

Foucault Goes to Weight Watchers

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This article argues that commercial weight-loss organizations appropriate and debase the askeses—practices of care of the self—that Michel Foucault theorized, increasing members' capacities at the same time as they encourage participation in ever-tightening webs of power. Weight Watchers, for example, claims to promote self-knowledge, cultivate new capacities and pleasures, foster self-care in face of gendered exploitation, and encourage wisdom and flexibility. The hupomnemata of these organizations thus use asketic language to conceal their implication in normalization.

For feminists, weight-loss dieting has long been associated with the tyranny of slenderness and the enforcement, by patriarchal disciplinary practices, of an ideal body type that carries a powerful symbolism of self-discipline, controlled appetites, and the circumscription of appropriate feminine behavior and appearance. I agree with many of these critiques, but my focus in this article is rather different. I want to approach weight-loss dieting not only as a quest for the ideal body, but also as a *process* of working on the self, marketed with particular resonance and sold to women, that cleverly deploys the discourse of self-care feminists have long encouraged. Until we recognize the power of this discourse, especially as cultivated by commercial weight-loss programs, I argue, feminists will be ill equipped to understand the perennial appeal of a self-disciplining practice that almost always fails its ostensible goals.

In particular, I want to supplement existing critical accounts of dieting, which typically rely on the central explanatory concepts of either “false consciousness” or “docile bodies” to better understand its *enabling* moments. Such moments exemplify Michel Foucault’s thesis that the growth of capabilities occurs in tandem with the intensification of power relations. In the first case, critics suggest, people diet because they act on false beliefs about the possibility and desirability of losing weight for the sake of their health. In a feminist variant,

women also diet because we have been ideologically duped by an oppressive set of beauty ideals: being thin will make us (hetero)sexually desirable, aesthetically pleasing to ourselves and others, and better able to build an image that is appropriately feminine. That this account is not, perhaps, wrong but certainly partial, is argued by the second “docile bodies” account. Sandra Bartky and Susan Bordo, its best-known advocates, suggest (following Foucault’s account of historical changes in the form and function of power) that dieting is one of a number of patriarchal disciplinary practices played out on the body through forms of *assujettissement*—the process of at once becoming a subject and becoming subjected. On this view, at stake are not only false beliefs about weight loss, or thrall to an oppressive aesthetic. Dieting itself (not just weight loss as a projected outcome) is an activity that constructs the docile body.

In turn, however, I want to suggest that Bartky and Bordo’s emphasis on Foucault’s account of disciplinary practices might usefully be supplemented by Foucault’s own concern, toward the end of his career, that he had emphasized technologies of power at the expense of technologies of the self (Foucault 1988, 19). Weight-loss dieting needs to be understood from within the minutiae of its practices, its everyday tropes and demands, its compulsions and liberations; and in turn, these cannot be resisted solely through refusal. To understand dieting as enabling is also to understand that we have reason to embrace the increases in capacities it permits without acceding to the intensification of disciplinary power it currently requires.

Recently, I spent ten months participating in Weight Watchers—the largest and best-known commercial weight-loss program in the world. My motives for joining were a complex mix of the personal and the professional, of skepticism, inquisitiveness, desperation, compulsion, and investigative zeal, which I cannot detail in this short space (even though my participation raises a number of ethical and ethnographic questions that deserve longer treatment). Suffice to say I was both interested in losing weight, embarrassed by that desire, and curious about institutionalized weight-loss programs. I wanted to produce philosophical writing that starts from a common but fraught standpoint—that of the simultaneously critical and engaged feminist. I hoped to answer the question posed by Ladelle McWhorter in the context of sexuality: “How can we normalized beings keep ourselves open to ever more development and yet not make ourselves vulnerable at the same time to the narrowing forces of regimes like the *dispositif de sexualité*?”¹ (Or, we might substitute, to regimes like weight-loss dieting.) “How can I affirm the ‘truth’ of my normalized (homo)sexual ‘identity’ while at the same time I refuse the cancellation of freedom and the foreclosure of becoming that sexual identities have produced?” (McWhorter 1999, 180). Or, how can I speak from my normalized position as a dieter simultaneously with my critical position as a diet resister? This article attempts to speak from that contradictory position, from very deep inside the disciplinary practice

of dieting, to reveal and thence to dispel the picture of self-knowledge and self-transformation that it cultivates.

I collected written materials, regularly visited the Weight Watchers websites, attended weekly meetings, and took every opportunity to talk to other participants. A lot of things about Weight Watchers were surprising, and overall the experience of participating convinced me of the need for nuanced microanalysis of the “politics of the ordinary”—the plethora of everyday practices that form our habitus and that are held in place by hundreds of tiny instantiations. My focus in this article is on the way the organization’s tactics embodied the paradox Foucault highlighted so well: that normalizing disciplinary practices are also enabling of new skills and capacities. On the one hand, deliberately losing weight by controlling diet involves the self-construction of a docile body through attention to the minutest detail. On the other hand, becoming aware of exactly how and what one eats and drinks, realizing that changing old patterns can have embodied effects, or setting a goal and moving toward it, are all enabling acts of self-transformation. This component of dieting in part explains its popularity and function, and why simply purveying information about the invidiousness of dieting without offering substitute activities to fill the same needs is bound to fail as a feminist strategy.

WEIGHT LOSS AND FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS

“Losing weight is good for your health.” True or false? For many in the overdeveloped world it is an accepted truth that we are almost all too fat and that losing weight will, with the exception of a few unfortunate anorexic, ill, or preternaturally thin individuals, have positive health consequences. However, this discourse of the “war on obesity” relies on a number of elisions and half-truths—or even, as the title of Glen Gaesser’s flagship book suggests, *Big Fat Lies* (2002). Here, I will assume rather than argue for a number of countercultural truths about weight, dieting, and health that are effectively defended by other commentators.² First, the great reduction of this debate is the assumption that weight itself is a stand-in for health, with the corollary false beliefs that losing weight automatically solves health problems and that gaining weight (or being heavier than a stipulated maximum all along) automatically creates them. The second myth is that there is a standardized range within which each individual’s weight must fall in order for her to be “healthy.” Standardized weight tables are artifacts of actuarial insurance company definitions that were themselves never based on comprehensive statistical information. They have changed over the years for no medical reason, and have become a better measurement of social acceptability than morbidity or mortality. Even those who are “obese” (body mass index over 30) can trace many health problems (which may *correlate* with high weight), to such causative links as lack of exercise, a high sugar diet, and

so on.³ Conversely, one can be fit, healthy, *and* heavy. Third, a huge majority of diets will fail, in the sense that even those who succeed in losing weight in the short term will regain it in the medium to long term. The corporate Weight Watchers' website even candidly sells the company as a good investment by saying: "Meeting members typically enroll to attend consecutive weekly meetings and have historically demonstrated a consistent re-enrollment pattern across many years" (Weight Watchers 2002), while it is a standard trope of published "success stories" that one may join and quit and rejoin a diet program many times—always, of course, "before it finally works."⁴

So, why does the weight-loss industry continue to be a multimillion dollar enterprise? Why are commercial diet programs, diet food products, diet drugs and now surgeries, and self-help books, services, or websites enjoying booming sales in all Western countries and expanding into new regions? Can the widespread popularity of attempts to lose weight be understood only as the product of false consciousness—the result of systematically obscuring the truth about health, weight, and recidivism? The ongoing popularity of weight-loss programs *can* be partly explained through ignorance and misconceptions: those who have not tried before have every reason to believe they will succeed in losing weight and keeping it off, while those who have previously tried and failed believe that different behaviors this time around will put them into the magic minority of success stories. Most health-care practitioners and policy makers tout the claim that weight loss *in and of itself* is good for one's health, and the diet industry funds research, lobbies medical providers, and advertises assiduously. Given the intensity of the pressure to conform to beauty ideals, of fat phobia, and of false beliefs about health and weight, much is at stake that may inspire even the most cynical dieter to try another plan. Finally, the increasingly common knowledge that "diets don't work" has also been obscured by the new linguistic conventions diet vendors favor. We are now sold long-established dieting practices under new descriptions, such as "lifestyle change" or "eating program": "When I *finally* reached my goal, I was so accustomed to following the Plan that it no longer felt like a diet—it felt like a lifestyle," pronounces Stephanie in her "Success Story" on the Weight Watchers' website (October 15, 2003).⁵ If "slimming" or "reducing" do not capture the contemporary (female) imagination, then "lifestyle change" with its aura of enlightenment, progress, and self-improvement surely does.

In the language of political theory, many popular beliefs and concomitant dieting behaviors can be explained, in light of my previous observations, using the language of false consciousness. In its Marxian formulations, the concept of false consciousness implies that certain social realities are systematically obscured by an internally coherent ideology whose propagation has material benefits for a dominant group. A systematic set of beliefs about health, beauty, and weight would indeed appear to conspire to induce a state of false consciousness,

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

Nonetheless, ideological captivity in the form of false consciousness cannot explain all of the power of weight-loss dieting as a cultural practice. Many dieters are well aware of the contradictions in this ideology, yet try diet after diet and yo-yo their weight (which, there is very sound evidence to show, is bad for your health [Gaesser 2002, 144–50]). They resent the profits made by corporations peddling diet services or products, and many women especially will agree that a diversity of body types ought to be celebrated and that the fashion for thinness is deplorable and oppressive. The sheer magnitude of the contradictions generated by our access to information about the failure rates of dieting implies that counterdiscourses ought to be more successful than in fact they are. While it is true that being thin (or at least less fat) will, generally speaking, work to one's advantage in the employment and dating markets (see Solovay 2000, esp. chap. 8 and notes), it is clearly false that anyone can become and remain thin (or even not fat). A central claim of this article is that the continued popularity of dieting cannot entirely be explained using a model of captivity by false beliefs. I suggest that a false consciousness model, following Marx, must be supplemented by an account that understands power as both repressive and enabling, following Foucault.

IDEOLOGICAL VERSUS ASPECTIVAL CAPTIVITY

David Owen argues that Ludwig Wittgenstein's metaphor of a picture that "holds us captive" describes an important "tendency to fall under the spell of our inherited ways of thinking." One mode of such captivity "operates when a picture is subject to reflection and taken to be universal, necessary, or obligatory" (Owen 2003, 87). Being held captive by a linguistic picture represents, posits Owen, an important form of nonphysical constraint on our capacity for self-government—our ability to make and act on judgments that are meaningfully our own—just as ideological captivity does. This "aspectival captivity," unlike ideological captivity (which is necessarily linked to the falsity of the agent's beliefs), is independent of the truth-value of such beliefs. Wittgenstein's insight was to show how our contested beliefs rely on prior certainties—systems of judgments generating an uncontroversial background that determines even what can count as true or false. This background makes our lives intelligible, but

usually passes unremarked as a taken-for-granted picture of the world—in part, because it is not grounded in systematically argued propositional judgments, but in habitual actions and practices. Although some picture is an inevitable feature of judging and can be valuable if it enables us to make sense of ourselves, being *held captive* by a picture implies that one cannot reorient one's reflection and is thus profoundly unfree (Owen 2003, 89). Making a picture visible *as* a picture is thus one of the tasks of post-Marxist philosophy, and Owen takes Foucault's genealogical method to be the paradigmatic approach to freeing ourselves from aspectival captivity.

Foucault's genealogy of power relations, as Owen and many others have pointed out, provides a specific example of how we might reveal and dispel a picture that has dominated political thinking. The technique is oriented around freeing ourselves from the belief that power is a substance possessed by a sovereign. Instead, Foucault suggested, we should see power as a ubiquitous relation within which multiple local forms of domination, discipline, or denial of self-government can occur. Thus to realize one's own freedom does not consist only in liberating oneself from the sovereign's grasp, increasing one's autonomy as one's capabilities increase. Instead, a crucial part of freeing oneself consists in understanding an alternative picture in which increasing capabilities are closely tied to the intensification of power relations. Diet organizations actively cultivate progressivist narratives that inhibit this realization. For example, Kandi Stinson recounts a common trope (it happened in my group, too, and is a feature of organizations' advertising)—the alleged gradual "improvement" of diet plans:

Occasionally . . . a member or leader would come across old organizational materials . . . and share with the group various taboos, restrictions, or requirements. At one time, potatoes could only be eaten early in the day, and liver had to be eaten once a week. Although members found the stories funny, leaders used them to emphasize how much the program had changed and especially how much more freedom members now had to eat what they wanted. Taboos are associated with "the old days," and are presumably no longer necessary as we have become more enlightened. (Stinson 2001, 146–47)

In this popular narrative, the organization exploits the sovereign power model: through investing in progressive nutritional science and removing archaic fetters on members' choices, the program has become more "modern" and its adherents more free. Yet at the same time as some of the more obviously quackish (or unfashionable) elements have been discarded, the contemporary program clearly bears the non-neutral marks of current cultural preoccupations. There are still plenty of dietary rules, but now they appear in graphically designed leaflets

that emphasize lifestyle change and auto-psycho-therapeutic strategies. The much-touted “Points” system is “all about individual freedom of choice”—yet by definition weight-loss dieting is about ceasing to make certain previously favored choices and restricting one’s eating in clearly defined ways. To be able to resist the language of liberation in this local historical narrative requires us to understand that: (a) the unfolding of new forms of knowledge does not necessarily map to freedom; and (b) such forms may in fact represent new strategies of power that are yet harder to identify because they are counterintuitive to existing political theoretical models. Liberation from the inductively false beliefs upon which dieting as a strategy is premised will be only one, relatively small, part of the process of coming to think differently in ways that advance our self-government. We also need to be liberated from the picture of power as sovereign that holds us captive and renders invisible the biopower that narrows behavioral options and possibilities for flourishing.

An existing literature offers a way into this project: in Foucauldian feminist analysis, dieting is understood as a disciplinary practice that serves to construct “docile bodies.” The locus classicus for these arguments is Sandra Bartky’s essay “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power” (in Bartky 1990, 63–82), as well as Susan Bordo’s book *Unbearable Weight* (1993, esp. 185–212). Bartky recapitulates Foucault’s argument in *Discipline and Punish* that the production of “docile bodies” requires coercive attention to be paid to the smallest details of the body’s functioning, partitioning its time and space under relentless surveillance. Directing her attention to the creation of a specifically feminine docile body, Bartky argues that gendered disciplinary practices aim to produce a woman with uniform shape, comportment, and ornamentation “against the background of a pervasive sense of bodily deficiency” (72). Capillary power is “everywhere and nowhere,” its effects supported by hundreds of everyday actions, yet systematically organized and enforced by no one. Body ideals are internalized by women, to the extent that “any political project which aims to dismantle the machinery that turns a female body into a feminine one may well be apprehended by a woman as something that threatens her with desexualization, if not outright annihilation” (77). Of diets, Bartky writes: “Dieting disciplines the body’s hungers: Appetite must be monitored at all times and governed by an iron will. Since the innocent need of the organism for food will not be denied, the body becomes one’s enemy, an alien being bent on thwarting the disciplinary project” (66).

Similarly, Susan Bordo “examines the normalizing role of diet and exercise by analyzing popular representations through which their cultural meaning is crystallized, metaphorically encoded, and transmitted.” Specifically, interpreting the physical body as representative of the social body, she reads “some dominant meanings that are connected, in our time, to the imagery of slenderness” as “the text or surface on which culture is symbolically written” (1993, 186–87).

The slenderness ideal, she suggests, embodies moral judgments of the proper management of impulse and desire, with body shape and size increasingly being read as a visible indicator of the inner moral self. For Bordo, the failures and contradictions of the management of appetite symbolize the unstable tensions in consumer capitalism: “As producers of goods and services we must sublimate, delay, repress desires for immediate gratification; we must cultivate the work ethic. On the other hand, as consumers we must display a boundless capacity to capitulate to desire and indulge in impulse; we must hunger for constant and immediate satisfaction” (199).

The theoretical framework Bartky and Bordo advance can offer a number of more specific insights into the local practices of weight-loss dieting, which were not the object of their original research. Their Foucauldian accounts show how normalization is enacted through ever-finer measurement and closer surveillance of the subject population. For example, standard height-weight tables are themselves a macro-tool for normalizing the population—for taking a vast and diverse group of people and establishing a “normal range” to which every individual bears some relationship. Deviation from the norm is then (falsely) read as proof of behaviors that can be pathologized, just as conformity is (falsely) taken as evidence of health and good conduct. Biopower here thus operates both at an epidemiological level and at the level of the production of a weight-based moral identity in the individual.

“Docility is a major objective of most successful normalized disciplinary practices,” writes McWhorter (1999, 180), and at the level of the individual weight-watcher it is assiduously cultivated. Any evinced skepticism about Weight Watchers’ methods, or unchastened confession of deviance from the plan, must be actively suppressed lest the house of cards come tumbling down. Most people who attend Weight Watchers fail to lose weight at all, or quickly reach a plateau and then start to regain. Most of these appear to drop out; of those who joined in my first weeks (identifiable by the week-by-week leaflets they clutched during meetings), I could identify only one or two four months later. My regular leader, Nancy, obviously had little emotional energy to spend on those who couldn’t make the grade.⁶ When a member would insist that she had stuck to the plan and still not lost weight, Nancy was endlessly capable of ad hoc explanations and pseudoscience—“Your body is holding on to the weight. It will come off next week,” for example. But, when pressed, she could also become brusque, or scold, reducing a delinquent member to the role of naughty child. I have never been in another adult milieu where discipline was applied to such tiny behaviors and deviance greeted with such serious and inflexible responses from the staff.

In most cases, however, the population of dieters need not be so overtly disciplined by our pastors. Unlike prisoners or schoolchildren, we have elected to place ourselves under the care of this institution, and have only ourselves to

blame if we fail to follow its good advice to the letter. The disciplinary practices of weight-loss groups are concealed in part by one of the most insidious dynamics in normalization: the reification and subsequent internalization of subject positions initially defined by mechanisms for the measurement of population. For example, Nancy favored the mantra: “Remember: you’ll always be a Weight Watcher.” Even the language of “watching” in the program’s name implies surveillance, but the ascription of “being” a watcher of weight in perpetuity implies an ontological state. One must *be* a person who will always need to pay attention to weight—a once-fat person who has confessed her past sins and decided to reform, but who can never forget that her new, slim persona is a construction that may slip at any moment. A Weight Watchers’ leaflet handed to those who meet their goal advises:

Once you’ve maintained your weight for three consecutive weeks, it may be a good idea to find 10 minutes to be alone—away from work, family, and friends—to think about what you’ve accomplished. Your mind often has to play “catch-up” with your body, particularly if you’ve lost a significant amount of weight, to realize that you’re now a thin person. This means that you not only need to look and dress like a thin person, but you have to think like one also. The great thing is, you’ve been rehearsing for this part during the past few weeks of maintenance instruction, and now it’s time to perform. And the best part is that there’s no need to be nervous since the only audience is you. (“Staying the Course,” 18)⁷

Thin people apparently share more than a body mass index—they also have a whole relationship to the world, a way of thinking. The idea of playing a part, alone, to oneself, in order to consolidate an identity perfectly exemplifies performativity theory and the internalizing of hierarchical subjectivities. As McWhorter (1999, 28) says of the insistence that homosexuals iteratively confess their identity, “That’s what your sexuality becomes, or maybe always was: a thing to be known, an epistemic object. And that is what you are.”

As willing participants in a disciplinary technology, dieters measure and scrutinize themselves far more precisely and conscientiously than those who must be educated into more reluctant self-monitoring behaviors. The organized diet program is thus a particularly extreme version of panoptic culture, which is why it attracts this kind of Foucauldian attention. Weight Watchers’ current program is exemplary in this regard, requiring that one evaluate the “Points” value of everything consumed. Members must write down in a food journal everything they eat, along with its Points value, and are also expected to check off six glasses of water, two servings of milk products, and five servings of fruit and vegetables per day. (Remember: this is the new, liberating plan, with much

greater choice and flexibility!) The obsession with measuring, recording, and hierarchy extends to weight: scales are calibrated to within 0.2 of a pound, and one's weight is recorded weekly to this level of precision, with weight loss (or gain) similarly noted. As members are drawn deeper and deeper into the culture of self-management through precision measurement, they often lose, quite literally, all sense of proportion. Thus someone might say, "I lost 0.4 this week," as if this figure indicated anything more than the added weight of a pair of jeans. Other commentators cite absurd behaviors around the weigh-in: "I lined up in front of the scale with women who wore flimsy summer dresses and thongs in the dead of winter in order to weigh less. Actually, the line started at the bathroom, which everyone visited first to make sure they didn't weight an ounce too much, some of them even spitting in the sink" (Fraser 1998, 138; see also Stinson 2001, 105).

Thus a feminist approach to disciplinary power offers a number of valuable insights into this specific institutional context: the normalization of a population is transformed into an ontology of persons, which is then internalized by those persons as "identities." The process is particularly transparent here, in a way that the emergence of sexual identities, for example, is not, partly because height-weight charts and commercial weight-loss organizations are a postwar phenomenon.⁸ Likewise, the disciplinary practices at play in the organized diet program require a particularly fine-grained and increasingly absurd regulation of food and exercise habits that is very much like the obsessive behaviors commonly associated with eating *disorders*. Thus the commercial diet blurs the line between pathology and "normal" eating, even as it attempts to shore it up with the rhetoric of improving one's health. So, is the popularity of dieting merely a result of rapid and successful internalization of beauty ideals that can be best exploited for profit through the deployment of biopower? Is diet resistance a matter of *exposé*—show the punters how false their hopes and how abject their participation, and the desire to diet will be regretfully left behind? The answer in both cases is clearly no. Dieting has a cultural resonance beyond the primarily repressive and disciplinary picture I've painted here.

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

fat, not appetite or desire, became the declared enemy, and people began to measure their dietary achievements by the numbers on the scale rather than by the level of their mastery of impulse and excess. The bourgeois tyranny of slenderness . . . had begun its ascendancy (particularly over women), and with

it the development of numerous technologies—diet, exercise, and, later on, chemicals and surgery—aimed at a purely physical transformation. (Bordo 1993, 185)

Bordo later disavows this quote, revealing its “limitations” by saying that “examination of even the most shallow [contemporary] representations” in fact “discloses a moral ideology” (198). Why does she start the essay in this way only to later turn back on her own words? I want to suggest that Bordo’s reliance on Foucault’s genealogical phase obscures the paradoxically enabling elements of the process of dieting that might be better theorized through Foucault’s final work. Further, Bordo focuses on *outcomes* in theorizing the body’s role in the symbolic economies of gender and consumer capitalism—on anorectic, toned, and slender icons. Her primary emphasis is on the representative functions of ideal bodies, especially bodies in advertising—the hypothetical product of rigorous diet and exercise. Both Bartky and Bordo think of dieting (usually coupled with toning exercise) as concerned with the minutest management of the (usually female) body’s size, contours, and surface. And indeed it is. However, almost all those who struggle to attain an ideal (or, at least, “better”) body will fail or backslide in their weight-loss and exercise goals. If this were the whole story, as both authors implicitly recognize, then weight-loss diets would hardly have the phenomenal cultural resonance that they do. Neither Bordo nor Bartky fully theorizes the micropractices of power that make up the day-to-day experience of weight-loss dieting. This erasure leads them to stress the *repressive* moments in the construction of the slender body, contra the *enabling* functions of the dieting process.

This line of thought is a supplement rather than a challenge to Bartky and Bordo; beyond endless parsing of the docile bodies thesis, Foucauldian analysis offers another feminist philosophical direction. Foucault argued that as disciplinary practices seep into the minutest habits and strategies of (self-) management proliferate, we do not cease to act, or feel repressed—politically or psychologically. Quite the contrary: with the intensification of power relations comes the increase of capabilities [*capacités*] often interpreted by a liberal political tradition simply as the increase of autonomy (Foucault in Rabinow 1997, 317). To return to Owen’s argument, breaking the hold of this picture of power that sees the growth of capabilities as emerging from increased autonomy (the sovereign view) will enable us to see that we have not been liberated from power in the modern age. Rather, as Bartky and Bordo demonstrate, biopower and its disciplinary effects has supplemented (and, increasingly, replaced) sovereign power. But, beyond *this* aspectual captivity lies another: the implicit sense that the feminized docile body has *only* been diminished, not only literally but metaphorically, too. My own earlier analysis painted a bleak picture of Weight Watchers that raises the blunt question: why subject oneself to such a regime?

Unlike those incarcerated, the dieter can withdraw at any time without explicit penalty. Once one has disabused oneself of the false belief that dieting can lead to permanent slenderness, and having revealed the model of power upon which it depends, surely continuing to diet can be explained only as a kind of compulsion beyond feminist analysis? Clearly a rational component remains: the social rewards that accrue to being slim are very real, and it takes a tough mind to reconcile itself to the knowledge that this ideal is unattainable and bad for women when so much points in the other direction. However, another piece of the puzzle is provided by the thesis that “docile bodies” analysis can elide the emotional, psychological, and practical functions of an organized weight-loss program. Such businesses exploit not only the desire to produce an appropriate body (with all the symbolism that adheres to it), but also the sense of self-development, mastery, expertise, and skill that dieting can offer.

DIETING AS (ANTI-)ASKESIS

To dwell too lovingly on these pleasures may sound like a paean to dieting, and this is certainly not my intention. However, intent on characterizing dieting as an oppressive disciplinary regime, feminists may have elided the details of the capabilities it can develop. Those with radical politics may also be too invested in looking down on women who freely admit to dieting; a holier-than-thou attitude can make the false consciousness model attractive not for its philosophical virtues but because it makes us feel morally superior. Further, I suspect we are theorizing at too high a level of generality to grasp the diet’s functions for the individual; it was not until I had spent quite some time at Weight Watchers, immersed in a diet culture from which my feminist politics had until then kept me far away, that I began to understand the satisfaction many women found not only in losing weight, but also in working on themselves—in however circumscribed a context. There may be a class politics underneath this elision: not only does being thinner often increase class mobility and economic rewards, but if you are stuck in a pink-collar job that has little space for personal accomplishment, then setting your own goal and taking action to achieve it can also feel especially empowering (however overdetermined by disciplinary technology). Commercial diet groups and texts are very canny about this dynamic, exploiting the rhetoric of skill cultivation and self-management in myriad subtle ways. The ultimate paradox of these practices of self-management is that

normalizing disciplinary practices may tremendously enhance a person’s ability to perform certain kinds of functions or accomplish certain kinds of task, but they decrease the number of different ways a person might be able to respond in a given situation; they narrow behavioral options. With that picture of

the normalized body in front of us—that picture of the highly productive and cultivated individual who is at the same time meek and conformist, unable to imagine alternatives and act in innovative ways—we may feel little hope for a new politics on the ground of normalized bodies and pleasures. (McWhorter 1999, 179–80)

The work of Foucauldian feminists on dieting, I will argue, would be more complete if it mirrored the phases of Foucault's own oeuvre, showing how not only technologies of power but also technologies of the self are engaged in a complex interplay. The technologies of the self the process of dieting cultivates expand the dieter's capacities. These capacities, as McWhorter implies, are often recycled back into disciplinary practices; nonetheless, they have a resonance and potential that could exceed the regime of normalization that generated them. Observing this process in one very local case study, I hope to show that a commercial enterprise has co-opted working on oneself in ways feminists need to understand in order to resist.

In his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault made a thematic transition from his earlier work on technologies of power, to a new emphasis on technologies of the self, “which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (1988, 18). Nikolas Rose has identified three ways of relating to the self: epistemologically (knowing yourself), despotically (mastering yourself), and attentively (caring for yourself), each of which is a different kind of technology of the self (Rose 1996). It is the attentive technology—care of the self—that Foucault thinks we have failed to understand as a politicized activity, although arguably the vast self-help industry capitalizes on our inchoate need in the postindustrial West to develop a satisfying *rapport à soi*. He returns to the ancients to find ways of living that, although inevitably implicated in disciplinary practices, cultivate a broader repertoire of human possibilities instead of increasing docility. This is an ethical—as opposed to a moral—project, which returns to the art of living as a project not captured by the Christian (and academic analytic) philosophical emphasis on prohibitions and commandments.

To capture the activities he had in mind, Foucault reclaimed the Greek term *askesis*—the struggle to create an art of living that ethically engages the world:

For the Greeks the word does not mean “ascetic,” but has a very broad sense denoting *any* kind of practical training or exercise. For example, it was a commonplace to say that any kind of art or technique had to be learned by *mathesis* and *askesis*—by

theoretical knowledge and practical training. . . . This *techne tou biou*, this art of living, demands practice and training: *askesis*. (Foucault 2001, 143)

Care of the self is not an indulgence, or a distraction from the affairs of the polis, but rather a necessary condition of effective citizenship and relationships. We owe it to ourselves and to others to constitute ourselves as ethical agents through asketic practices.

The notion that diet can constitute a technology of the self is not at all new. In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault included a lengthy discussion of ancient views of dietetics, which he suggested was often a more important aspect of the “regimen of pleasures” than sexual relations (1985, 99–139). Rose is right, I believe, that through Foucault we can see that the relationship between government and *assujetissement* needs to extend to techniques of the body: a genealogy of subjectification should be concerned not only with ethics as the permitted and forbidden, but also with “the ways in which different corporeal regimes have been devised and implanted in rationalized attempts to enjoin a particular relation to the self and to others” (Rose 1996, 137). Little philosophical attention has been paid, however, to the details of these case studies in Foucault’s later work, and almost no feminist attention at all. They are generally taken to be rather droll excursions on the idiosyncrasies of ancient lifestyles, the philosophical purpose of which rests not in their content but in their form.

The central medium for the transmission of asketic advice about diet was (and arguably is now again) the *hupomnemata*, a word that in its original context has “a very precise meaning: it is a copybook, a notebook”:

In the technical sense, the *hupomnemata* could be account books, public registers, individual notebooks serving as memoranda. . . . Into them one entered quotations, fragments of works, examples, and actions to which one had been witness or of which one had read the account, reflections or reasonings one had heard or had come to mind. They constituted a material memory of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering these as an accumulated treasure for rereading and later meditation. They also formed a raw material for the writing of more systematic treatises in which were given arguments and means by which to struggle against some defect . . . or to overcome some difficult circumstance. (Foucault in Rabinow 1997, 273)

In the ancient world, says Foucault, *hupomnemata* were key aids to caring for the self. Their purpose was “not to pursue the indescribable, not to reveal the hidden, not to say the nonsaid, but, on the contrary, to collect the already-said” (Foucault in Rabinow 1997, 273). Setting aside the issue of the historical

accuracy of Foucault's account, it is clear that he has identified a context for ethical reflection that is no longer, if it ever was, the province of academic philosophers. Mariana Valverde points out that far more people rely on the eclectic asketic insights of modern-day *hupomnemata* such as *The Prophet* or *Chicken Soup for the Soul* than on any systematic moral philosophy, and that "eclecticism may itself be a very useful *techne tou biou*" (2004, 84). Commercial weight-loss groups have understood the kind of working on oneself that dieting provokes, and have produced their own *hupomnemata* accordingly.

Weight Watchers' *hupomnemata*—leaflets handed out at meetings, magazine articles, website materials, and even cookbooks—carefully exploit key asketic themes from a popular culture preoccupied in more or less ethical ways with care of the self. Of the three types of technology of the self—epistemic, attentive, and despotic—the docile bodies thesis implies that the despotic predominates in dieting discourse. Especially where disordered eating is overtly at stake, the language of self-mastery does indeed take center stage in both self-reports and critical analyses; however, commercial diet programs make clever use of the epistemic and attentive moments, too. In what follows, I want to draw four parallels between the forms of care of the self Foucault described and endorsed, and the rhetorical strategies of Weight Watchers' *hupomnemata*. My underlying premise is that Weight Watchers is using this rhetoric to deepen its members' dependence on the organization—and, by implication, on the docility the organization cultivates. At the same time, the discipline of weight loss generates real capabilities, and fosters a kind of attentiveness toward the self. There is little in Foucault's final work that helps feminists identify how disciplinary practices that travel under the sign "care of the self" might constitute practices of freedom, and how they (sometimes simultaneously) cultivate docile bodies.

First, Foucault suggested that "in Greco-Roman culture, knowledge of oneself appeared as the consequence of the care of the self. In the modern world, knowledge of oneself constitutes the fundamental principle" (1988, 22). Weight Watchers' rhetoric cultivates both positions—that the care of the self implicit in successful dieting will improve one's self-knowledge, and that knowing oneself is central to weight loss. For example, "The key [to avoiding a diet lapse] is to know yourself well enough to take action before your personal temptations take over" (1, 34). Or, a text headed "A Self-Discovery Puzzle" declares:

As you can see, these past weeks you've learned many new things about *yourself*. When you put them all together, they make up the person you are. You can enhance your weight loss by building on your strengths and working with any limitations that may be affecting your progress. Weight loss is a continual process of learning about your body, your relationship to food, and the environment you live in. (12, 5, emphasis in original)

Dieting may permit a kind of embodied self-care that provides a detailed and absorbing shared narrative in place of a (sometimes feigned) ignorance or denial of one's habits or status that is often deeply internal and privatized. The process may entail new ways of relating to others that permit the unspoken to be voiced, or change to be mooted.⁹ In this context, the self to be known is not a static, essential one, but rather ever transforming: "Be the person you *really want to be*, now and forever," invites Slimming World on its website banner.¹⁰ The transformed self is not just a goal, however; the process of transformation itself invents new capacities and invites reflection on a post-ascetic self that is not yet known. Foucault thought, of course, that care of the self as a practice of freedom would require that we reject the language of authenticity. That is, we should not understand ourselves as seeking to liberate a self that was always there, but rather to invent ourselves as something new that is not yet imagined. Here the weight-loss discourse is particularly insidious, sometimes invoking the authentic self, while other times turning back on itself to claim that the self we seek to liberate is always developing—always, of course, positing the telos of weight loss and thinness in a way that sets bodies into a hierarchy:

You may be surprised by the changes you've made and what you've learned so far. Even if it's only two or three changes, change for the better is empowering and can improve your life. Keep in mind that you'll continue to grow and change. At any point in the future, refer back to the changes you've made as a reminder of who you are, how much you've learned, and how far you've come since your first week. You've come a long way! (12, 13)

It's quite possible that if you asked yourself the same questions you were asked earlier in the weight loss process, you'd answer them differently now. And as you continue to learn more about yourself, if you ask yourself the following questions in the future, you may answer them differently than you will today. (12, 5)

Second, the *hupomnemata* invite reflection on everyday accomplishments and the evolution of new capacities: "Replace negative messages with positive ones. When you think about your weight goal and you're tempted to say, 'I can't,' say instead, 'I can!' tell yourself . . . *I can* become a thinner, healthier person" (8, 14, emphases in original). Renee—another Success Story—announces: "I discovered losing weight didn't just make me look better. Knowing I accomplished something difficult has helped me feel better about myself. These days I walk a little taller" (November 5, 2001). Losing weight enables women to undertake activities they might previously have allegedly been unable or certainly unwilling to try. In this category, physical play with one's children (or grandchildren) is an extraordinarily popular trope (as are a child's disappointment in an

overweight mother or being unable to rescue a child from danger) as motivations for weight loss). Losing weight makes one into both a new person with new capacities, and a conventionally better caregiver and mother:

When I first lost weight, I went to the park with the children. Rachel pushed me on the swings and we played trains down the slide—it was great fun for all of us and something I wasn't able to do with them before losing weight. I also promised I'd go on a roller coaster with them, which I did—never again! Ian, my husband, has bought me a mountain bike, so we all go for rides together, and although I couldn't walk up the stairs without becoming out of breath, I can now walk for miles.¹¹

It is a feminist commonplace that many women's achievements go unrecognized or are invisible. Losing weight, however, provokes ready congratulation; it is tangible, and can be graphed and tracked; it has setbacks and successes that seem clear-cut. *Weight Watchers* uses its materials to link diverse accomplishments to weight loss, which then becomes an outward and visible symbol of other successes. For example:

When Jennie joined *Weight Watchers* in March 2001, she was 49 years old, 5' 7", and facing a tough dilemma. Desk-bound at home, writing a tech guide to the Internet, Jennie was worried about her weight. "I was miserable about weighing 220.6 pounds and anxious that being just a few feet from my refrigerator would tempt me to pig out." She saved herself from this fate by tracking her *POINTS*[®] religiously. "Monitoring every morsel that crossed my lips gave me the willpower to stay on Plan." By February 2002, she'd lost 60.8 pounds (she's since lost another 8) and gained a manuscript! (May 12, 2003)

The transitional period of losing weight is also represented as temporally significant, as women allegedly use the processes of self-discovery and transformation it cultivates to reassess the ethics of their own existence:

Before Patti joined *Weight Watchers*, she was a Type A corporate executive whose major exercise was dialing pizza places from her car phone. She shed not just the excess pounds but the stressful career as well.

Patti credits *Weight Watchers* with giving her not just a new body, but a new life. "I was so physically lethargic and emotionally stressed that I was out of control," she says. "I was too young to feel that bad." In April 2001 she started attending Meetings, and by December, she'd gone from 169 to 145 pounds. Now she

weighs 140.8 pounds and has a brand new job: She's a personal trainer! Patti says enthusiastically, "If you'd have told me a year ago that I'd be a certified personal trainer, incredibly into nutrition and living a healthy lifestyle, I'd have thought you were crazy. But I've never been happier." (September 22, 2003)

Here we also see Patti cultivating new pleasures—an asketic practice that Foucault endorsed, even though he was more interested in drug use and sado-masochistic sex than in weight loss. Working on oneself requires working not just to conform behaviors and second-order desires, but to transform the self at the level of first-order desires, too:

WeightWatchers.com: Was there one tip you picked up from your Leader that really made a difference?

Stephanie: We needed to figure out what would make us want to choose carrots over Häagen-Dazs. That brought home to me that what's important isn't to eat veggies because that's what the diet says to do but to eat them because that's what will make me feel good about myself. (October 15, 2003)

Third, the *hypomnemata* support Foucault's position that "care for others should not be put before the care of oneself. The care of the self is ethically prior in that the relationship with oneself is ontologically prior" (Foucault in Rabinow 1997, 287). Dieting is equated with taking care of oneself in the face of the gendered exploitation that characterizes many women's lives. Balancing the often culturally prescribed care of others with more attentive, and prior, care of the self is something that a Foucauldian feminist might well recommend (see O'Grady 2004). Trading on this political claim, in a story entitled "Giving Too Much," Tia explains:

My mom died when I was nine, and having to help raise my younger brothers started me off on a path of putting others first, long before I had a family of my own. Recently, I was working full-time, PTA president and on the church, school and Boy Scout boards. I gained weight because, like a lot of people, I didn't realize that to be there for others you have to take care of yourself first. (July 21, 2003)

Foucault remarked, "the possibility of a danger in the very practice of 'diet' was readily acknowledged. For if the aim of regimen was to prevent excesses, one might exaggerate the importance one lent to it and the autonomy one permitted it to assume." In the case of "valetudinary" excess, one becomes excessively preoccupied with sticking to the rules of the regimen; this attitude forgets that "the purpose of diet was . . . to make [life] useful and happy within the limits

that had been set for it. . . . A regimen was not good . . . if it did not allow one to be open to any change. The usefulness of a regimen lay precisely in the possibility it gave individuals to face different situations” (1985, 104–5). Recognizing the truth of this ascetic insight, dieting *hupomnemata* works, fourth, to avoid association with the excesses of despotic disciplining, despite the extraordinary micromanagement I’ve shown that dieting entails. Instead, they emphasize the importance of making one’s own choices, initiating transformation, and approaching food (and other things) with wisdom and flexibility. The new “Flexpoints” addition to the Weight Watchers plan carries the slogan: “The real world is full of real choices. Weight loss should be too.” When Foucault comments of the ancients that “regimen should not be understood as a corpus of universal and uniform rules; it was more in the nature of a manual for reacting to situations in which one might find oneself, a treatise for adjusting one’s behavior to fit the circumstances” (1985, 106), he could be running a Weight Watchers meeting.

It might be objected that these contemporary *hupomnemata* differ from the practices of writing the self that Foucault discussed because they are primarily passive, designed to be read rather than actively engaged. Citing Socrates, Foucault wrote: “To become an art of existence, good management of the body ought to include a setting down in writing carried out by the subject concerning himself; with the help of this note-taking, the individual would be able to gain his independence and choose judiciously between what was good and bad for him” (1985, 108). The dieting subject is being written here, not writing itself. Notice, however, that these texts are not books—they are small leaflets designed to be carried in a pocket or purse, or websites that continually evolve and offer something new to the repeat visitor. At one meeting I attended, a member was lauded for her innovation of laminating and ring binding her introductory booklet for easy reference in the kitchen or supermarket. She carried it with her to refer back to the basic advice and rules it offered. Weight Watchers’ members are enjoined to write down not only what they eat, but also how they feel—notes and tips to themselves that will help them in their project. Intermittent quizzes help members answer contrived questions such as, “What’s your dieting personality profile?” Members are sometimes invited to write in the leaflets, reflecting on their continuation of such phrases as, “Losing weight has enabled me to . . .” Trite though they are, they provide an interactive moment, where the client engages the *hupomnemata* and thus feels more connected to the program and its role in her self-development.

My argument is provocative because it may seem too much like an endorsement of commercial weight-loss programs as capacity-enhancing activities, especially for women. Feminists are much more familiar with an image of the beaten down, obsessive, and oppressed dieter as the irrefutably docile body. By articulating in some detail how dieting discourse appropriates and exploits the language

of care of the self, however, I hope to demonstrate its function as both disciplinary and enabling, in ways feminists have largely ignored. Dieting *hupomnemata* are clever, touching a cultural nerve. They are also quite evidently hackneyed, manipulative, and self-serving, and we should never lose sight of the fact that my focus is on commercial enterprises whose primary goal is profit. Although these texts may provide glimpses into an ethical world of self-development and new capacities, they are ultimately immobilizing as much as enabling. Whatever skills and capacities dieting might enhance are, in the rhetoric of the commercial programs, immediately co-opted back into a field of meaning internal to weight loss. *Only* losing weight, they would have us believe, can lead to true self-knowledge, self-development, self-mastery, and self-care.

Earlier I stressed that weight lost is almost always regained, in order that now I could point out how much is at stake in this failure. With weight loss as the synecdoche for multiple forms of working on oneself, recidivism is likely to be particularly crushing, with regained weight standing in for ethical weakness, a return to old habits, and failure to care adequately for the self (as well as to be responsible to others). Losing weight and regaining it is an ignominious defeat for one's efforts to create an art of living. This partly explains why women diet over and over again, seeking to regain the sense of reincarnation that the process is designed to cultivate. Although profitable for commercial organizations, this cycle of elation and failure ultimately makes body weight metonymic of a host of political inequities that clearly cannot be redressed through the individualized practice of dieting. Given the hyperbolic constructions of the "Success Stories," dieters can be forgiven for thinking that any achievement will be a panacea, forgetting that these narratives are fabrications, presentations of weight loss as commercial organizations would like it to be.

Even as we advocate diet resistance and alternative feminist activities, however, we must recognize that for many women giving up dieting in response to finally taking on board the futility of weight-loss programs is experienced as much as grieving as liberation. We may realize that the books, websites, magazines, and weekly meetings are false friends. But, those women who actually act on the knowledge—rather than just propositionally rehearsing it—must go through mourning. We mourn not only the loss of the future thin self that even if not attained can always be looked forward to, but also the loss of a forum in which, however conditionally, we might be helped to take care of ourselves. Furthermore, if my critique is correct, passive refusal will be limited as a strategy of resistance. A whole literature characterizes the best feminist response as renouncing the weight-loss diet, saying—with greater and lesser degrees of sophistication—"I just won't care; I'll eat what I like" (see Orbach 1978). Not only has this stance already been co-opted and sold back to us, it will always deny the ascetic components of care of the body and the psychic needs that are met by trying to organize or manage our appetites.

Nonetheless, the capacities weight-loss *hypomnemata* cultivate—resisting gendered exploitation, working to release negative conditioning, or assuming responsibility for choices about how to live—are important *askeses* from any feminist perspective. Fortunately, “human beings are not the unified subjects of some coherent regime of domination that produces persons in the form in which it dreams. . . . Techniques of relating to oneself as a subject of unique capacities worthy of respect run up against practices of relating to oneself as the target of discipline, duty, and docility” (Rose 1996, 141). At the place where self-discipline into the world of dieting meets the new capacities that the practice generates is a fissure feminists should exploit. In the scripted examples of website testimonials or advisory pamphlets, every *askesis* is turned back on itself, and fully recruited again to the service of dieting. In the world of meetings, however, the real women I met were often aware that they could learn from Weight Watchers without becoming the projected unified subject of its regime. Central to this awareness is the possibility of uncoupling new capacities from docility, and of recruiting those capacities to care of the self. For example, the importance of method, structure, and consistency to any disciplinary project became clear to me (and, as Foucault pointed out, achieving greater freedom often involves discipline). I realized that strategies for observing and documenting self-limiting and self-destructive behaviors could be very useful as an awareness practice. And I saw how communities of women could be mobilized (both in face-to-face meetings and online) that beg to be imitated by a diet-resisting not-for-profit feminist organization. Ultimately, these are insights into dieting *askeses* that exceed normalizing goals and expand, rather than reduce, my possibilities for being in the world. Thus, finally, feminists should understand the needs of contemporary women—including ourselves, of course—for sites in which we can develop care of the self and an aesthetics of existence, without further entrenching our own docility.

NOTES

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1. According to McWhorter, a *dispositif* (deployment, affective mechanism, apparatus, device) is “a system of relations among heterogeneous elements such as discourses, institutions, laws, architecture, etc., that serves a strategic function”; thus for Foucault the *dispositif de sexualité* was the administrative strategies of nineteenth-century Europe that attempted to “understand, influence, and use specific populations’ sexualities” (McWhorter 1999, 237n19).

2. For a journalistic treatment of the diet industry see Fraser 1998; for survey and critique of the medical literature on weight and health see Campos 2004; Gaesser 2002; and their references. I am also deeply indebted to April Herndon's (2003) work on fatness and nation, and very grateful to her for many conversations, references, and insights into the feminist politics of weight.

3. Witness the enormous success of Morgan Spurlock's recent film *Supersize Me* (2004), in which the significance of his failing health on an all-McDonalds diet is repeatedly eclipsed (including in the very title of the film) by his weight gain. In my local community, a Mc-Zealot gained notoriety by eating only McDonalds for a month while managing to *lose* weight. That this outcome was interpreted as evidence that Spurlock could be "proved wrong" shows how all of the complex economic, ethical, aesthetic, environmental, and health-related claims *Supersize Me* alludes to could be reduced to the number on the scale, which is in turn a synecdoche for a body's success or failure.

4. I called Weight Watchers to ask for statistics on their long-term success rates, but was told such information is not available. Other researchers have encountered similar denials (see, for example, Fraser 1998, 147–48), and weight-loss organizations are not legally required to collect or make public this data. Complaints made to the U.S. Federal Trade Commission about inaccurate reporting of success rates led, in 1997, to Weight Watchers, along with similar groups, entering into a consent order that "requires us to comply with certain procedures and disclosures in connection with our advertisements of products and services but does not contain any admission of guilt nor require us to pay any civil penalties or damages" (Weight Watchers 2003, 9). Basically, this amounts to adding the rider "results not typical" to every published testimonial, and the Weight Watchers' welcoming leaflet includes an elaborate and tautological caveat about their success rates. It is clear from watching members come and go, listening to them recount earlier failed attempts to lose weight (often with the same program), or seeing how few members are awarded "lifetime" status (reaching a goal in the stipulated weight range and maintaining it for six weeks), that the failure rates are extraordinarily high. In fact, it is virtually a truism that "the only people who have kept weight off are the Weight Watchers leaders, the ones who have quite literally made a career of dieting" (Fraser 1998, 148). There are very few studies of the efficacy of commercial weight-loss programs (see Tsai and Wadden 2005). They are avowedly methodologically limited, and show only small weight loss and acknowledge regained weight among participants. Reflecting the endemic conflict of interest problems that beset the study of nutrition and weight loss in North America, the most methodologically credible study of Weight Watchers (which hardly shows impressive outcomes in any case) was initiated and funded by the organization itself (Heshka et al. 2003).

5. All website quotes are from the Success Stories pages of www.weightwatchers.com, the U.S. site, with their date of posting in parentheses. Most of these stories are archived for medium-term access.

6. "Nancy" is a pseudonym. A "Group Leader" in Weight Watchers is a former member who has reached and maintained her goal weight, and been trained to lead the weekly motivational meetings that are central to the organization's program.

7. Quotes taken from Weight Watchers' weekly leaflets distributed to Canadian members in 2002 are cited throughout in parentheses with the week number or title followed by the page number: (12, 3), for example, indicates week 12, page 3.

8. The first Metropolitan Life height-weight tables were published in 1959. Weight Watchers was founded in 1963, and is the oldest commercial weight-loss organization in North America.

9. Thanks to Kim Leighton for this point. Personal communication with author, October 6, 2003.

10. www.slimmingworld.co.uk, accessed October 16, 2003.

11. Ingrid, a featured “success” on www.slimmingworld.co.uk, accessed October 17, 2003.

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