

# ***The discursive regulation of 'too fat' and 'too thin' bodies***

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# ***Drawing on***

- ▣ *In-patients' experiences of treatment for eating disorders*

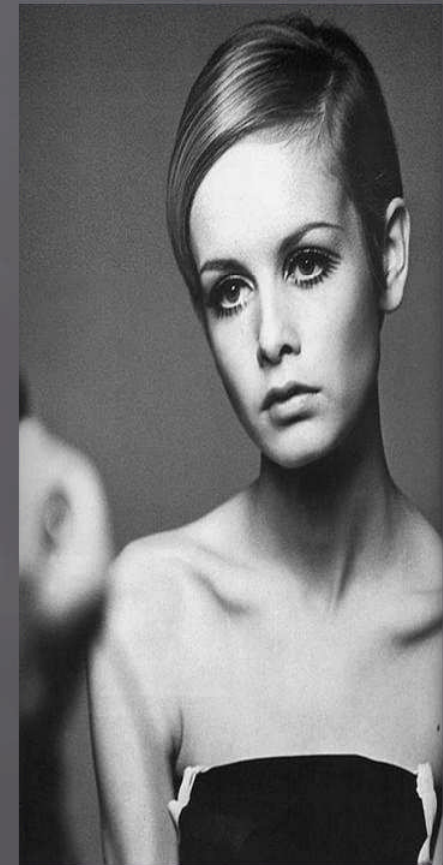
with Simon Clarke, Janet Treasure, Gail Anderson, Mark Finn and Lin Bailey (Malson et al, 2011, 2008, 2004)

- ▣ *Experiences of 'being large'*

with Irmgard Tischner (Tischner & Malson, in press, 2011, 2008)

# Context

- ▣ 'Anorexia' as 'crystallization of culture' (Bordo, 1993), expressing numerous cultural values
- ▣ E.g. self-control, individualistic competitiveness, self-discipline, consumer culture, postmodernity ...
- ▣ Corpo/hyper-real gendered ideals of thinness & food-restriction





# *Shifting contexts*

“Look at our procession” shouted Kath. “Isn’t it fun!” “How can he enjoy it?” asked the tinker’s wife. “He’s very thin and I don’t know what to do for him. .... “Let me play my violin and see what happens,” said Patrick. So he played a tune, and you see what happened. The tinker started to get fatter. He lost his cough, and his cold, and his stomach-ache, and his headache; until he was well and smiling and happy again. (Blake 1970: 29)



# 'A war against obesity'

- ▣ Focus on body-weight as *the* key indicator of health.
- ▣ Neo-liberalisation of health

'In the 10 to 11-year-old age group, 34.5% of boys and 30.7% of girls weighed too much. NHS Information Centre chief executive Tim Straughan said: "These findings highlight the scale of obesity among some of our young children – something which may affect their future health." ... "We'll only turn the tide on obesity for good if everyone plays their part." '(BBC News , 10.12.09)



- ▣ Thinness/beauty & heteronormative constructions of femininity as palimpsest of health-related weight orthodoxies
- ▣ Conflation 'health' & 'beauty'



# ***Neo-liberalised body management***

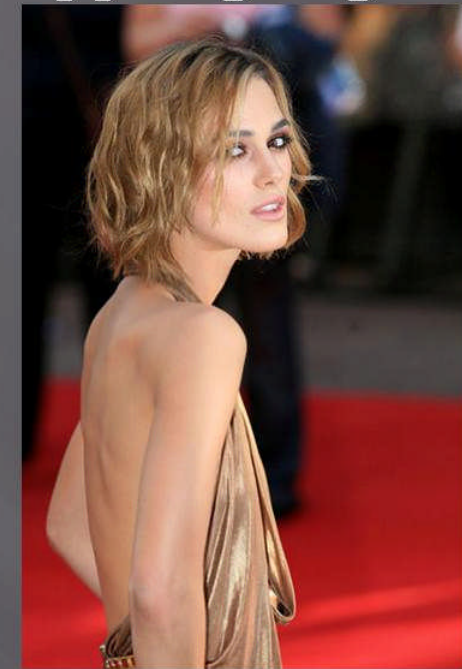
“We need to understand the psychology of obesity, take control of our own minds, change our habits, lose the weight and stay slim ... we all must take responsibility for our own choices.”

*(Lighter Life, Nov/Dec 2006, p.8)*

“I can see how they're judged, but why is that such a bad thing? Being judgemental is only wrong, if you make bad judgements. Equating obesity with physical laziness and greed is an accurate judgement for the overwhelming majority of obese people. What is wrong with telling the truth and saying that obesity is unattractive and for many an indicator of undesirable personality traits?” (Danot, Guardian blog, 2009)

# *Cultural 'knowing'*

Lynn: I thought people must look at me and think I'm, that person's mental uh like, you know. And I'd think they'd look at me and they'd think I'm like that so I stopped going out so that people wouldn't see me.



Alli: I've gone to parties and I remember I went to the loo and I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror and uh thought: oh God you're just an ugly monstrosity and you know just burst into tears and went home.



## ***Policing the 'too fat' & the 'too thin'***

Scrumpz: I suppose (.) just sit there and eat all day (.) that's what people think so, which isn't true (.) which then gives you a complex when you go out, if you *do* go out to eat, it sort of, well me personally I sit there and I'm looking around, "who's looking at me, who's looking at me" uhm, I sort of avoid eating in front of people.

Blade: It's like if you're uhm, I could take you shopping now and if we went up to uhm a a queue with all slim people in, and I come up with my trolley, they would actually see what I was buying to prove to themselves "that's why she's fat" and you know that that do, you know, nobody up to now said anything uhm but you can tell that they're doing that look.



## ***Discipline & cultural prohibition***

Rich: I'm quite self-conscious about eating in public ... I always take great care not to, not to take too much because I feel self-conscious (.) you know, that I'm fulfilling a stereotype.

Don: I often have something to eat before I go to a buffet here so I don't appear greedy... I (.) beware putting ideas into people's heads that uh, you know, he's having a lot and, look, he's quite big, or (obese).

Jacqueline: It's probably a stroke of paranoia and also *maybe* it is happening, but I always feel that when I go in a restaurant, my partner who is also big that we get put nearer the back so we are not seen near the front of the restaurant to be eating food as two big people and that seems to have happened quite a lot you know.

# *Eating as horrifying*

Nicki: I know that you have to eat to live but um (.) when at the time it seemed like an awful thing to do and re' like a disgusting thing to do.

Zoe: I would just run into the like kitchen and like four o'clock in the morning, like have a bowl of cereal, like *two* muffins and like toast, like and would eat so much and then I couldn't like, I felt like I had eaten half of it before I'd even realised what I was doing. [...] my body was just eating it before my mind could /I: could think about it/ was awake enough to stop it from doing it.



# ***The ward as factory feeding farm***

Clare: I feel all what's happening is I'm just being fattened up.

Georgina: I think you can use the place to get your weight up. Use it as a food house. I mean that. This is what it is. It's a case of you eat your way out of here. Everyone does it.

Liam: The issue here is putting weight on at the moment. It's the re-feeding. It's a factory feeding farm.

Justine: One girl ... comes up to me and she goes: All I've got to say to you is eat because if you don't they'll give you cans [of supplements]. If you don't have the cans you'll get the [naso-gastric] tube. So eat.

## ***‘Anorexic’/therapeutically intended weight-management***

Justine: I mean the whole point is you know anorexics generally are so ritualistic and so rigid in everything. I mean you're just doing exactly the same thing [in treatment] by weighing three times a week. You're getting obsessed with putting on. You're still obsessing.

Amalia: But I'm coming to a clinic that's making me constantly obsessed with my body-weight, my food.

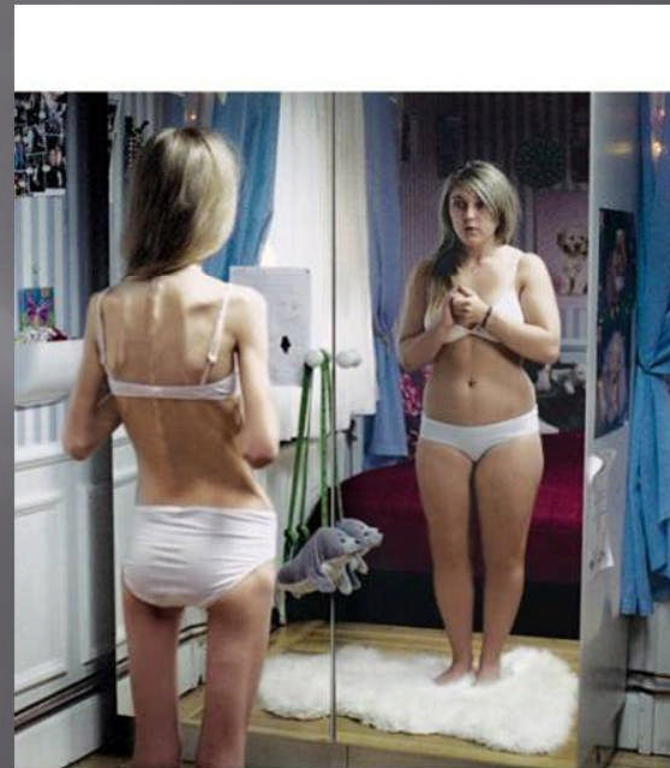
Cas: Everything becomes all about weight, numbers, um and calories and kilojoules. I had no idea before I came in here what they were. Came out of here and I knew it pretty well. Um and weighing things, stuff like that. All that, yep, I learnt in here. Didn't know it before



# *I don't think that's normal.*

Cas: I mean who gets up every morning at six o'clock or every second day to get on some scales?

And your whole week or your whole day is gunna be stuffed or it's gunna be good because of one set of scales. I don't think that's normal.



Support for people with eating disorders.

 anorexi bulimi kontakti