the real, the biological and the symbolic, and the produced and the reproduced become blurred. Computer-mediated communications illustrate that all understandings of the body are mediated through representations which are constructed through interpretative frameworks. The collapse of the real blurs the boundaries and illustrates that appearance is malleable and unreliable, that displayed images are able to be virtually manipulated.

By losing the concreteness of the physical body and its connection to supposed naturalness and the taken-for-granted givenness of real-life bodies, the assumptions guiding Western conceptualizations can be challenged as the definition of the person. The infamous *New Yorker*
cartoon, “On the internet, nobody knows you are a dog,” succinctly encapsulates this challenge to unembodied presences. My latest research with self-described overweight individuals suggests that their use of computer mediated communication allows them this freedom, this ungrounding from a deviant bodily identity. In some ways their disembodied experiences on the computer release them from isolation and discrimination. Being on-line allows them the freedom to assume various embodied identities.

Significantly though, new ethnographic research is suggesting that much of the potential for on-line communication to challenge conventional interpretation is not realized as interactions are geared toward “re-connecting and re-fixing bodies and identities” (Slater 92). For instance, individuals and online communities put their photos on web sites, or people who meet in chat rooms exchange electronic images of themselves. As “real world” references, people on-line also seek each other out to meet in real life, either individually or in groups. In this sense the people I interviewed remain trapped in the narratives surrounding excess weight. While people may form bonds through disembodied interaction in cyberspace, the concreteness of the body is still sought. Bodily attributes such as gender markers and size are still perceived as stable identifiers. The markers are used to anchor the disembodied voice, the “real” body perceived as manifesting the outcome of the battle between temptations, sensations, indulgences, and the mind’s control of rational thought. Computer-mediated communications, even as they challenge the boundary markers of reality, even as they allow individuals to play with signifiers and metaphors, also illuminate our desire to ground the body in its physical essentialism. At the beginning of the 21st century, the hegemonic distinctions and metaphors are still being reproduced despite the challenges that have been made to those constructs. The general tyranny of normalizing disciplines, the pressures on American men and women to transform their bodies to meet culturally sanctioned unrealizable ideals, is perpetually replicated in their daily interactions as they both yearn for and reject, both virtually manipulate and confront images of who they are.
Notes

1 The interviews have been conducted periodically over the last ten years with twenty middle class American men and woman who describe themselves as "overweight." The interviews are part of a long-range investigation of weight consciousness in American culture. I recognize gender as an important determinant within normalizing disciplines, as many theorists have documented. (See Susan Bordo in her book *Unbearable Weight.*) While not ignoring gender as a factor, this analysis will focus on mechanisms cited by both men and women in their attempts to transform their bodies.


3 See Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*.

4 The labeling of these overweights' assertions of autonomy as "oppositional" draws upon John Fisk's definition. Eating two candy bars is phenomenologically an act of resistance, an act that puts them in *their own experience* as in "direct opposition to the dominant ideology." Within the context of this specific moment they are defying cultural mandates. That this resistance is co-opted is not phenomenologically significant.

5 Similar results were found in the study of class consciousness in Sennett's *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. Sennett's respondents deemed their class inferiority a sign of personal failure, even as many realized they had been constrained by class origins which they could not control.


7 See Stein, *The Psychoanthropology of American Culture*.

8 See Logan and Hunt 139.

9 See O'Neill, *Five Bodies* 151.


Bibliography


