

انضباط "الأجسام الطيبة": رؤى فوكولدية في اضطرابات الأكل في رواية "فرصة سمينة" لليسليا نيومان

Disciplining "Docile Bodies": Foucauldian Insights into Eating Disorders in Lesléa Newman's *Fat Chance*

يعتمد هذا البحث على مفاهيم ميشيل فوكو عن "الانضباط" و "الأجساد الطيبة" كما وضعها في كتابه "الانضباط والمعاقبة: ولادة السجن" (١٩٧٥) لتناول مأزق الفتيات المراهقات اللاتي يعانين من اضطرابات الأكل. على الرغم من أن كتاب فوكو يتناول التغييرات التي حدثت في نظام العقوبات الغربي، إلا أن تصوره "للجسد الطيب" قد يكون مناسباً لفحص القوى التي يتم فرضها على الأجساد المصابة باضطرابات الأكل، كما يتضح من بطلنة رواية ليسيلى نيومان "فرصة سمينة" (١٩٩٦) وزميلتها المصابة بفقدان الشهية / النهم، يمكن أن يقال إن لهن أجساداً سهلة الانقياد؛ نتيجة للقواعد الاجتماعية والثقافية ومعايير الجمال التي تنظم تصورات النساء عن مظهرهن وحجم أجسادهن، والتي يصعب تحررهن منها.

اضطرابات الأكل الأجسام الطيبة انضباط قوي الانضباط معايير الجمال

This paper draws on Michel Foucault's concepts of "discipline" and "docile bodies" as he theorizes them in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) to address the predicament of adolescent girls with eating disorders. Although Foucault's book is primarily concerned with the changes that occurred in the Western penal system, his perception of the "docile body" may be well-appropriated to examine the discursive forces that are meted out on eating disordered bodies. Women with eating disordered bodies, as exemplified by the protagonist of Lesléa Newman's novel *Fat Chance* (1996), and her anorexic/bulimic class-mate, may thus be said to possess docile bodies; a byproduct of sociocultural norms and beauty standards that discipline women's perceptions of their appearance and body size, and from which they can hardly be liberated. Bringing Foucauldian ideas to bear on eating disordered bodies does not propose liberating them; rather, it serves only to bring new insights into viewing them as the object of application of disciplinary power.

Eating disorders; docile body; discipline; disciplinary powers; beauty norms

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“Why would a girl - because usually it is a girl - do something potentially harmful to herself in order to lose weight?” (Newman 172), asks Miss Fiorino, the counselor who visits Judi Leibowitz’s school in Lesléa Newman’s¹ novel *Fat Chance* (1996). Through a series of diary entries written over a year by the thirteen-year-old Judi Leibowitz, Newman sets out to explore the life-threatening ramifications of eating disorders in women². This paper will venture on addressing the question posed by Miss Fiorino by drawing on Michel Foucault’s concepts of “discipline” and “docile bodies” as he theorizes them in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975). Although Foucault’s book is primarily concerned with the changes that occurred in the Western penal system, his perception of the “docile body” as “pliable, ready at all times” (*Discipline* 135), may be well-appropriated to examine the discursive forces that are meted out on eating disordered bodies. In Foucauldian terms, these forces represent a “mechanics of power” (138), or a “disciplinary technology” (215), that produce irretrievable “subjected and practiced bodies, docile bodies” (137-38). Women with eating disordered bodies, as exemplified by Judi Leibowitz and her anorexic/bulimic class-mate Nancy Pratt, may thus be said to possess docile bodies; a byproduct of sociocultural norms and beauty standards that discipline women’s perceptions of their appearance and body size, and from which they can hardly be liberated.

By addressing the throes of eating disorders in adolescent girls through Judi’s diary entries, and by touching upon many of the challenges that teenagers stumble upon, Newman’s novel may be viewed as a specimen of young adult literature; that is “literature written for young people aged 11 to 18” wherein “the main character is a teenager who is the center of the plot... [and whose] actions and decisions are major factors in the plot outcome” (Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown 4). Although the term “young adult literature” is difficult to strictly define, it is generally agreed that it tackles contemporary issues, problems, and experiences to which adolescents can relate, such as dealing with parents and authoritative figures; facing illness, eating disorders and death; and dealing with peer pressure, drugs, alcohol, sexual experimentation, addiction and pregnancy (Bucher and Hinton 10). In addition to the internal changes happening to adolescents, young adult literature addresses the communities in which a young adult lives: “These communities, including the family and its socioeconomic group, the neighbourhood (including the school), the ethnic/racial/religious community, and young adolescent peers, affect the development of adolescents” (2). In this regard,

Judi's grappling with the ambient disciplinary powers may be said to typify the way

[y]oung adult literature reflects the changes adolescents experience. As they make their first excursions into adult territory, adolescents are learning to take responsibility for their own actions. Young adult literature reflects their experiences with conflicts, focuses on themes that interest young people, includes young protagonists ... and has a language common to young adults. (10)

Discipline, as defined by Foucault, "may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power, a technology" (*Discipline* 215). Power, according to him, "is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions" (26). In other words, power is distributed across "relationships of force" in "nonegalitarian" systems, relations and structures (*History* 94). This leads Foucault to the conviction that power relations are omnipresent; they are "the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums" that are immanent in any social context (94).

Chief among the disciplinary powers that this paper will seek to address in the context of eating disorders are: body hatred; the cultural idolization of slenderness; gender and gender-based ideals of beauty; beauty standards, or, more accurately, beauty myths; peer pressure; adolescence as a new stage with new demands; the meticulous observation of the body, both cultural and personal; the bingeing-purging pattern ensuing from eating disorders; the cultural denigration, and often stigmatization, of fatness; weightism; beauty magazines; vigorous and excessive exercising; and self-harming eating habits. Before bringing the Foucauldian concept of docile bodies to bear on Judi's wrestling with her body image, it becomes essential to give a brief overview of eating disorders, with a particular focus on anorexia nervosa and bulimia.

Eating disorders happen when food starts to lose its essential function as a means of sustenance or nurturance. Instead of eating food for its nutritive value or even for the sensual pleasure it is likely to induce, this relationship becomes distorted for some people, particularly adolescent girls. "Their attitude to food, their food choices, and their eating become disordered, producing a group of medical problems ... referred to as eating disorders" (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 9-10). These disorders have far-reaching consequences that affect not only the physical, but also the mental well-being of the sufferer. Generally speaking, there are four main eating disorders: Firstly, anorexia nervosa is a disorder of self-

starvation that results in severe weight loss, either as a result of restriction of diet, or some other mechanism, such as vomiting. Secondly, bulimia nervosa is a disorder in which bouts of ravenous overeating are followed by deliberate vomiting or purging by some other means, such as laxatives, diuretics, or fasting. Thirdly, binge-eating disorder, which consists of repeated episodes of overeating, or bingeing, but not necessarily accompanied by vomiting, purging or fasting. Finally, all abnormal behaviours and attitudes towards food that do not fit into strictly defined medical diagnoses are also considered eating disorders (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 10-11).

Psychological, physiological, familial, environmental and sociocultural forces converge to trigger eating disorders. Still, it is no easy task to ascertain why these disorders happen: “There are complex and often confusing afflictions, and the processes that initiate and then perpetuate them are complicated, with powerful yet concealed forces that effect change in an invisible manner” (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 11). A common consensus is that they usually develop within a cultural context that fosters women’s fixation on thinness and propagates unattainable body ideals (Bruch 6; Sesan 260; Shisslak and Crago 419). It is generally adduced that “a dysfunctional system for evaluating self-worth based mainly on eating habits, shape, or weight is considered to be the core maintaining factor of eating disorders” (Mares et al.). On the other hand, recent research studies have postulated that some people are genetically predisposed to develop eating disorders, thereby emphasizing the interplay of both genetics and the environment (Reynolds 17-18). In most cases, though, eating disordered women cite familial and cultural values as causes of their obsession with appearance and dieting (Rabinor 275). In her book *Eating Disorders: Obesity, Anorexia Nervosa, and the Person Within* (1973), Hilde Bruch emphasizes the same point by stating that eating disorders can hardly be explained by “one simple mechanism” since they “are neither purely physiochemical nor physiological in some other way, nor due to psychological or social factors alone, but rather they develop as an expression of disturbances in the interaction of these various forces” (5). Be it anorexia, bulimia, bingeing or any other related disorder, “a conflict between women’s bodies and the body politic” becomes a common denominator (Steiner-Adar 382).

Defined as “the relentless pursuit of thinness through self-starvation, even unto death” (Bruch 4), anorexia nervosa is a complicated amalgam of emotional, psychological and physical changes that are often induced by sociocultural pressures. Although conspicuous weight loss is the most marked manifestation of it, this physical change is underlain by less evident but equally alarming psychological and emotional turbulences (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 16). The word “anorexia” comes from the Greek word *an*, meaning not, and *orexis*, meaning desire; hence, the loss of desire for eating. The word “nervosa” is derived from the

French word *nerveux*; that is, having a psychological cause (24). Thus, in its literal sense, the term anorexia nervosa means loss of appetite as a result of a psychological illness. However, this is not an accurate description since anorexics do not lose their appetite, but rather learn instead to deny it. It is only when the disorder worsens that some anorexics eventually do lose their appetites (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 25; Whelan 16-22). In her seminal book *Unbearable Weight, Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1993), Suzan Bordo contends that the anorexic does not lose her appetite; rather she is “haunted by it” (146). No matter how skinny they become, most anorexics still see themselves as fat and in need of losing weight. Misconceptions about size are evident in “an exaggerated interpretation of any curve and excess weight as grotesquely fat” (Bruch 91). The overpowering fear of becoming overweight or gaining fat persists even if the anorexic is underweight:

Not only do anorexics have an overwhelming desire to be very thin; their perception of their bodies is also markedly altered. When they examine themselves, they often feel that they still weigh too much even when they are underweight; they ‘see’ themselves differently than others do. In spite of being alarmingly wasted and gaunt, they insist that their bodies have too much fat. In their attempt to get rid of their imagined body fat, anorexics usually resort to self-induced vomiting, enemas, the excessive use of laxatives, or of diuretics. (Bruch 253)

The type of excessive weight loss characterizing anorexia and resulting in a skeletal appearance comes under the designation of cachexia³; a term used to describe profound weight loss, accompanied by the loss of muscle mass and subcutaneous fat (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 29). The strict reduction of food intake, coupled with self-induced vomiting and purging, beget an array of pernicious medical repercussions such as: metabolic and electrolyte complications; loss of body tissues; susceptibility to cold; increase in body hair called lanugo; reduced renal function; amenorrhea; cold and bluish extremities; decreased basal metabolic rate; fainting spells and dizziness; rough skin; fragile, brittle and easily damaged hair; insomnia; depression and social withdrawal; fluid retention; decreased mental ability; and ultimately death (Bruch 39; Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 29-35). From the point of view of a recovered anorexic, “to be anorexic is to keep a close daily tally of a close death—to be a member of the walking undead” (Wolf 104).

Closely related to anorexia, although it has unique properties as a distinct eating disorder, bulimia nervosa is a disorder in which people gorge a huge amount of food in a short time, known as bingeing⁴, then subsequently get rid of it through deliberate purging⁵. In contradistinction to anorexia, which literally means lack of hunger, bulimia has been perceived in terms of “hyporexia...or a heightened exaggerated hunger” (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 47). The literal meaning of the

word bulimia is derived from “the Greek *bous*, ox, and *limos*, hunger”, thereby implying that someone possesses an appetite as voracious as an ox’s, or has the capacity to eat a whole ox (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 47; Whelan 25). Purging is usually effected by self-induced vomiting by putting fingers down the throat; the use of laxatives; diuretics; and rectal suppositories or enema; as well as the use of appetite suppressants and excessive exercising. Though a binge may induce emotional and physical satisfaction, not long afterwards it engenders feelings of shame and remorse, thereby necessitating a purging episode (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 39-40; Whelan 26-27). It is no exaggeration to postulate that “bingeing and purging become a kind of addiction...[that] release[s] chemicals called opioids into the brain which bring[s] a short-term sense of pleasure” (Whelan 27). An important point about bingeing is that it happens without prior notice; “it can happen almost anywhere, any time, and bulimics may overeat voraciously in their homes, at work, at school, in restaurants, in their cars, on the street, or even while shopping, at the beach or in a public park” (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 41). Like anorexics, bulimics regard body shape and weight as determinants of self-worth.

The injurious consequences of bulimia are manifold, chief among them are: persistent sore throat due to the acidic stomach contents passing in vomiting, not to mention the finger scratches on the throat. Repeated vomiting can also cause broken blood vessels to appear around the eyes. The acids also result in teeth erosion and gum recession. Another hazard induced by vomiting is the swelling of salivary glands. Frequent vomiting also allows acidic stomach contents to flow backward into the esophagus at any time; what is known as reflux. The complete bursting of the esophagus is also a recurrent complication. Other health risks reach the heart and kidneys. Prolonged use of laxatives can also lead to falling, fainting or even death as a result of dehydration or electrolyte disturbances (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 50-53).

Be it anorexia or bulimia, eating disorders always affect the normal functioning of the body through their abnormal patterns of nutrition intake and eating habits. In short, their detrimental impact can be life-threatening. From the above-mentioned account of both disorders, it becomes evident that they are closely related:

“About half of anorexics show some bulimic symptoms, and many bulimia sufferers go through period of strict dieting between binges. Like those with anorexia, people with bulimia attach much importance to weight and body shape, and have an intense fear of becoming fat with a distorted image of their body” (Whelan 25).

This is to a great extent the case of Judi Leibowitz who exhibits symptoms of both disorders. For the purpose of this research she will be referred to as being afflicted with an eating disorder in the more general sense. In as much as the same

way, her friend, Nancy Pratt, oscillates between the symptoms of both disorders, and will be likewise mentioned in the same terms. Notwithstanding the designation of the disorder, they both act in a way that renders the course of their lives contingent on the shape and size of their bodies. Their plight may be viewed in the light of Foucault's proposition that "it is always the body that is at issue - the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission" (*Discipline* 25). According to Foucault, "in every society, the body [is] in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions or obligations" (136). The outcome of these coercive measures is "a docile body...that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (136). Foucault's concept of docile bodies thus suggests that bodies are often positioned receptively for disciplinary powers to act upon them.

A case in point is the way Judi becomes obsessed with whittling down her body size on account of the ambient beauty norms. In a culture replete with idealized body images, Judi, Nancy and many others going through the same ordeal, not only feel uncomfortable in their bodies, but they even view them with abhorrence, guilt, and shame when they fail to meet the societal ideal. According to Bordo, "this guilt festers into unease with [their] femaleness, shame over [their] bodies, and self-loathing" (8). In this context, women's body hatred becomes a culturally constructed attitude; that is "structural", "political" and "built into the system", but "not accidental" (Wooley 19). This "structural"/ "political" hatred may be aptly viewed as a Foucauldian discipline. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault defines those disciplines as "methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility" (137). These disciplinary methods, or "technologies", as Foucault also refers to them (215), become "formulas of domination" that result in the objectification and docility of the body (137).

Body hatred as a disciplinary power is established in Judi's first diary entry, and is maintained throughout, tightening its grip on her as she plummets deeper into her eating disorder. Right from the outset, her self-image is adulterated with body-shaming sentiments: "I am so disgusted with myself. I weigh 129 pounds and I look like an elephant. I swear if I wore a gray pair of pants and a gray top, they would definitely put me in the zoo" (Newman 16). The very same sentiments are extended to define her relationship to her clothes: "I hate my clothes. They are all size 11/12. Last year I wore 9/10.... I went up an entire size 10" (10). Hatred also underpins her perception of the gym: "I hate gym. My locker is right close to Nancy Pratt's so I try to turn my back so that she won't see my flabby stomach when I change into my gym suit, but that just means she can see the rolls of fat around my waist" (12). She even hates summer because the summer clothes expose

her body (57). Judi's self-deprecating attitude can be further explained in the light of the following view: "The tyranny of the ideal image makes almost all of us feel inferior We are taught to hate our bodies, and...hate ourselves. This self-hatred takes an enormous toll....[N]egative body image leads to a negative self-image, reflected by feelings of inferiority, anxiety, insecurity, and depression" (Kilbourne 396).

In so loathing herself, Judi is internalizing the cultural discourse that "elevate[s] the pursuit of a lean, fat-free body into a new religion" (Seid 4). This new creed, in its turn, becomes a Foucauldian discipline that acts upon the body. As explained by Foucault, "[w]hat was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it" (*Discipline* 137-38). According to Foucault, the act of controlling bodies is the conduit through which discipline works. For the body to be disciplined in this way, it must be receptive to the powers that work on it. The docile body, then, is "something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body [from which] the machine required can be constructed" (135). Against a cultural system that evaluates self-worth based on weight and appearance, it is only inevitable for Judi to approach her body as a docile one; an object to be viewed and judged with hatred and shame.

Miss Fiorino's proposition that "usually it is a girl" who engages in self-destructive eating habits lends credence to the conviction that "women, not men, are at war with their bodies" (Seid 8). In point of fact, "in the case of eating disorders, where nearly all the sufferers are female, the importance of gender is beyond debate" (Fallon, et al. ix). Although these disorders do occur in males who exhibit the same behaviour as their female counterparts⁶, almost 90 per cent occur in women, especially young and adolescent ones (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 10; Whelan 49). In this context, gender establishes itself as a potent Foucauldian discipline; a "technique of power" that regards individuals both as "objects and as instruments of its exercise" (*Discipline* 170). In compliance with gender-based ideals of femininity and beauty, women have always been more vulnerable. Much to their detriment, the "[s]tandards for males are not as extreme or as inimical to normal masculine body builds as are women's standards" (Seid 8). Failing to meet these standards suffices to stigmatize women. Miss Fiorino's words attest to the perception of gender as a disciplinary power hoisted on girls' bodies:

There is definitely more pressure on females than on males to have the perfect body. Sometimes a girl will develop an eating disorder just because one of her friends or a parent or a doctor or even a stranger on the street makes a comment about her body...this can make a girl feel pretty bad about

herself. And a common response to feeling bad is dieting. And a common effect of dieting is developing an eating disorder. (Newman 173)

Based on Foucault's view that "where there is power, there is resistance" (*History* 95), developing an eating disorder may thus be viewed as an act of resistance to societal pressure, pitting women against their own bodies to meet the cultural standard. In fact,

[i]t is not just biology that confounds women. They strive to meet this unreasonable standard because it has become a moral imperative...and because the quest for physical beauty remains deeply powerful.... [W]omen's self-image, their social and economic success, and even their survival can still be largely determined by their beauty [W]omen try to meet unreasonable weight standards also because fashion...requires them to do so. (Seid 8-9)

In other words, the cultural fixation on female beauty, or what may be called "the beauty myth" (Shisslak and Crago 421), becomes a means of objectifying women. It is a form of discipline that renders them susceptible to eating disorders. In this regard, the high rate of eating disorders among women can be described in terms of a resemblance between Victorian attitudes towards female sexuality and modern attitudes towards food: "In the 19th century the control of sexual instincts was the acme of virtue; sexual behavior was the yardstick of goodness. Today, eating habits and body weight have become the yardsticks of virtue, and food rules have become as dour and inhibitory as the sex rules of the 19th century" (Seid 8). Just as women could not circumvent the stringent Victorian codes that sought to define their sexuality, they cannot evade being defined by standards of beauty that propagate a culture of slenderness. Bordo explains how these disorders have become cultural statements about gender:

[I]n these disorders the construction of femininity is written in disturbingly concrete, hyperbolic terms: exaggerated, extremely literal, at times virtually caricatured presentations of the ruling feminine mystique. The bodies of disordered women in this way offer themselves as an aggressively graphic text for the interpreter—a text that insists, actually demands, that it be read as a cultural statement, a statement about gender. (169)

Bordo further explains that these disorders have assumed different manifestations throughout history: neurasthenia and hysteria in the second half of the nineteenth century; agoraphobia, anorexia nervosa and bulimia in the second half of the twentieth century (168)⁷. Even as early as the 4th century B.C., the Hippocratic texts of Greece described "a disease of 'young women'... characterized by amenorrhea, wasting away, great hunger, vomiting, depression, societal ideation, anxiety, aches and pains, and breathing difficulties" (Perlick and Silverstein 77)⁸. Due to rampant cultural influences in different historical eras, women internalize a

myriad of self-deprecating attitudes that eventually render them prone to various “female malad[ies]” (Showalter 1). Gender is accordingly a discipline and a “system of power relations embedded in other systems of power relations” (Butryn 279). From a Foucauldian perspective, and as Newman’s novel exposes, women’s bodies are always “manipulated, shaped, [and] trained” in accordance with those socio-cultural disciplines and power relations (*Discipline* 136).

The beauty standards against which Judi’s body is pitted also operate as a Foucauldian disciplinary power that renders her body image a distorted one. Although body image describes “an internal and subjective sense a person has of her own body, the term easily jumps from the subjective to the objective” (Hutchinson 153). This act of “jumping” may be attributed to the Foucauldian perception of discipline as “a technique for the transformation of arrangements that distributes [bodies] and circulates them in a network of relations” (*Discipline* 145-46). Consequently, instead of being “the image of the body that allows a person to know about sensations, emotions, bodily needs, and appetite, and to negotiate the physical environment” (Hutchinson 153), body images become distorted by disciplinary forces that gauge how far they fit into the cultural ideal. In Judi’s case, she has a completely normal figure but imagines herself to be excessively obese. Her obsession with weight loss is evident in the way each diary entry revolves around her diet. The body image distortion that exacerbates Judi’s eating disorder partly comes from peer pressure, exemplified by her constant idolization of Nancy. “I am not too sure how to describe myself, but pale and dumpy-looking are two words that come to mind” (Newman 2), Judi records in her diary, as opposed to her perception of Nancy: “Nancy is thin and beautiful and looks like she has spent the entire summer vacation working on her tan and bleaching her hair” (2). In another instance, when she ponders what she wants to do in the future she states: “Sometimes I think I want to be a fashion designer” (6), then she sorrowfully retorts: “You have to be attractive like Nancy Pratt to be in the world of fashion, even to be a designer and I am not” (6). Adding to her misery, she sets herself off against not only Nancy, but also Monica, her best friend. Observing her eating, she records in her diary: “this would add to 600 calories at least, but it doesn’t matter because Monica has a great body. She can eat whatever she wants to and still she can wear size 7/8. It isn’t fair, but I guess life isn’t fair” (14). She even thinks Monica chose her as a friend on account of her weight: “Maybe because I am fat and ugly and wear boring baggy clothes, so she really looks good by comparison when she stands next to me” (41). Judi’s obsession with losing weight typifies the attitude of an anorexic, “who literally cannot see her body as other than her inner reality dictates and who is relentlessly driven by an ideal image of ascetic slenderness” (Bordo 153). This ideal is essentially a Foucauldian discipline that contributes to her distorted body image⁹.

An important observation is that the onset of Judi's affliction with eating disorders coincides with the onset of her puberty. Given the rapid physical, emotional and social changes that young people have to deal with, adolescence is not to be perceived merely as a stage in a person's maturation, but often becomes a hotbed for eating disorders. In Foucauldian terms, adolescence becomes a new discipline to which the body must adapt. Observing the changes in her body Judi confides to her diary: "Mom says it's because I am becoming a woman...And I don't really like it" (Newman 3). In another instance, she expresses the very same resentment stating:

I am really getting frustrated about my poundage problem. I wish I could get one of those operations where they take out part of your intestine and then you could eat whatever you want without gaining any weight. Could you see Mom letting me do that dear diary? Fat chance. She says I need all my nutrients because I am a growing girl. Yeah—I am growing alright—sideways. (21)

Judi's stance may be understood in terms of the fear experienced by adolescent anorexics and bulimics; precisely "a characteristic fear of growing up to be mature, sexually developed, and potentially reproductive women" (Whelan 155). The disciplinary dimension of adolescence is all the more manifested in the way it manipulates the body to meet new demands pertaining to the adolescent own sense of selfhood and interpersonal relationships, particularly with the opposite sex.

For teenagers everything seems to be changing at once. Their bodies change shapeAs they start moving towards adulthood they begin to develop a new sense of who they are as a person, and how they relate to others. Relationships with the opposite sex take on a new meaning and arouse strong feelings. On top of this they are under pressure to do well at school. Some teenagers get very anxious about these changes and feel that their lives are getting out of control. (Whelan 44)

Nowhere is this more evident than in Judi's case whose adolescence is punctuated by her struggle to lose weight, find a boyfriend, and decide on a career to pursue. "Richard Weiss still hasn't said a word to me and I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up...I just think if I lost some weight everything else would work out too" (Newman 20-21), she distraughtly writes in her diary. In another instance she addresses her diary stating: "Diary--do you think my final outcome is to be a fat girl with no boyfriend who doesn't know what to with her life forever?" (37). Typifying the stance adopted by adolescent girls with eating disorders, Judi hinges her happiness and success on losing weight¹⁰: "I am going to get so thin. Richard Weiss won't be able to resist me, Tommy Aristo will stop bugging me, and Nancy Pratt will ask me to be her best friend" (60). In another instance, she gauges her happiness only insofar as the scales indicate weight loss: "Today is a great day. I

weigh 120—hurray! I am so happy” (142). Judi’s obsession gradually escalates to a life-threatening disorder:

Girls who have a negative body image are more likely to suffer from depression, to have eating disorders, and to consider killing themselves. The pervasiveness of negative body images among adolescent girls may be understood in part as girls’ attempt to live within the safety of an ideal image that looms large in the culture, rather than in the vulnerability and vitality of their female bodies. (Tolman and Debold 302)

What Judy experiences can be further explained in terms of the “characteristic scenario” wherein the disorder “develops just at the outset of puberty. Normal body changes are experienced ... as the takeover of the body by disgusting, womanish fat” (Bordo 156). Her conversation with her mom when she tells her she is on a diet reveals her exasperation: “Don’t be silly Judy. You are just a growing girl...dieting isn’t healthy at your age. You’ll stunt your growth” (Newman 29), says the mother, whereupon Judi reveals her apprehensions to her diary: “You see dear Diary, I am afraid Mom is right—I will grow out of this awkward stage into an even bigger and more awkward stage. I wish Mom could understand but she doesn’t. How could she? She’s got a good figure. She has no idea what’s it is like to be the fattest girl in the entire eighth grade” (29).

Tantamount to Judi’s grappling with the demands of adolescence is another Foucauldian discipline that asserts its authority: the strict observance of her body to monitor any weight changes. In keeping with Foucault’s theory, “the exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible” (Foucault, *Discipline* 170). In other words, discipline according to Foucault is engendered not by a recourse to force, but rather through careful observation, and the moulding of the bodies into the norm through this observation. In Judi’s case, the process of observing her body operates on two levels: how the surrounding people observe her; and how she subjects her body to a perpetual process of self-scrutiny. An example of the former can be discerned in the way she feels exultant when someone comments on her weight loss, and conversely devastated by any reference to the opposite; the latter is exemplified by her meticulous examination of every inch of her body, and the ensuing feelings of elation or dismay.

In both cases, observation is to be understood along the lines of Foucault’s concept of “surveillance”; “a hold over the body...a power that seems all the less ‘corporal’ in that it is more subtly ‘physical’” (*Discipline* 177). Foucault further explains surveillance as a means of “establish[ing] over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them. That is why, in all the

mechanisms of discipline, the examination is highly ritualized. In it are combined the ceremony of power and the form of the experiment, the deployment of force and the establishment of truth” (184). Foucault also explains how the body, as a “new object of surveillance”, becomes “the target for new mechanisms of power” (155). Along these lines, an eating disordered body like Judi’s may be viewed as the locus of intersection between societal and personal forces that extol slenderness and demonize fatness. Its status as a docile body is thus the outcome of the way “discipline is founded on a meticulous observation of detail combined with an awareness of the political value of these details for purposes of control; and efficient use” (Shumway 125). The political and the personal thus converge to wield unwavering disciplinary power over her body. Surveillance according to Foucault is “perpetual and total” (Rainbow 19), emblemized by the Panopticon¹¹ model: “Hence the major effect of the Panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, *Discipline* 201). According to Foucault, this is effected by its “mechanism of observation” (204), which may be said to underpin Judi’s quest for attaining an ideal of slenderness.

In her overriding desire to lose weight, winning Nancy as a friend becomes one of Judi’s pressing needs. Unfortunately, it is through Nancy that she falls in the labyrinth of purging. “I ate too much so I puked. No big deal”, explains Nancy the very first time Judi sees her in the act of purging (Newman 83). “Lots of girls do it, especially models. And actresses and dances” (83), Nancy affirms. Forced by her mother to eat supper, and following in Nancy’s footsteps, Judi writes in her diary: “I shoved my entire supper into my mouth...then later I went upstairs into my room and threw up the whole thing” (98). Further confessions in her diary ensue: “Dear diary, I hope you don’t think it’s too disgusting. Nancy Pratt does it, and she says lots of other girls do that too. I did exactly what she told me and ran the shower so that Mom wouldn’t hear and I sprayed some hair spray around afterwards so it wouldn’t smell” (100).

As she finds herself incarcerated in this habit she remembers Nancy’s words: “You get used to it. It’s certainly not as disgusting as being fat” (84). Two Foucauldian disciplinary technologies can be discerned in what Nancy says: the bingeing-purging pattern, and the cultural denigration of fatness, both of which contribute to the docility of their bodies. Firstly, the bingeing-purging pattern establishes itself as a discipline when viewed from Foucault’s conviction that “[t]he chief function of the disciplinary power is to train” (*Discipline* 170), which is exactly what happens to the body once a person gets into this habit. Foucault’s perception of the docile bodily as one that “turn[s] silently into the automatism of habit” (135), reveals how far they are caught up in the throes of their eating disorders. Training, in a Foucauldian context, is an important facet of the

operation of power upon the docile body (138). When brought to bear on eating disorders, the anorexic/bulimic body is rendered docile through constant training to this injurious practice: “Once the pattern is established, the nervous system becomes used to bingeing in certain situations, making it even more difficult to resist” (Whelan 27). The way the body gets attuned to this habit may also be also viewed along the lines of Foucault’s explanation of disciplinary control:

Disciplinary control does not consist simply in teaching or imposing a series of particular gestures; it imposes the best relation between a gesture and the overall position of the body...[and] everything must be called upon to form the support of the act required. A well-disciplined body forms the operational context of the slightest gesture. (*Discipline* 152)

Judi asserts the status of her body as a “well-disciplined one” that acquiesces to the dictates of the bingeing-purging discipline when she confides to her diary: “I have been eating nonstop. I am too scared to weigh myself ...and I really think I should stop puking. I mean besides being gross, I guess it’s kind of dangerous. But I cannot stop doing it until I stop pigging out and this weekend was a real disaster” (Newman 153).

In this context, Judi’s and Nancy’s bodies become quintessential receptacles for disciplinary powers to operate on them. Even more disciplinary is how

[w]ith the passage of time, an individual’s very identity may become incorporated into the eating disorder. The eating disorder is all pervasive and all consuming, and the person no longer maintains his or her identity, but takes on the identity of the disorder, becoming the person with anorexia nervosa [or bulimia]. The sufferer thinks constantly about food, body image and control. (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 107)

Miss Fiorino’s words lend credence to the all-pervasive nature of eating disorders: “Dieting leads to Frustration which leads to Bingeing which leads to Frustration which leads to Dieting which leads to Frustration...That’s exactly what it feels like to be in the throes of an eating disorder” (Newman 175). Judi also gives voice to her total surrender to weight obsession when she apprehensively records in her diary: “That’s when I decided I had to go on a diet once school started...what if I go up an entire size every year...what if I wear a size 11/12 in eighth grade, a size 13/14 in ninth grade, a size 15/16 in tenth grade, a size 17/18 in eleventh grade, and A SIZE 19/20 IN TWELFTH GRADE. I WILL JUST DIE!” (10).

As for the denigration of fatness, it can also be viewed as a form of disciplinary power that shapes bodies to serve prevailing norms of beauty. It is not just Nancy who sees being fat as “disgusting” (Newman 84); rather it is a cultural attitude that leads to a wider “corporal stigmata” (Seid 4). Eating disorders thus “reveal a more widespread cultural disorder” (Bordo 55). In cultures that extol thinness,

[m]any [fat persons are] turned down for jobs, denied promotions or raises, denied benefits, demoted, fired or pressured to resign, questioned about weight or urged to lose weight. There was a positive correlation between weight and the degree of discrimination. Furthermore, women experienced such employment discrimination at lower weights than men did. (Rothblum 57)

Throughout Judi's diary, there is hardly an entry in which she does not internalize the cultural stigmatization of fat people, either when she expresses her nightmarish fear of gaining weight, or when she refers to Ms. Roth, their English teacher, who is socially ostracized because she does not conform to the exalted model of slenderness. To cite a few examples: "I know I am really really FAT...not as fat as Ms. Roth...but still if I don't do something about my weight, I am definitely on my way" (Newman 3); "Ms. Roth is fat, the fattest teacher I've ever known, so who would want to marry her?" (3); "everyone knows fat people shouldn't wear white" (3); "Tommy Aristo called Ms. Roth the Sloth" (3); "next year I will be in high school and who wants to be a fat freshman?" (4); "[m]aybe Ms. Roth is so nice because she thinks nobody really likes her because she is fat" (5); "I always wear baggy clothes to hide all my bumps and lumps" (6); "[s]ometimes I wish I could just wear a big bag around my body and hide the whole thing" (10); "[Nancy Pratt] was wearing this white blouse which was pretty see-through—you could see the white lace of her bra if you looked hard enough—and a tight purple skirt...Nancy Pratt was not Ms. Roth. Can you see Ms. Roth in an outfit like that, dear Diary? Fat chance" (11); "I really am disgusted with myself. I weigh 129 pounds which is more than I have ever weighed in my entire life. I swear if I get up to 130 pounds I am going to run away and be a fat lady in a circus" (45); "[i]f Paul Weinstein ever drew a caricature of me, I'm sure he would draw a Miss Piggy (49); and finally "[f]at girls don't deserve boyfriends anyway" (134).

"Fat chance" thus becomes Judi's catchphrase every time she sees her fatness as a hurdle, hampering her from attaining her life goals. For example, she is dismayed at not winning the boy she likes, attributing this to her fatness: "Me and Richard Weiss! Fat chance" (Newman 43). At some other point, she gives voice to the very same apprehension by writing in her diary: "Oh Diary. I am so depressed. Can you see me getting to know lots of boys? Fat chance" (117). When she pigs out and feels she is out of control she writes: "I am definitely going to weigh myself tomorrow ... I hope I have only gained a pound or two at the most. Fat chance, with all the eating I have been doing!" (161). These are only a few of countless examples that express her utter sense of dismay, and reflect the cultural prejudice or discrimination based on appearance¹².

In the same vein, the students' answers to Miss Fiorino's question "[w]hy would a girl- because usually it is a girl- do something potentially harmful to

herself in order to lose weight?” attest to the very same cultural prejudice. One girl answers “because it is important to be thin” (172); others join with the following: “because no one wants to be friends with you if you are fat”; “and boys won’t ask you”; “and you can’t find cool clothes to wear”; “and kids tease you at the beach”; “even your mom gets mad at you”; and “no one picks you to be in their basketball team” (172-73).

Against this backdrop, it is only natural for Judi, Nancy and many others, to be easily susceptible to eating disorders. People afflicted with anorexia nervosa and bulimia thus become inevitable outcomes of the beauty norms and weight loss obsessions propagated by culture: “These...obsessions [are not] bizarre or anomalous, but, rather... the logical (if extreme) manifestations of anxieties and fantasies fostered by...culture” (Bordo 15). According to Foucault, “disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects” in “a mechanism of objectification” (*Discipline* 187), which aptly describes the objectification of eating disordered bodies through the power of cultural standards and obsessions. Bordo emphasizes the same causative relationship, postulating that cultural norms “work not only through ideology and images but through the organization of the family, the construction of personality, the training of perception—as not simply contributory but productive of eating disorders” (50).

In *Fat Chance*, the society at large, with its various institutions, correspond to those cited by Foucault as the setting in which docile bodies are disciplined. Within these institutions, the bodies are disciplined to respond to enforced dictates which Foucault describes as “a political anatomy” and a “mechanics of power”, “defin[ing] how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines” (*Discipline* 138). In the Foucauldian model, systems and institutions are developed to control the processes that the body goes through (137). Moreover, “the power exercised on the body is conceived...as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, [and] functionings (26). In other words, for Foucault, the body is an object that can be read in order to determine how discursive power relations are organized. Worth noting is that power relations in the Foucauldian sense are not limited to the political domain but rather infiltrate into all social systems; “these relations go right down into the depths of society, that they are not localized in the relations between the state and its citizens” (*Discipline* 27). Bordo reiterates that when dealing with Foucault, “we must first abandon the idea of power as something possessed by one group and leveled against another; we must instead think of the network of practices, institutions, and technologies that sustain positions of dominance and subordination in a particular domain” (167). As a result, a new conduit of disciplinary control is consolidated;

one that “spread[s] over more of life, so that there [are] no moments or situations where a person [is] free of this ‘discipline’” (Firth 115). The result is obedient and malleable bodies, or more accurately, docile ones. In the context of the novel, if different institutions contribute each in its own way to the demise of eating disordered bodies, it is because they are all fraught with “weightism”; that is, “an insidious system of values about thin and fat people” that serves “to idealize and overvalue thin people, while devaluing and rejecting fat people” (Steiner-Adar 384).

Taking beauty magazines as a specimen of the institutions that serve as a setting for docile bodies with their Foucauldian “dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, [and] functionings” (*Discipline* 26), one can understand how they control the processes the body goes through¹³. Right from the outset of her diary, Judi invariably refers to *Seventeen* magazine in terms of a disciplinary power: “Sometimes I think I want to be fashion designer because I know a lot about what makes a person look good from reading *Seventeen* magazine all the time” (Newman 6). It is the disciplinary power of the magazine that defines not only her body, but more ubiquitously her perception of beauty in general. Cultural standards, beauty norms and individual behaviours are set and modified in commensurate with the discourse that the media perpetuate. Bombarded by images of beauty, youth and slenderness, these magazines bolster low self-esteem, especially among adolescent girls who struggle to attain an often unachievable model.

Judi’s diary entries reveal their deleterious impact: “Some of the girls in the magazine are so skinny. They are even thinner than Nancy Pratt. They all have beautiful hair and perfect smiles. It is really depressing I will never be pretty like that... I am not pretty and I am not smart. So what am I?” (Newman 11-12). The way Judi questions herself is a typical attitude exhibited by people with eating disorders: “Quite consistently, low self-esteem emerges as a powerful (sometimes overwhelming) perception among those with eating disorders...many people with eating disorders turn in on themselves, questioning their own value” (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 100-101). The impact of the magazine can be viewed in terms of Foucault’s “micro-physics of power” (*Discipline* 26); that is, a form of power that is strategic and tactical. These forms of disciplinary power, according to Foucault, are “always meticulous, often minute, techniques, but they had their importance: because they defined a certain mode of detailed political investment of the body, a ‘new micro-physics’ of power” (139). When brought to bear on eating disorders, the result of this power, and is evident in Judi’s case, is that “the artificial image of what we should look like, and the ways we can attain that image are foisted upon us, ad nauseam, despite the fact that the image is an abnormal one” (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 93). It is no exaggeration to proclaim the disciplinary impact of the

magazine as the prime factor that triggers Judi's eating disorder and obsession with weight loss: "I already weigh 127 pounds which is seven pounds more than I should according to *Seventeen* magazine" (Newman 8). Obviously, this is a general consensus: "The media, particularly television, magazines, and movies-are an important force in our culture, and are felt to be part of the reason some people develop eating disorders" (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 93). The role of the media in generating these disorders cannot be overlooked since it often operates at "an unconscious level, increasing the threat of the media's influence on the occurrence of...eating disorders" (Filatova and Kutseva). The disciplinary impact of the magazine is even extended to her perception of Ms. Roth: "Ms. Roth wore a navy-blue dress today, with a red-and-white scarf tied round her neck which was very sensible since everyone knows a nice scarf or a pretty necklace draws the eyes from the hips up to the face. Maybe Miss Roth finally went and bought herself a copy of *Seventeen* magazine" (Newman 33).

Another disciplinary power emanating from *Seventeen* magazine is the way Judi takes to exercising in a manner evocative of Foucault's definition of disciplinary punishment:

Disciplinary punishment is, in the main, isomorphic with obligation itself; it is not so much the vengeance of an outraged law as its repetition, its reduplicated insistence. So much so that the corrective effect expected of it involves only incidentally expiation and repentance; it is obtained directly through the mechanics of a training. To punish is to exercise. (*Discipline* 180)

Although Foucault theorizes this concept in his discussion of prison, it provides new insights when brought to bear on Judi's experience with eating disorders, particularly in terms of its repetitive and regimented dimensions, as Judi writes in her diary: "I am going to be really good from now on and I am going to start exercising too. They have these sit-ups in *Seventeen* to tighten your tummy and some special leg lifts to 'slenderize those thighs'. I am going to exercise every night before bed so that I don't be tempted to eat" (Newman 47).

Typical of people with eating disorders, exercising becomes an indispensable part of their life, and in many ways a punishment. Surprisingly as it may sound, "[i]n spite of their dangerous weight loss and obvious loss of muscle mass, most anorexics are very active. Many see a rigorous daily exercise program as part of their pursuit of thinness. They seem to be addicted to exercise, seeing it more as a duty than as a pleasure" (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 33). In a most apt analogy, exercising "becomes a bitter pill that must be swallowed for 'the sin of being fat'" (Burgard and Lyons 219). In this regard, exercising becomes a most punitive measure that bears the imprint of Foucault's definition of disciplinary punishment: "It must therefore be essentially corrective...the disciplinary systems

favour punishments that are exercise - intensified, multiplied forms of training, several times repeated” (*Discipline* 179). Eating disordered bodies are accordingly caught up in a similar vicious circle of repeated forms of training. Judi gives voice to this pattern by stating: “I was so upset. I didn’t know what to do. I had dieted and exercised and starved myself to death and thrown up” (116). The very same patterns are repeated, thereby becoming the defining features of her docile body. Much to her detriment, “the experience is intoxicating [and] habit-forming” (Bordo 178). As her diary reveals, a whole new world of habits is introduced to Judi’s daily life once she falls into the abyss of eating disorders. The dynamics of her life change as she becomes solely intent on losing weight; to cite a few examples, she gets into the habit of lying to her mom about her food intake and daily routine; she gives up her baby-sitting activity because she gets a chance to eat there; and she fasts not for religious reasons, but as a means of losing weight.

Even more blatant is Nancy’s demise who takes the habit of eating and purging to the point of no return. In Foucauldian terms, her docile body becomes subjugated to disciplinary powers in a relation of “subjection”: “[D]iscipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies...it dissociates power from the body... it turns it into an ‘aptitude’, a ‘capacity’...it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection” (*Discipline* 138). This “strict subjection” connotes a state of enslavement not only to cultural norms, but even to the anorexic’s/bulimic’s self-harming eating practices. Hospitalized then subsequently admitted to the intensive car, Judi is petrified as she witnesses Nancy’s deterioration: “She looked awful. She had those huge black circles under her eyes and she was as white as this piece of paper I am writing on. Even saying hi to me made her feel tired.... She just looked like a skeleton lying there” (Newman 158-59). In another instance she describes her as “someone coming out of a concentration camp” (188). Notwithstanding her precarious condition, and typical of people with eating disorders, Nancy refuses to eat even when she is really sick, thereby attesting to her utter “subjection” in a Foucauldian sense (*Discipline* 138). “Check out my stomach”, Nancy asks Judi (182), worried that she might have gained weight. “She lifted up her hospital gown...she pinched a miniscule amount of flesh between her fingers...she was so thin, her belly caved in like a teaspoon and I could see all her ribs sticking out. Of course I didn’t tell her she looked awful”, Judi writes in her diary (182). She even goes as far as asking Judi to stealthily bring her laxatives. Judi’s and Nancy’s predicaments may thus be described in terms of Bordo’s view that “through these disciplines, women continue to memorize on [their] bodies the feel and conviction of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough” (165-66).

Although the novel ends on a happy note for both Judi, who finally gives her mother her diary to read and decides to see a therapist, and Nancy, who goes to a residential eating disorders clinic, Newman does not unconditionally portend salvaging docile bodies from the coercive potential of disciplinary discourses. As she suggests, body-hatred can only give way to body-love when one is liberated from cultural norms of beauty, which is no easy endeavour: “Once you let your body develop naturally...you’ll end up with a body you really like” (Newman 214). This can only happen when women abstain from harming, deforming, and starving their bodies, and begin instead to celebrate them as a means of empowerment, totally disregarding cultural constraints. As long as “the body is invested with relations of power and domination” (Foucault, *Discipline* 26), it will always be susceptible to being objectified, manipulated and modified in deference to the ambient disciplinary discourses. In this case, and as Foucault suggests, “the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body” (27). The subjection Foucault refers is to be understood in terms of the strategies and techniques of discipline that operate subtly in any cultural context, and which are not easy to evade.

Having thus endeavoured to address Miss Fiorino’s question - “[w]hy would a girl- because usually it is a girl- do something potentially harmful to herself in order to lose weight?” in terms of Foucault’s concepts of discipline and docile bodies, one can conclude that Foucault’s perception of the body as being manipulated by different forms of disciplinary power, may be well-appropriated to shed new light on the nature of eating disorders with their repeated patterns of bingeing and purging, regular weight monitoring, relentless curtailment of caloric intake, and consistent exercise. For the purpose of this research, different forces have been cited as strategies of discipline that operate on women’s bodies. In the context of eating disorders, it becomes apparent that docile bodies will persist to be the locus of the techniques of discipline as long as we are embedded in relations of power that control self-presentation. The continued objectification of women’s bodies by cultural norms and by women themselves will maintain the disembodiment and disempowerment that exacerbate their status as docile bodies, whereupon the body will remain an object to be repudiated, hated, starved and perfected. As a result of these disciplines, women’s docile bodies will always be inscribed with “an ideological construction of femininity” (Bordo 168).

Just as it is difficult to cite a distinct reason for the triggering of eating disorders—since “in the development of an eating disorder, internal factors such as genetics, biochemical makeup, and personality traits combine with external pressure from family, peers and society” (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 93)—it is equally challenging, though not totally impossible, to find a cure for them, particularly when it comes to rectifying innate societal stereotypes about

appearance and beauty standards¹⁴. Although hospitalization, behavioural and interpersonal therapies, and self-help groups, may be enlisted as helpful conduits in the treatment of eating disorders, docile bodies will always persist.

In short, bringing Foucauldian ideas to bear on eating disordered bodies does not propose liberating them; rather, it serves only to bring new insights into viewing them as the object of application of disciplinary power. Discipline, as theorized by Foucault, posits the body at the nexus of power relations enforced with the aid of complex systems of surveillance. Although the discursive forces that are meted out on eating-disordered bodies assume multifarious forms, they all share a disciplinary dimension, manifested in a set of constraints, obligations and norms of societal acceptance and castigation. The inevitable outcome is a docile body, susceptible to all the disciplinary discourses that invariably seek to shape and modify it in commensurate with their dictates. Eating disordered bodies are essentially docile bodies; embedded in institutions and practices that they internalize. Even with a dynamic perception of power as postulated by Foucault, docile bodies will always be implicated in cultural norms and practices, thereby epitomizing the pervasiveness of stereotypes about physical appearances and beauty norms.

¹ Lesléa Newman (1955-) is an American feminist author, poet and editor. Newman is best known for her controversial book *Heather has Two Mommies* (1989), which established her reputation as a Lesbian feminist writer. Newman has also written many books tackling issues pertaining to homosexuality, Jewish identity, eating disorders, and AIDS.

² *Fat Chance* is inspired by a real life experience of a girl with an eating disorder that the writer knew.

³ The word comes from the Greek (*kakos*, bad, and *hexis*; a habit of body). Cachexia occurs in medical conditions, such as cancer (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 29).

⁴ An episode of binge-eating is medically defined as “eating within a specific period of time ...an amount of food larger than most people would eat, and having a sense of lack of control; the bulimic feels she cannot stop eating or control what or how much she is eating” (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 40).

⁵ There are two ways of getting rid of food for bulimics: the “purging type”; wherein the bulimic has regularly induced vomiting, misused laxatives, diuretics or enemas. The other is called the “non-purging type; wherein the bulimic has used other compensating behaviours such as fasting or excessive exercising (Kirkpatrick and Caldwell 40).

⁶ Bordo affirms that “[m]en do develop eating disorders...[and] those who do so are almost always models, wrestlers, dancers, and others whose profession demands a rigid regime of weight control” (53).

⁷ This does not mean that anorexia was not known in the nineteenth century, or that women no longer suffered from hysteria in the twentieth century. Rather, “the taking up of eating disorders on a mass scale is as unique to the culture of the 1980s as the epidemic of hysteria was to the Victorian era” (Bordo 168).

⁸ In addition, a disorder known as “chlorosis” was commonly diagnosed among young women in the 17th through the 19th centuries; that is “a malady of women beginning in adolescence that appeared in most girls of the era. Symptoms included amenorrhea, appetite disturbance, depression, anxiety, headache, breathing difficulty and insomnia, as well as disturbed body image” (Perlick and Silverstein 77).

⁹ Bordo suggests that an anorexic “does not ‘misperceive’ her body; rather, she has learned all too well the dominant cultural standards of how to perceive” (57).

¹⁰ Typical of anorexics, “success in losing weight gives them a sense of achievement and independence. Self-control becomes all important, a way of holding back the anxiety about other areas of life” (Whelan 44).

¹¹ In his study of the origins of the prison, Foucault cites Jeremy Bentham’s plan for the Panopticon as the emblem of a disciplinary institution in the way it allowed constant observation in a subtle manner through its architectural design:

Bentham's Panopticon is the architectural figure of this composition. We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheral building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery....The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial units that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. (*Discipline* 200)

¹² “Looksism” is the term used to refer to the cultural prejudice or discrimination based on appearance (Rothblum 54).

¹³ The inimical impact of beauty magazines can be explained as follows:

Bombarded by verbal and visual commercial images of the nude, women have been seduced into believing that they should, and could, with enough effort-have one of those perfect bodies. They expect the image reflected in the mirror to look like the nude. It almost never does. And so they renew their battles against their recalcitrant bodies. (Seid 10)

¹⁴ Treatment techniques for eating disorders have improved in the last few years:

In the past most people with severe eating disorders were admitted to psychiatric hospitals and treated alongside patients with all sorts of mental problems. This still happens in some cases but research has shown that people do better when treated by a team which specializes in eating disorders..... Other continue to live at home and attend clinic or therapy sessions as an out-patient. (Whelan 51)

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