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**Contemporary Diet Culture in the light
of Michel Foucault's Analyses**

Diplomová práce

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem práci vypracovala samostatně. Všechny použité prameny a literatura byly řádně citovány. Práce nebyla využita k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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Abstract (in English)

Nowadays various formerly silenced topics have appeared under the spotlight of public's attention: specifically, mental health awareness has put forward body image concerns as being an incentive for most lethal forms of mental distress such as eating disorders. Despite body image issues are the subject of research for various academic fields, mainly psychology, this thesis attempts to study body image from a different point of view. That is in relation to contemporary diet culture; the thesis focuses on the application of Michel Foucault's theoretical concepts of disciplinary power and "care of the self" practice on the contemporary diet culture. Hence, discovery and review of diet culture controlling mechanisms that might be later internalized by individuals will be in the scope of this work, alongside with the study of diet culture discourse reinforced by influential YouTube content creators. Mainly, the thesis is focused on how dietary practices refer to disciplinary practices, conceptualized by Foucault, while, simultaneously, act as enabling for the subject, mimicking Foucauldian "care of the self" practices.

Key words: Michel Foucault, diet, diet culture, care of the self, eating disorder, self-transformation.

Abstract (in Czech)

V současné době se veřejnost víc věnuje tématům, která dříve byli umlčené: konkrétně, povědomí o duševním zdraví předneslo porušený obraz těla jako podnět pro jednu z nejmrtelnějších forem duševních onemocnění, jakými jsou poruchy příjmu potravy. Přesto, že problémy s obrazem těla jsou předmětem výzkumu pro různé akademické obory, zejména psychologii, tato práce pokouší studovat obraz těla z jiného úhlu pohledu. A to je ve vztahu k současné dietní kultuře; tato práce se zaměřuje na aplikaci teoretických konceptů Michela Foucaulta o disciplinární moci a praktiky „péče o sebe“ na současnou dietní kulturu. V rámci této práce je tudíž zahrnut objev a přezkoumání dietní kultury skrze její mechanismy kontroly, které by jednotlivci mohli internalizovat. Velká část dané práce je také věnována studiu diskurzu dietní kultury, který se objevuje ve videích vlivných tvůrců obsahu na YouTube. Obzvláště, tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na popis toho, jak dietní praktiky se vztahují na disciplinární praktiky, konceptualizované Foucaulem, a zároveň působí jako umožňující pro subjekty v rámci praktiky „péče o sebe“ Foucaulta.

Klíčová slova: Michel Foucault, dieta, dietní kultura, péče o sebe, poruchy příjmu potravy, samotransformace.

Poděkování

Na tomto místě bych ráda poděkovala vedoucímu své práce, Mgr. Ondřeji Vášovi, Ph.D., za pomoc s vymezením výzkumného problému a poskytování nezbytných poznámek a komentářů při vedení mé diplomové práce.

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Introduction

The emergence of modern sociological concepts of body occurred under the influence of philosophy, history, political theory, anthropology, as well as under the influence of significant social changes and transformations of the 20th century; in particular, the democratization of culture and morality and the development of feminism as a theory and social movement, which raised a number of theoretical questions about the analytical and political status of the human body.

Michel Foucault's intellectual work has also had a significant impact on the conceptualization of corporeality. According to his ideas, power affects the individual through their body: through discipline of the body, as well as through the creation of normative concepts of the "correct/successful" body with the help of linguistic practices - discourses. The production of a certain type of body leads to the production of a certain type of subjects. Accordingly, the dominant discourses, constructing normative bodies, exclude those deviant types that do not fall into the outlined frames.

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*"¹. This shift marked Foucault's interest in possibility of subject's liberation within the frame limited by power relation present in the subject's everyday life.

Similarly, deliberately placing the body in the center of the power relation net, in my work I attempt at the analysis of contemporary dietary practices applying Michel Foucault's theoretical base for better understanding of their enabling moments.

Most existing accounts of dieting, using Michel Foucault's theoretical apparatus, are typically critical and rely on the central concepts of "docile bodies". Scholars rely on Michel Foucault's ideas of power as being diffused (not centralized), productive (not oppressive), and internalized by subjects through a norm. The goal of my work is to challenge the application of Foucauldian theoretical scope on dietary practices by an attempt to detect if any dietary practice

¹ Editors, The. (1999). Ladelle McWhorter, Bodies & Pleasure: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization. *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*; Vol 11, No 1; 84-84. 11.

or its elements can be considered as enabling, liberating, resembling more of “care of the self” practice that Michel Foucault suggested as ethical practice of freedom.

Therefore, main research question of my work can be formulated as follows: are dietary practices a way to freedom (making our bodies “capable”) as Foucault conceptualized it through “care of the self” practices or are they, after all, just another type of disciplinary practices, hiding behind the curtain of making one’s body healthy, capable and free?

Structure of work

In the first chapter of my work I will make an overview of Foucault’s key concepts of power and “care of the self” as those concepts serve as the theoretical apparatus for future analysis of diet culture, and singular dietary practices.

In the second chapter I will apply the summarized theoretical framework onto dieters’ stories shared in extremely popular YouTube videos in the format “My Weight loss journey” to attempt at providing an answer to the main research question.

Relevance justification

According to 2018 Food and Health Survey, that was conducted by International Food Information Council Foundation, at the time one third of Americans were on a diet. The percentage of dieters has increased in comparison to the previous year by 22%, which clearly shows a trend that more and more people are becoming interested in restricting their food consumption for variety of reasons. The same survey underlines that top desired benefit of dieting that people aspire to gain is cardiovascular health - 20% of respondents - while the second top benefit is weight loss; 18% of people who participated in this survey highlighted weight loss as top desired outcome². In the meanwhile, 54% of British individuals who took part in 2018 survey agree that they have a least once tried dieting with a weight loss goal³.

² 2019 Food and Health Survey, from: <https://foodinsight.org/2019-food-and-health-survey/> [15.06.2021].

³ Share of people who have tried a diet to lose weight in European countries 2018, from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/988089/share-of-people-who-have-tried-a-diet-to-lose-weight-in-europe/> [15.06.2021].

Even though a person can diet for various reasons, including medically conditioned, dieting with the goal of losing weight to achieve certain body shape is the event that seems the most debatable of all. If we put medical complications related to excessive food consumption aside, why can a person be driven to restrict their food consumption? Adopt variety of rituals and arrangements around food? Deliberately minimize or eliminate pleasures from eating experience? Develop feeling of guilt that accompanies each meal and, possibly acquiring some sort of disordered eating or eating disorder? Those questions are frequently brought up by specialists and scholars who work with people's psyche, and while psychotherapy provides methodology for eating disorders and disordered eating treatment, more people seem to be inclined to be stuck in weight loss dieting and weight regaining circles.

In my work, focusing on diet culture phenomenon and studying dietary practices as main diet culture means of influencing the subject, I will attempt at underlining enabling moments that diet serves to its followers. As Cressida Heyes put it: "*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*"⁴. And such understanding, possibly, can shed the light on diet's attractivity.

⁴ Heyes, C. (2006). Foucault Goes to Weight Watchers. *Hyapatia*, 21(2). PP 126-149.

Chapter I

Diet culture

In this part of the first chapter it is important to explain what diet culture is, and which aspects of the phenomenon are relevant for this work. As a term, diet culture is pervasively used on social media to cover quite a wide spectrum of narratives that put forwards physical appearance. According to Eating Disorder Registered Dietitian & Professionals (EDRDPRO) web site diet culture is “*a belief system that focuses on and values weight, shape, and size over well-being*”⁵.

Among diet culture’s characteristics are that diet culture associates health with body size, pathologizing excessive weight or, less often, underweight people, encourages to follow external rules about what, when and how much to eat, suggests that people are more or less good/moral/worthy based on their body size, creates privilege of a certain slender body shape, suggests sport and activity as punishment for bigger amounts of food consumed, views overweight people as less valuable⁶.

Diet culture is then pictured by anti-diet communities as some external force that drives a person towards certain beliefs and values, and influences individual’s behavior in a way that they become inclined to be engaged in pathological outlook driven activities that in the long run might add up to eating disorder development. Research shows that eating disorder development is affected by three factors: family, media and peers⁷. Diet culture narratives can be present in individual’s interaction with any of these. From this perspective, diet culture might be considered as a type of discourse that was influenced by nutritional science and shaped out by mass media.

To draw a bigger picture, I am citing another author, Christy Harrison, who attempted to provide a thoughtful definition of diet culture:

⁵ EDRDPRO, from: <https://edrdpro.com/its-time-to-drop-out-of-diet-culture/> [15.06.2021].

⁶ National Eating Disorder Association Blog, from: <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/blog> [15.06.2021].

⁷ Goodman, J. R. (2005). Mapping the sea of eating disorders: A structural equation model of how peers, family, and media influence body image and eating disorders. *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 12(3-4). PP 194-213.

“Diet culture is a system of beliefs that:

- Worships thinness and equates it to health and moral virtue, which means you can spend your whole life thinking you’re irreparably broken just because you don’t look like the impossibly thin “ideal.”*
- Promotes weight loss as a means of attaining higher status, which means you feel compelled to spend a massive amount of time, energy, and money trying to shrink your body, even though the research is very clear that almost no one can sustain intentional weight loss for more than a few years.*
- Demonizes certain ways of eating while elevating others, which means you’re forced to be hyper-vigilant about your eating, ashamed of making certain food choices, and distracted from your pleasure, your purpose, and your power.*
- Oppresses people who don't match up with its supposed picture of “health,” which disproportionately harms women, femmes, trans folks, people in larger bodies, people of color, and people with disabilities, damaging both their mental and physical health ”⁸.*

Considering the definitions provided, it is possible to outline key points that are characteristic of diet culture:

- 1) It exists in the cultural space externally to individual/subject but has potential to be internalized.
- 2) It represents a system of beliefs that values certain slenderness ideal, while casting out people who do not meet the criteria of what is considered as normal.
- 3) Imposes certain set of rules regarding how, when or what to eat in order to obtain the desired body.
- 4) Inclines an individual to take part on sport activities for the same purpose.
- 5) Uses “healthy” label to be promoted.

In my work diet culture will be studied from the standpoint of Foucauldian theoretical base. This being mentioned, certain characteristics provide more value to the study than others. For my

⁸ Harrison, C. What Is Diet Culture? from: <https://christyharrison.com/blog/what-is-diet-culture>

[15.06.2021].

work external nature of diet culture is significant as it fits into Foucauldian perception of social sphere that is overwhelmed with abundant power relations surrounding individuals. Diet culture providing a certain norm and a set of dietary rules also echoes Foucault's disciplinary power phenomenon that will be described in more details in the course of this chapter. Having placed diet culture as external and influencing the subject's behavior, my focus will be on single practices that the subjects gets engaged in when adhering to diet culture's narratives. Limiting the scope of work, I will not pay much attention to sport regimen, rather study various controversial dietary practices in the light of Foucauldian concepts of power and "care of the self".

Power

Michel Foucault's concept of power ties together several important themes in his work and is significant for my thesis as a dietary practice, despite it being masked as "care of the self" activity, after all, might remain just another way of internalizing the norm that appeared as such in the midst of disciplinary power relations.

For better understanding of Foucault's concept of power, it is necessary to contrast his understanding of power with what Foucault calls the "legal" model of power, which identifies the latter with laws. With such understanding of power, it turns out to be a simple limiter of freedom, the boundary of its implementation whilst the diverse and subtle power relations that permeate the entire modern society are not considered ⁹.

On the contrary, Foucault takes a closer look at the micro-level to examine power relations that are not limited to the state and its functioning. Foucault's insight into history of power proves that power relations cover and essentially constitute the activity of education, family relations, knowledge of man and society. Foucault underlines that role of power relations is not limited to restriction of freedom manifestations, but they generate certain types of activity and communication, defining the life of society and people from the content point of view.

Taking a retrospective approach, Foucault notices that since the end of 17th - beginning of the 18th century a system of power has been permeated by new power mechanisms, which

⁹ Foucault, M. (1988) 'Technologies of the Self' in L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton (eds)

Technologies of the Self: a Seminar with Michel Foucault. Tavistock. London.

operation is not ensured by right but by techniques, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control. These methods that are employed on all levels and in such forms, that they go beyond the state and its apparatus¹⁰. Rather than distributed from a single totalizing point of control, Foucault views power as being exercised at a multiplicity of locations:

*"I do not mean in any way to minimize the importance and effectiveness of State power. I simply feel that excessive insistence on its playing an exclusive role leads to the risk of overlooking all the mechanisms and effects of power which don't pass directly via the State apparatus, yet often sustain the State more effectively than its own institutions, enlarging and maximizing its effectiveness"*¹¹.

Thus, power relations are not reduced to a certain central point of their distribution. Power is omnipresent. It is being reproduced at every moment and at every point, or rather, in every relation that connects any points of the social system. Power exercises itself in countless relations at countless points; it is not external to other types of relationships (economic, cognitive, sexual), but permeates them, playing a productive role. Foucault's idea is that, if power's only role was to repress, then power would be very fragile; it would be operating only in a negative way. On the contrary, power is strong because it produces effects at the level of desire and at the level of knowledge.

Thus, Foucault offers his perspective on modern society: power relations in modern society are omnipresent and productive. Both characteristics are closely related. Power is productive insofar as it is not reducible to one definite authority, but permeates all discourses and activities in society, impacting them from a certain perspective and thereby conditioning the outcomes they produce. The image of power as prohibiting, interfering and limiting is superficial. Power impels and at the same time determines what appears as a result of its impetus. Power exercises itself primarily not through consistent strategies for achieving predetermined goals, but in making individual decisions. Multiplying, following each other, relying on one another and spreading, such decisions form a kind of a whole, in which certain goals are distinguishable, although it is

¹⁰ Foucault, M. (1988) 'Technologies of the Self' in L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton (eds) *Technologies of the Self: a Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Tavistock. London.

¹¹ Foucault, M. (1980). 'Questions on Geography' in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. The Harvester Press: Brighton.

impossible to find specific individuals who would strive to achieve such. Large-scale strategies are, then, rendered anonymously.

Where there is power, there is resistance, that is not external to power itself. For power relations, as Foucault argues, there is nothing completely external at all. It exists in an inextricable connection with countless points of resistance, simultaneously relying on them. Foucault especially emphasizes the incorrectness of the idea of a certain central point or instance of resistance. Just as power relations permeate the entire social life, not being localized at any specific points, resistances also form their own dense network, covering all social structures and spheres.

Foucault proceeds and deconstructs the power/resistance binary opposition, which divides people into two groups, simultaneously implicating proactiveness of one in opposition to reactivity of the other. This way, group one is assigned to be the proactive executor of power over group two, thus putting group two into the opposition with no power but rather reactive resistance to the power that is exercised by group one. To prove the point, he provides an instance: in the beginning, new technologies of sex were applied to “*the economically privileged and politically dominant classes*” whilst the working classes managed to avoid them for some time. This case shows power as exercised within more privileged classes rather than imposed by one class over another through exploitation ¹².

Foucault's proposes that, at the end of 17th - beginning of the 18th century in Europe, a new type of power begins to form, that is fundamentally different from the previous, feudal type. It is customary to depict such type of power as the rule of law, rightful equality of all facing law, alternatively, Foucault sees its essence in something else, interpreting the emerging system of power as "disciplinary power" ¹³.

Foucault starts to explain what disciplinary power is by providing an example from the military regulations of the 17th century that contain the description of an exemplary soldier. Such a soldier can be seen from afar: he keeps his head straight, his shoulders are unfolded, his stomach

¹² Foucault, M. (1988) 'Technologies of the Self' in L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton (eds) *Technologies of the Self: a Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Tavistock. London.

¹³ Foucault, M. (2007). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Duke University Press. PP 445-471.

is tucked up, his legs are strong. In other words, the military regulation depicts an exemplary soldier as a sign: his whole figure expresses pride and strength. It is necessary at that point of time because the soldier himself is a symbol of the power of the sovereign.

The military regulations of the middle of the 18th century is in stark contrast to the one of the 17th century. Instead of describing the soldier as a sign of power and authority, a very prosaic task is posed there; that is to get rid of a peasant and transform a recruit into a soldier. Consequently, the soldier is seen as something that is produced to meet a specific requirement. To achieve this goal, certain techniques and procedures are being developed. The use of disciplinary power techniques usually begins with the movement of individuals through space as such type of power requires enclosed spaces in which their own laws and rules operate – so called disciplinarily monotonous places. In soldier's case, for instance, a French decree of 1719 ordered to construct several hundreds of barracks with very strict maintenance and a complete ban on unauthorized absences. Additionally, the military regulations of the middle of 18th century aim at further standardization of soldier's actions and even gestures that must be performed by an individual placed in this disciplinary monotonous space. As a result of such and similar techniques steady application, the body of a recruit should turn into an efficiently functioning "machine", performing certain assigned tasks.

In this historical period the power passed from vivid symbolic manifestations and confirmations of its dominance to gradual and systematic, even petty, and painstaking work on the bodies of its subordinates. Thus, merely external manifestations of authority's power is substituted by the new type of power that has the potential to be internalized by subjects, whose bodies and their transformation becomes an object and the goal of power application. In other words, a subject's body must be transformed into a "docile body". This is not narrowed to just obedience but aims at transformation of subordinate bodies and tools of their labor into a kind of instrumental complexes that function as efficiently and expediently as possible. That way, a fundamental change in the functioning of power takes place. Such a change requires focus on the human body, calculated manipulation of its limbs, gestures, and behavior with the goal of getting the most of it.

The goal of "docile bodies" formation can only be achieved with thoughtful implementation of well-designed techniques which, in the first place, include organization of bodies in space. As Foucault notes, such techniques' prototype turned out to be the techniques of self-improvement developed in monasteries, where monks would live as a strictly enclosed and

isolated group, following quite severe regulations, such as keeping silent and gathering for a night service to sing Nocturns (aka Matins) and Lauds in the church at around 2 AM ¹⁴. Later, this process of arrangement of bodies in space and time by disciplinary means expanded gradually and spontaneously and took place in the most diverse areas of human activity — in the army, school, hospital, manufactory, and vocational training systems.

In the disciplinary space, an individual is assigned with a specific place. Such a place serves as a rank, a certain position in the classification established by this discipline. Thus, criminals are distributed depending on the nature of the crime, patients - on the nature of the disease, students in the class - depending on their behavior and academic performance. According to Foucault, discipline manifests itself in ranking, it is a technique of organizing distributions. Disciplinary power individualizes the bodies, attributing to them certain places through which they are distributed and included in the systems of relations ¹⁵. An example is the organization of a school class. The main form of organization of schoolchildren in the 18th century was "lining up": in the classroom, in the corridor, in the yard. Moreover, each student was assigned with a certain place depending on the performance of any assigned task; these ranks were set and reevaluated systematically: day after day, month after month, year after year. The student is constantly moving from one sequence to another. The place he occupies in the class space corresponds to his place in the hierarchy of knowledge and abilities. Discipline, by organizing "cells", "places" and "sequences", thereby forms a complex disciplinary space, at the same time architectural, functional and hierarchical.

The tendency to liken the disciplinary space to a large table closely correlates with the prevalence of tables in science. The construction of tables was one of the most significant novelties of science, politics and economics in the 18th century, presenting effective methodological tool. Thereby, botanical gardens and zoos were transformed into material spatial classifications of living beings. In the meanwhile, observation, control and regulation of money and goods circulation was carried out by the construction of economic tables and their utilization. The military camp became a table of the variety of different types of the armed forces located in this camp. The hospital space

¹⁴ Cartwright, M. (2018, December 13). [The Daily Life of Medieval Monks](https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1293/the-daily-life-of-medieval-monks/). *World History Encyclopedia*. From <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1293/the-daily-life-of-medieval-monks/>

¹⁵ Foucault, M. (2007). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Duke University Press, P 147.

reflected a systematic classification of diseases. Tables and layouts were both observation-control and study tools. Tables in the 18th century were simultaneously power technique and cognition procedure ¹⁶.

Nowadays, the tendency to apply tables for the purposes of knowledge distribution and organization survived in many spheres of human activity, including contemporary dietary practices, where its power-performative function can be traced. Cressida Heyes's article *Foucault Goes to Weight Watchers* serves as an example. The author narrates about her experience after she spent ten months taking part in Weight Watchers - the largest and best-known commercial weight-loss program in the United States. Having engaged in weight-loss activities and faced dietary discourse that is present in abundance in the course of the program, she problematizes the use of BMI (body mass index) tables with intention to classify people's bodies by insisting that "*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*" ¹⁷. Having made such a statement, Cressida Heyes questions the notion of "a norm" when applied to weight-height correlation, simultaneously suggesting that people who do not fit might feel pressured to comply.

Apart from aforementioned large-scale organization of phenomena and beings into tables and hierarchical spatial, disciplinary power aims at pacing time. Disciplinary power is not limited to regulation of time through its distribution at evermore fractional intervals, but also seeks to continuously monitor the quality of its use, eliminating everything that can distract and contribute to making a mess.

The disciplinary management of an individual's time is embodied in the intention to divide time into as fractional intervals as possible, each of those should be devoted to the completion of a certain task. This creates increasing amount of opportunities to monitor and evaluate the results. Foucault gives numerous examples of this tendency to divide time into segments filled with homogeneous activities – separate time dedicated to general learning from practice time. This way, at the end of the 17th century a school was organized at the Tapestry Manufactory. Sixty specially selected children were first placed at the disposal of the teacher, who was engaged in their general

¹⁶ Foucault, M. (2007). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Duke University Press. P 150.

¹⁷ Heyes, C. (2006). *Foucault Goes to Weight Watchers*. *Hypatia*, 21(2). PP 126-149.

education. Then, they were transferred to receive training from masters – in this case - weavers. After six years of such training, four years of service followed, and then an exam, the students received the right to leave school and start their own business. In 1737, at the same manufactory, a school of drawing was created, in which a completely different attitude to time was adopted. Students spent two hours daily, except Sundays and holidays, at school; a roll call was conducted, and a list of absentees compiled. The school was divided into three classes. The first was intended for those who did not have any drawing skills at all. In this class the students copied the models for a whole year. In the second year, pictures were copied, but only by pencil. Finally, in the third year of study they began to use paints.

Detailed precision of disciplinary time distribution corresponds to increasing specification of gestures and actions that must be performed by an individual placed in this time and space. Discipline establishes a strict correlation between body and gesture. It seeks to find out the best relationship between the phases of the gesture and the positions of all parts of the body and introduce it as a universal and obligatory requirement, avoiding individual deviations - there should be nothing idle and useless in the body. The body is viewed as if parallel to the object. As a result, a new object is formed. Becoming the object of new mechanisms of power, it also becomes the object of new forms of knowledge. Such a body becomes an object of drilling and training; it is now governed by an external authority, rather than its own life spirits ¹⁸.

All the training and drilling is introduced with the purpose of a subject to fit into the norm. Consequently, one of the key characteristics of disciplinary power that is, at the same time, one of its main objectives is to create a norm. Individuals who deviate from the norm become objects of punishment. The whole boundless area of deviations from a given norm or non-compliance with a given level is subject to punishment. Thus, the role of punishment is to eliminate the deviation from the prescribed norm. However, punishment is only one side of the control system, which also includes rewards. Any actions of the objects of disciplinary authority are subject to assessment as “bad” or “good”, respectively as punishable or deserving encouragement. Continuous evaluation of individuals based on their actions constitutes the base of disciplinary power while norm is transformed into coercive principle. Indeed, the universality of norm is affirmed, the latter being determined based on the orientation towards obtaining maximum benefit.

¹⁸ Foucault, M. (2007). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Duke University Press, P 157.

Normalization is then a set of techniques of power which posit a standard or norm against which subjects are measured and thereby come to be defined as individuals. Foucault introduces the notion of normalizing judgment as a central disciplinary technique of normalization. In the context of a disciplinary institution, like the school or the prison, the disciplinarian uses normalizing judgment to evaluate and punish not only violations of rules, but also the failure of subjects to meet certain standards or norms. Normalizing judgment homogenizes and individualizes subjects by considering all members of a group with reference to a particular norm. In other words, a subject's actions, and, in particular, their relation to the norm, is taken as deeply representative of the subjects themselves.

Foucault's ideas were later interpreted by two very prominent feminist scholars: systematic objectivization of a subject as well as normalization are among the central themes in Sandra Bartky's essay "*Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power*"¹⁹, as well as Susan Bordo's book *Unbearable Weight*²⁰. Bartky reiterates Foucault's argument in *Discipline and Punish* that the production of "docile bodies" requires insistent attention to be paid to the tiniest details of the body's functioning, disjoining its time and space under relentless surveillance. Focusing on the creation of a specifically feminine docile body, Bartky argues that gendered disciplinary practices aim to produce a woman with uniform shape, properties, and ornamentation against the background of a pervasive sense of bodily deficiency. On 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"*²¹.

In similar way, 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*

¹⁹ Bartky, S. L. (1997). Foucault, femininity, and the modernization of patriarchal power, PP 92-111.

²⁰ Bordo, S. (1993). Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body. *Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press*, PP 185-212.

²¹ Bartky, S. L. (1997). *Foucault, femininity, and the modernization of patriarchal power*, PP 92-111.

*time, to the imagery of slenderness” as “the text or surface on which culture is symbolically written”*²².

Moral judgments of decent management of incentives and desire are embodied in the slenderness ideal, Bordo suggests, with body shape and size more widely being precepted as a visible confirmation of the inner moral self. She goes on by implying that 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”*²³.

Accordingly, the theoretical framework Bartky and Bordo develop more specific insights into the local practices of weight-loss dieting, whilst their Foucauldian accounts show how normalization is enacted through ever-finer measurement and closer surveillance of the subject population.

To summarize this part of the chapter, power, from Foucault’s point of view, is not limited nor possessed by the state’s governing mechanisms. It must be viewed as a system of relations that permeate the entire social field. Everywhere there are numerous nodes of relations of power and subordination. That results in complex nets of interactions of obedience and resistance being tied everywhere in the social sphere. Moreover, disciplinary power aims at controlling via knowledge creation that is organized in the forms of numerous tables used in different spheres of social life and science. Based on the knowledge processing, a norm is created. Such a norm can be applied to subjects in order to single out deviants, who are later morally judged and labelled as non-compliant, while, simultaneously, the norm is internalized by subjects themselves to be used as apparatus for self-regulation.

²² Bordo, S. (1993). Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body. *Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press*, PP 186-87.

²³ Bordo, S. (1993). Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body. *Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press*, PP 185-212.

Practice

Disciplinary power operates both on macro and micro levels through a set of practices. These practices are persistently implemented by subjects, institutions or government for deliberate or accidental regulation of others or self. Foucault highlights the utmost importance of practices per se by talking about subjectivity through which individuals examine themselves by exercising certain practices in order to create truths about themselves. My work's primary focus are dietary practices as a segment of a wider scope of self-constituting practices. Hence, my intention in this part of the chapter is to have a closer look at practices as Foucault conceptualizes such.

Quite commonly, commentators of Foucault's work claim that it is divided into a series of chronological stages of intellectual effort ²⁴. The first stage is reported as comprising the archaeology texts that draw attention to knowledge formation within singular epistemes: *The Order of Things*, *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. The second stage is then reported to include the genealogy texts that diachronically look into how power is established by knowledge: most particularly *Discipline and Punish*. The third stage singles out Foucault's later texts that examine subjectivity and the formation of the self: *History of Sexuality* and *Technologies of the Self*.

Rather than dividing his work into chronological stages, in my work I will support the position that practices provide a pervasive constant presence throughout Foucault's work. For the sake of simplicity, I will treat the terms "practices", "techniques", "models", "technologies", "devices", and "strategies" as interchangeable in this chapter.

Of any of Foucault's works, his autobiography is perceived by Florence as making the strongest case for there being an exceptional focus on practices throughout Foucault's intellectual career. In this text, Foucault indicates that his analysis of the relation between subject and truth is a unifying element across the span of his work. Or more precisely as Foucault utters: "*the study of the modes according to which the subject could be inserted as an object in truth games*" ²⁵. It

²⁴ Townley, B. (1994) *Reframing Human Resource Management: Power, Ethics and the Subject at Work*. Sage: London.

²⁵ Florence, M. (1994) 'Foucault, Michel, 1926-' in G. Gutting (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to FOUCAULT*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, P 316.

becomes clear that practices enabling and enacting with the production of truth are of Foucault's specific concern.

By truth games, Foucault designates *“the rules according to which, with respect to certain things, what a subject says stems from the question of truth and falsehood”*²⁶. Elsewhere Foucault defines a truth game as *“a set of rules by which truth is produced ... a set of procedures that lead to a certain result [that] may be considered valid or invalid, winning or losing rather than a game that one plays for amusement. Hence, the way that we develop knowledge about ourselves through disciplines such as economics, biology and psychiatry should be analyzed as truth games rather than taken at face value”*²⁷. Therefore, Foucault explains that his studies are centered around the problem of truth-telling, and not the problem of truth itself²⁸. This approach is intended to question the idea of existence of singular unified truth that is identical across all space and time. Such a standpoint rather suggests that everyone is entitled to possess their own truth, thereby acknowledging the possibility of multiple viewpoints on truth, none of which can be prioritized.

When a particular truth game is played, certain, very specific discourses are formed. According to Foucauldian thought, being exposed to certain discourses, individuals acquire knowledge of themselves:

*“The discourses of mental illness, delinquency, or sexuality say what the subject is only within a very particular truth game, but these games do not impose themselves on the subject from the outside in accord with necessary causal or structural determinations. Instead they open up a field of experience in which subject and object alike are constituted only under certain simultaneous conditions, but in which they go on changing in relation to one another, and thus go on modifying this field of experience itself”*²⁹.

²⁶ Florence, M. (1994). P 315.

²⁷ Florence, M. (1994). 'Foucault, Michel, 1926-' in G. Gutting (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to FOUCAULT*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, PP 17-18.

²⁸ Foucault, M (1983) *Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia, six lectures given by Michel Foucault at Berkeley*.

²⁹ Florence, M. (1994). 'Foucault, Michel, 1926-' in G. Gutting (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to FOUCAULT*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, PP 317-8.

Thus, Foucault does not suggest that the mentally ill, delinquent, and sexually offensive have these labels imposed on them merely from outside. Such individuals do not necessarily passively take the position of society's outcasts. In fact, individuals who are so categorized are themselves part of a truth game in which subject and object – in this instance a deviant individual and society - continue to shape one another within a particular field of experience in a given historical context.

Foucault examines the relationship between our thoughts and historical development of practices in Western society to study the relation between subject and truth³⁰. He poses a question of the origin of a practice, and concludes that practices must have not been invented by individuals themselves but rather represent “*models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group*”³¹. In other words, here Foucault suggests that practices are something one comes across, when they interact with society. One learns about practices while being introduced to behavioral patterns of their social group.

Practices in the scope of Foucault's interest include clinical practices (*The Birth of the Clinic*); psychiatric practices (*The History of Madness*); discursive practices (*Archaeology of Knowledge; The Order of Discourse*); pedagogic practices (*Discipline and Punish*); normalization and surveillance practices (*Discipline and Punish*); “care of the self” practices or techniques of the self (various); sexual practices (*History of Sexuality Vol I*); political, judiciary, or religious practices; police technologies; parrhesiastic practices or “free speech” (*Discourse and Truth lectures*); and Christian ascetic practices (various)³².

In his earlier work, Foucault's attention is dedicated to practices, constituting the subject who falls out of the normative distribution of clinical or psychiatric, or penal system³³.

³⁰ Foucault, M. (1988). 'The Political Technology of Individuals' in L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton (eds) *Technologies of the Self- a Seminar with Michel Foucault*. *Tavistock*: London.

³¹ Foucault M (2000). 'The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom' in P. Rabinow (ed) *Michel Foucault, Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. - Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 1*. *Penguin*: London, P 291.

³² Skinner, D.E. (2007). *Organising Organic: a Foucauldian Analysis of the Regulation of Organic Food Production*, University of Warwick.

³³ Florence, M. (1994). 'Foucault, Michel, 1926-' in G. Gutting (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to FOUCAULT*, *Cambridge University Press*: Cambridge, P 316.

*“What I wanted to try to show was how the subject constituted itself, in one specific form or another, as a mad or a healthy subject, as a delinquent or nondelinquent subject, through certain practices that were also games of truth, practices of power, and so on”*³⁴.

Following on, Foucault divides practices into four major types, including technologies of power, of production, of sign systems, and of the self, paying more attention to the latter: *“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”*³⁵.

Evidently, here, Foucault is aligning technologies of the self with “care of the self” practices that I cover later in this chapter. “Care of the self” practices constitute the next thematical block that plays enormous role for my work. Foucault defines “technologies of the self” as *“Those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria”*³⁶. And that it is through such practices that subjects apply the game of truth and falsehood to themselves.

In the view of the foregoing, it becomes evident that technologies of the self are rooted in the level of the individual: *“I am more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of self”*³⁷. Thus, technologies of the self seem to serve to constitute identity; within the outlined context, Foucault formulates a research question of the work he was concerned with at the time of his visit to the University of Vermont shortly before he died: *“How*

³⁴ Foucault M (2000) 'The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom' in P. Rabinow (ed) *Michel Foucault, Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. - Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 1*. Penguin: London, P 290.

³⁵ Foucault, M. (1988) 'Technologies of the Self' in L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton (eds) *Technologies of the Self: a Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Tavistock. London, P 18.

³⁶ Foucault, M. (1984) *The Use of Pleasure: the History of Sexuality Volume 2*. Penguin Books: London.

³⁷ Foucault, M. (1988). 'The Political Technology of Individuals' in L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton (eds) *Technologies of the Self- a Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Tavistock: London, P 19.

*did we directly constitute our identity through some ethical techniques of the self which developed through antiquity down to now?"*³⁸.

Attempting to provide an answer, Foucault noticed that when a problem with current practices starts to be identified by individuals, a new problematization is set up. Through it, one can actively modify the practices concerned. However, not without limitations: this can be done by singular individuals rather than by a collective unconscious:

*"The history of thought is the analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience, or a set of practices which were accepted without question, which were familiar and out of discussion, becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behavior, habits, practices, and institutions. The history of thought, understood in this way, is the history of the way people begin to take care of something, of the way they became anxious about this or that for example, about madness, about crime, about sex, about themselves, or about truth"*³⁹.

In this extract, it is possible to grasp the potential for the analysis of how individual's way of eating and one's body shape has first become problematized by diet culture, and now is being addressed with attempts to challenge the well-established state of things by anti-diet, pro-intuitive eating movements. This tendency and its mechanisms will be more thoroughly exposed and studied in the second chapter.

To sum up, through studying practices, Foucault is analyzing the relations between subject and object that enable and enact the construction of truth, where truth is constituted through truth games. Simultaneously, practices embody the dual processes of subjectification and objectivization.

³⁸ Foucault, M. (1988). 'The Political Technology of Individuals' in L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton (eds) *Technologies of the Self- a Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Tavistock: London, P 146.

³⁹ Foucault, M (1983). *Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia, six lectures given by Michel Foucault at Berkeley*, P 28.

Subjectification and objectivization

The dual process of objectivization and subjectification operates to construct truth through practices. Foucault's intellectual activity, throughout his whole career, is claimed to be centered around and driven by "*A Critical History of Thought*". In the latter collocation, by thought Foucault means "*the act that posits a subject and an object in their various possible relations*"⁴⁰. Therefore, one's engagement in a critical history of thought requires the analysis of practices where relations between the subject and the object are modified⁴¹.

Subjectification and objectivization always take place together, representing a dual dynamic process: "*This objectivization and subjectification are not independent of one another; it is from their mutual development and their reciprocal bond that what we might call "truth games" arise*"⁴². To recall, Foucault refers to studying the modes "*according to which the subject could be inserted as an object in truth games*"⁴³ as a consolidating element in his work. Consequently, subjectification mode is related to the process by which a subject presents itself as a subject to a particular kind of knowledge; whilst objectivization mode is related to the process by which a subject becomes an object of knowledge⁴⁴.

The relationship between subject and object, as portrayed by Foucault, is educational, because the dual dynamic process of objectivization-subjectification posits a teacher alongside the learner, who must be somehow improved and corrected. At the earlier stages of his intellectual career, Foucauldian's subject and object are, in fact, different people. This way, Foucault studies disciplinary practices from the viewpoint of how subjectification - objectivization processes create a different object to the subject within domains of knowledge provided by the discourses of mental illness, health and delinquency. Such discourses define the subject as referred to a particular truth game. The dual process of subjectification – objectivization then operates as follows; with the help of subjectification, a representative of the disciplinary authority, so called disciplinary expert,

⁴⁰ Florence, M. (1994) 'Foucault, Michel, 1926-' in G. Gutting (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to FOUCAULT*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, P 314.

⁴¹ Florence, M. (1994). P 314.

⁴² Florence, M. (1994). P 315.

⁴³ Florence, M. (1994). P 316.

⁴⁴ Florence, M. (1994). P 315.

subjects themselves to the knowledge produced by disciplinary power, and, at the same time, objectifies individuals as delinquent, insane or fat through objectivization. Meanwhile, the objectified individual subjects themselves to the disciplinary authority's opinion with the help of subjectification, whilst objectifying the disciplinary authority as an expert. It is worth noting, that, consequently, in the case of an individual who is judged to be inappropriately fat, no matter how overweight the person in medical terms is, one should not analyze this individual's body shape (in the context of Foucauldian studies), but should instead investigate the normalizing and examining practices that situate the individual within a group in which their fat is deemed to be considered inappropriate.

Later in the span of his intellectual career, Foucault's focus is on practices that are related to care of the self. Such practices are rooted in applying the truth game to oneself. Hence, as for subjectification – objectivization dual dynamic process, the individual themselves represent both object and subject simultaneously. One intentionally strives to govern themselves efficiently to attain virtue using “care of the self” practices: *“The principal work of art which one must take care of, the main area to which one must apply aesthetic values, is oneself, one's life, one's existence”*⁴⁵.

For my work such striking difference between disciplinary power practices and “care of the self” practices is significant. Since my main objective is to find out if dietary practices as a whole or any specific one can be enabling and even liberating in Foucauldian sense, such dietary practices then must meet the criterion that their subject and object is the same individual. Accordingly, in the context of enabling dietary practice, the trace of coercive authority should not be evident, or the subject themselves should be very aware of their position in the midst of disciplinary discourses and actively engage in “care of the self” practice, with the purpose of grounding their experience in themselves.

Care of the self

Ancient Greek and Roman practices related to the principle of caring for the self are the earliest practices identified by Foucault. Such practices date back to antiquity when care of the self

⁴⁵ Foucault M (2000). 'On the Genealogy of Ethics: an Overview of Work in Progress' in P. Rabinow (ed) *Michel Foucault, Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 1*. Penguin: London. P 271.

Greek: *epimeleia*; Latin: *cura sui*) was a usual form of activity⁴⁶. Back then taking care of yourself outweighed knowledge of yourself. In contrast, according to Foucault, in modern world knowing oneself has obscured the principle of caring for oneself. The reason being that, firstly, Christianity has influenced us in a way that we treat taking care of ourselves as something immoral and, secondly, secularism has added up to us respecting external laws more than ourselves as the basis for morality.

In Ancient Greece and Rome the “care of the self” referred to a whole set of occupations, but their main characteristic is that, being engaged in such practices, an individual searches inside for principles of self-regulation instead of relying on external well-established rules or laws. What is more, the care of the self was not a rest cure; the time spent on caring for the self “*is filled with exercises, practical tasks, various activities*”⁴⁷.

In Antiquity “caring for the self” became conceptualized as a philosophical activity, although, it had not started out as such, and thereby became more generalized. Foucault suggests that Plato's *Alcibiades* shows that with development of his ideas Socrates starts to use “care of the self” differently and places the theme of the care of oneself at the center of the *techne tou biou*, the art of living. In *Care of the Self*, Foucault outlines the progressive development of the art of living themed under “care of the self”:

*“It [care of oneself also took the form of an attitude, a mode of behavior; it became instilled in ways of living; it evolved into procedures, practices, and formulas that people reflected on, developed, perfected, and taught. It thus came to constitute a social practice, giving rise to relationships between individuals, to exchanges and communications, and at times even to institutions. And it gave rise, finally, to a certain mode of knowledge and to the elaboration of a science”*⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Foucault, M (2000). 'The Hermeneutic of the Subject' in P. Rabinow (ed) *Michel Foucault, Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 1*. Penguin: London, P 95.

⁴⁷ Foucault, M. (1984). The Care of the Self, the History of sexuality Volume 3. *Penguin Books*: London, P 51.

⁴⁸ Foucault, M. (1984). The Care of the Self, the History of sexuality Volume 3. *Penguin Books*: London, P 45.

“Care of the self” reaches its climax during the first two centuries AD, when it had evolved progressively into the cultivation of the self. Foucault sets out the timeframe for the establishment of “care of the self” as self-mastering practice just before the beginning of Christianity ⁴⁹.

A cultivation of the self is characterized by an individualism in which the relationship with oneself is intensified and “*in which one is called upon to take oneself as an object of knowledge and a field of action, so as to transform, correct, and purify oneself, and find salvation*” ⁵⁰. Similarly to “care of the self”, the cultivation of the self stems from the *techne tou biou* and is preoccupied by the principle of taking care for oneself.

Overall, Foucault identifies four groups of activities, that are considered as taking care for oneself. First and foremost, there comes caring for one’s body, that includes health routines and physical exercises without overexertion. It is worth highlighting that “care of the self” is connected to looking after both – body and soul – with an increased focus on the body as being potentially more vulnerable, and a threat to the soul if not treated. On the other hand, diseases of the soul are less perceivable; hence they might present a more significant threat for a subject. Secondly, “care of the self” consists of practices like reading, meditating, journaling, rereading one’s own notes, recollecting truths that one knows already, and adapting them to one's life. Thirdly, practicing “care of the self”, one has meaningful, though-provoking conversations with friends, confidants and/or a mentor. Fourthly, “care of the self” can involve engaging in open-hearted correspondence ⁵¹.

Through aforementioned practices, one is to achieve a mastery over oneself. Moreover, by caring for the self, one is able also to care for others in the community: “*it is the power over oneself that thus regulates one's power over others*” ⁵². Foucault assumes that, having been taking proper care of yourself, you cannot abuse your power over others:

⁴⁹ Foucault, M. (1984) *The Care of the Self, the History of sexuality Volume 3. Penguin Books: London.*

⁵⁰ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Care of the Self, the History of sexuality Volume 3. Penguin Books: London, P 42.*

⁵¹ Skinner, D.E. (2007). *Organising Organic: a Foucauldian Analysis of the Regulation of Organic Food Production, University of Warwick.*

⁵² Foucault M (2000). 'The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom' in P. Rabinow (ed) *Michel Foucault, Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. - Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 1. Penguin London. P 288.*

*“When the philosophers and moralists will recommend care of oneself ... they are not advising simply to pay attention to oneself, to avoid mistakes or dangers or to stay out of harm's way; they are referring to a whole domain of complex and regulated activities. We may say that in all of ancient philosophy the care of the self was considered as both a duty and a technique, a basic obligation and a set of carefully worked-out procedures”*⁵³.

In other words, Foucault pictures the care of the self as a persistent movement of self-appropriation and self-fashioning which is achieved through active engagement in a set of practices. However, it is not the recovery of a fixed self that already exists at some level, but rather self-constitution through certain practice implementation.

Taking care of the self is also deeply interconnected with knowing oneself, as no self-transformation is possible without deep understanding of the object of one's efforts. All the changes to the self in the course of “care of the self” practices are meant to be aligned with one's own intention, feelings and thoughts.

*“Taking care of oneself requires knowing [connaitre] oneself. Care of the self is, of course, knowledge [connaissance] of the self ... but also knowledge of a number of rules of acceptable conduct or of principles that are both truths and prescriptions. To take care of the self is to equip oneself with these truths: this is where ethics is linked to the game of truth”*⁵⁴.

Achievement of an "ethics of control" and a conversion of the self is a common goal of “care of the self” practices. Once “ethics of control” is attained, the soul is supposedly becomes unassailable due to setting oneself free from enslavement. At this state one's “self” is truly independent, and nothing can disturb the relationship between the individual and their “self”. During “care of the self” activities to achieve an “ethics of control”, one constantly reminds themselves *“that the chief objective one should set for oneself is to be sought within oneself, in the*

⁵³ Foucault M (2000). 'The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom' in P. Rabinow (ed) *Michel Foucault, Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. - Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 1.* Penguin London. P 95.

⁵⁴ Foucault M (2000). 'The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom' in P. Rabinow (ed) *Michel Foucault, Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. - Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 1.* Penguin London. P 285.

relation of oneself to oneself"⁵⁵. One is answerable only to oneself "*one exercises over oneself an authority that nothing limits or threatens*"⁵⁶. Hence, independent thinking is one of the outcomes of achieving the conversion of the self. Another outcome being, that one learns how to independently please oneself; this pleasure is, consequently, under one's control because it does not come from anything outside one's self: "*The individual who has finally succeeded in gaining access to himself is for himself, an object of pleasure*"⁵⁷. In a sense, one is regulating one's own pleasure. This way, with the help of "care of the self" practices, an ethical subject forms themselves.

Diet as a way of looking after one's body seems like one of the most obvious approaches to self-mastering through mastering of own's body. Regulation of individual's pleasure derived from delicious food consumption is at the base of diet mentality. Foucault emphasizes that similar concerns were raised in Antiquity as well. In *The Use of Pleasure* a lengthy discussion of ancient views of *dietetics* is included, which provides arguments for diet to be considered as more important aspect of the "regimen of pleasures" than sexual relations in Ancient Greece. It is significant to Foucault that food was once the focus of a complex set of restrictions and inspired a greater discursive interest than did sexual activity⁵⁸.

If establishment of "regimen of pleasures" and active "care of the self" activities offer an individual a way to become their own authority, can one cherish hopes of achieving freedom by rooting their experience in themselves and exercising certain techniques? Foucault is not too optimistic about absolute freedom. Following the thought of the Greeks and Romans, he suggests that we are free within certain parameters—according to the Stoics, some things are up to us, while other things are out of our control—and by reconnecting with the „care of the self“ we can recover the possibilities of autonomy and self-mastery, which are the conditions of freedom as much as its

⁵⁵ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Care of the Self, the History of sexuality Volume 3. Penguin Books: London, P 64-5.*

⁵⁶ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Care of the Self, the History of sexuality Volume 3. Penguin Books: London, P 65.*

⁵⁷ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Care of the Self, the History of sexuality Volume 3. Penguin Books: London, P 66.*

⁵⁸ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Use of Pleasure: the History of Sexuality Volume 2. Penguin Books: London.*

fulfillment. This is also the opening of spiritual life as the quest for a more purposeful existence that affirms a sense of belonging, as opposed to separation and death ⁵⁹.

Ethics of the self

According to Foucault, *ethos* is an ancient Greek word with a very specific meaning, largely lost in modern times:

“ethos was a way of being and of behavior. It was a mode of being for the subject, along with a certain way of acting, a way visible to others. A person's ethos was evident in his clothing, appearance, gait, in the calm with which he responded to every event, and so on” ⁶⁰.

In modern Greece, *ethos* has been replaced by another word derived from the same root, *ethikos*, meaning „theory of living“, from which modern English word “ethics” stems. Foucault defines ethics as *“the practice of freedom”* ⁶¹.

Throughout the history, the intellectual conceptualization of ethics has been evolving and changing, in the end presenting a mosaic of pieces that constitute a bigger picture when being viewed upon as a whole. For the Ancient Greeks followed by Kantian thought, ethics had the potential to be liberating. Possessing a certain *ethos*, you were practicing freedom in a certain way. Individual was not deprived of opportunities to take up an active role in liberation of the self through hard work.

In modernity, on the contrary, a somewhat passive role was assigned to an individual in the meta-theories on ethics that embrace the social as providing imperatives for the way that people are to act. Hence, a theory of ethics, so called utilitarianism, echoing Plato’s and Aristotle’s

⁵⁹ White, R. (2014). Foucault on the Care of the Self as an Ethical Project and a Spiritual Goal. *Hum Stud* 37, PP 489–504.

⁶⁰ Foucault M (2000). 'The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom' in P. Rabinow (ed) *Michel Foucault, Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. - Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 1*. Penguin: London. P 286.

⁶¹ Foucault M (2000) 'The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom' in P. Rabinow (ed) *Michel Foucault, Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. - Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 1*. Penguin: London. P 284.

emphasis on the priority of polis and being supported and adopted by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill amongst others, views the correct way to proceed as the one that produces the greatest good for the biggest number of individuals, even if some people are harmed by the action.

Simultaneously, Kant's "*Categorical Imperatives*", taking after Plato, are ends in themselves, for they are moral laws based on rationality and capable of being universalized; they are considered to be so fundamental that they have no ambiguity and are carried out without space for negotiation and without any thought to the possible consequences. Meanwhile, humanism embraces the notion of the goodness of human nature: that people share universal human qualities, which enable them to determine right and wrong ways to act.

Relying excessively on universal rules and principles is not how Foucault viewed ethics. Hence, Foucault is rather skeptical of determinism that is characteristic of humanism, which he criticizes in the following citation: "*What I am afraid of about humanism is that it presents a certain form of our ethics as a universal model for any kind of freedom*"⁶². Foucault steps up against the idea of individuals' passive response to universal dogmas about the correct code of conduct in any given circumstances.

Foucauldian way of doing ethics differs from modern meta-theories briefly outlined above, as Foucault asserts that ethics is created in the interaction of the social and individual. Accordingly, Foucault's role seems to be the one of emancipation and empowerment:

*"My role - and that is too emphatic a word - is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed. To change something in the minds of people - that's the role of an intellectual"*⁶³.

In the visionary statement above, Foucault is uttering a desire to challenge social determinism by showing people that they, in reality, do have a choice. Such a choice may imply

⁶² Martin, R. (1988). "Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault, October 25, 1982" in *L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton (eds) Technologies of the Self: a Seminar with Michel Foucault. Tavistock: London. P 15.*

⁶³ Martin, R. (1988). "Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault, October 25, 1982" in *L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton (eds) Technologies of the Self: a Seminar with Michel Foucault. Tavistock: London. P 10.*

for an individual to be disciplined enough to construct one's own choices based on their individual's inner needs with the goal of self-mastering. For that reason, for Foucault ethics takes place at the level of the individual: "ethical work" is something "*that one performs on oneself, not only to bring one's conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior*"⁶⁴ .

Foucault is going beyond the concept of agency for, by "ethical subject", he refers to the individual as being subject – not object - to external moral prescriptions but also as being subject to their own actions, that is again being subject to the manner in which they conduct themselves⁶⁵.

Thus, a person might choose to avoid adultery because a moral prescription, outlined in the Ten Commandments, treats adultery as unacceptable in the social group to which they belong. Alternatively, being an ethical subject, they might elect to hold back from being unfaithful as a result of personal decision. Similarly, Susan Bordo in *Unbearable Weight* makes a statement that moral inner self of a person can be judged by the way their body looks, implying that the slenderer the body is, the more "ethical", according to social standards, the person is considered to be⁶⁶. Based on this judgement, a person can take up a diet in order to manifest with their shape that they are, in a way, "*a better person*", with a tougher character and stronger power of will. On the contrary, in the light of Foucauldian ideas, the individual cannot be considered as ethical subject, since the choice of weight management does not necessarily appear as an inner motive.

Following the same logic of moral judgement, among individuals influenced by diet culture narratives food is divided into groups and labeled as "good" or "bad" in relation to what is acceptable when a person follows certain diet and what not. In such a case, food is prescribed by the strict rules of a diet, and person does not rely on their own desires and preferences, which seem to drive them further from Foucauldian ideal of an ethical subject. For Foucault a moral act cannot be reduced to an act of conformance to a rule, in this case – set of dietary rules; moral action must

⁶⁴ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Care of the Self, the History of sexuality Volume 3. Penguin Books: London, P 27.*

⁶⁵ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Care of the Self, the History of sexuality Volume 3. Penguin Books: London, P 26.*

⁶⁶ Bordo, S. (1993). *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, PP 185-212.*

take account of the context and of the relationship one has with oneself⁶⁷. Hence, the process of forming oneself as an ethical subject is:

*“A process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself. There is no specific moral action that does not refer to a unified moral conduct, no moral conduct that does not call for the forming of oneself as an ethical subject-, and no forming of the ethical subject without "modes of subjectivation" and an "ascetics" or "practices of the self" that support them. Moral action is indissociable from these forms of self-activity”*⁶⁸.

Here, Foucault distinctly claims that moral actions, indeed, refer to social practice; nevertheless, they mainly depend on an individual’s self-assessment with respect to their own actions. Additionally, the statement implicitly refers to the dual dynamic processes of objectivization and subjectification mentioned earlier. The subject is treating themselves at the same time as an object and as a subject in forming part of themselves as the *“object of his moral practice”*. Through objectivization an individual assesses their behavior as an ethical subject, whilst through subjectification the same individual is identifying themselves within a field of universal moral conduct as a subject. Self-assessment is executed via *“self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination ... for the transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object”*⁶⁹.

Having differentiated morality and ethics, Foucault defines morality as *“a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various*

⁶⁷ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume 2. Penguin Books:* London, P 28.

⁶⁸ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume 2. Penguin Books:* London. P 28.

⁶⁹ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume 2. Penguin Books:* London. P 29.

*prescriptive agencies such as the family...educational institutions, churches, and so forth”*⁷⁰. Clearly, morality in this context does not merely sum up moral actions.

Foucault then outlines two ways of propagating morality. Firstly, values and rules can be set down normally and systematically in doctrine and through pedagogy. For the current work, then, this might equate to approved for medical use BMI tables and nutritional guidelines released by governmental authorities. Secondly, where dissemination of values and rules is less formal, regulation becomes multifaceted⁷¹. It is necessary to underline that this second layer is of more importance for my work. This looser dissemination of rules and values might correspond to socially accepted body shape being popularized by mass media, and, simultaneously, various restrictive diets that prevail in diet culture discourse and are spread among individuals who are primarily concerned with their body size. At the very least, it might help to explain explicit attractiveness and dominance of diet culture narratives for its followers.

In contrast, ethics, from Foucault’s standpoint, is connected to the self and is equal to regulating one’s own behavior, recognizing oneself as the subject of one’s own actions, and employing a form of governmentality over oneself through self-regulation. This way a truth game is applied. Additionally, in implementing a code of practice, individuals are able to make ethical choices about how they resist or obey, comply and respect or disregard the imposed values and rules⁷².

At first glance, morality seems to be assigned by Foucault to the level of the social, while ethics - to the level of the individual. Nevertheless, it comes to blurring of distinctions when Foucault proceeds to distinguish between a code-oriented and an ethics-oriented morality⁷³. As far as code-oriented morality is considered, the subject is provided with rules to follow: “*the ethical subject refers his conduct to a law, or set of laws, to which he must submit at the risk of committing*

⁷⁰ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume 2. Penguin Books:* London. P 25.

⁷¹ Skinner, D.E. (2007). *Organising Organic: a Foucauldian Analysis of the Regulation of Organic Food Production*, University of Warwick.

⁷² Foucault, M. (1984). *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume 2. Penguin Books:* London. P 25.

⁷³ Skinner, D.E. (2007). *Organising Organic: a Foucauldian Analysis of the Regulation of Organic Food Production*, University of Warwick.

*offences that may make him liable to punishment”*⁷⁴. As a result, when regulating one’s own conduct, an individual can choose to follow the given rules to avoid being punished but has other choices as well. Through code implementation, one is forming oneself as an ethical subject. From treating a subject as passive Foucault is shifting the focus on how the subject is able to respond proactively to confined laws and rules through self-regulation: *“the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice”*⁷⁵. This type of self-regulating might be related to a situation when a person must follow certain food rules in order to avoid undesirable complication. The latter might happen when an individual is obliged to avoid certain product groups due to severe allergic reaction that might be caused by this product consumption. Another example might be sugar free diet of an individual suffering from diabetes.

An ethics-oriented morality, being different from the code-oriented morality described above, is more about the individual performing certain practices in a process of self-formation as an ethical subject. The relationship the individual has with themselves is significant here: *“in his different actions, thoughts, and feelings as he endeavors to form himself as an ethical Subject”*⁷⁶. With an ethics oriented morality, *“the emphasis is on the forms of relations with the self, on the methods and techniques by which he works them out, on the exercises by which he makes of himself an object to be known, and on the practices that enable him to transform his own mode of being”*⁷⁷.

Foucault goes on by stating that either a code-oriented morality or an ethics-oriented morality will be more dominant within a given historical context. Nevertheless, the predominance of one mode does not restrict the existence or operation of the other. Consequently, he pinpoints the Christian tradition from the beginning of the early 13th century to the commencement of the

⁷⁴ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume 2. Penguin Books:* London. PP 9-30.

⁷⁵ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume 2. Penguin Books:* London. P 27.

⁷⁶ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume 2. Penguin Books:* London. P 30.

⁷⁷ Foucault, M. (1984). *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume 2. Penguin Books:* London. P 30.

Reformation as centering more around a code-oriented morality through the organization of the penitential system. On the contrary, two thousand years ago, the Ancient Greeks and Romans were more inclined towards an ethics-oriented morality ⁷⁸.

Viewing upon dietary practices through the lens of differentiation of code-oriented morality and ethics-oriented should be adopted in my work, and this conceptual scheme will be further and, in more detail, utilized in the second chapter. At this point, I want to underline that code-oriented morality seems to be pervasive among dieters, when they tend to adhere to a stable number of food rules in order to keep up with a diet. Nevertheless, more liberating potential is vividly present in adoption of ethics-oriented morality, provided in this scenario the subject is less likely to be affected by power relation interplay, because, based on the resume present in this section, Foucault links liberating practices with ethics. This condition being one of the many conditions for a dietary practice to meet in order to be considered a “practice of freedom” in Foucauldian sense, rather than a merely normalizing practice of disciplinary power. In the next section I will try to outline additional criteria for practice of freedom in Foucauldian sense.

Practice of freedom

For more thorough understanding of a diet as a practice and fetching its enabling moments, at this point of my work, it is required to enumerate the criteria, brought up in previous sections of work, that will be helpful to identify any type of practice as liberating in Foucauldian sense. However, for that purpose we must assume that human liberation is possible, even though Foucault seems to challenge this idea and propose that freedom is only a reversal of perspectives that remains within the orbit of what it seeks to escape from ⁷⁹.

For a practice to be liberating, it should be feasibly classified as Foucauldian “care of the self” practice, which allows subjects, to some extent, to challenge the identities that are foisted upon them, and to re-invent themselves. Practice of “care of the self” allows individuals to ground

⁷⁸ Skinner, D.E. (2007). *Organising Organic: a Foucauldian Analysis of the Regulation of Organic Food Production*, University of Warwick.

⁷⁹ White, R. (2014). Foucault on the Care of the Self as an Ethical Project and a Spiritual Goal. *Hum Stud* 37, PP 489–504. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10746-014-9331-3>

their experience in themselves and become aware of the power relations that surround and threaten them. Though “care of the self” practices, an individual is more likely to realize the normalizing implication of moral weighing on individual’s shoulders.

Moreover, Foucault highlights that ethical practices, such as practice of freedom, demand theoretical knowledge and practical training. But what is more significant, one’s self-mastering and consequent self-transformation into an ethical subject should take advantage of and open more possibilities for the subject themselves⁸⁰. Self-regulation, then, equates to regulating one’s own conduct, recognizing oneself as the subject of one’s own actions, and employing a form of governmentality over oneself while leaving some space for flexibility and adaptation.

Summary

Thus, to summarize the first chapter it is necessary to outline the main points set out above. Diet culture in its contemporary shape is criticized on social media for adding more value to individual’s physical appearance and body size while being an external force that affects subject’s behavior through internalization. In this work diet culture, as a whole, and dietary practices, in particular, are interpreted from the standpoint of Foucauldian concepts of disciplinary power and ethical practices of freedom.

Disciplinary power manifests itself through a system of power relations that permeate the entire social field with the aim at controlling by knowledge. Based on knowledge produced in the midst of power relations, a norm is created. Later, the norm is applied to subjects in order to single out deviants, who are later punished or simply morally judged and labelled as non-compliant. Simultaneously, the norm is internalized by subjects to be utilized as apparatus for self-management.

Power is exercised via certain practices which represent certain processes of analyzing the relations between subject and object that enable and enact the construction of truth, where truth is constituted through truth games. Disciplinary power exists externally to the subject (until

⁸⁰ White, R. (2014). Foucault on the Care of the Self as an Ethical Project and a Spiritual Goal. *Hum Stud* 37, PP 489–504.

internalized), whilst the main characteristic of “care of the self” practice is that subject and object is the same individual, resulting in single truth constituting point.

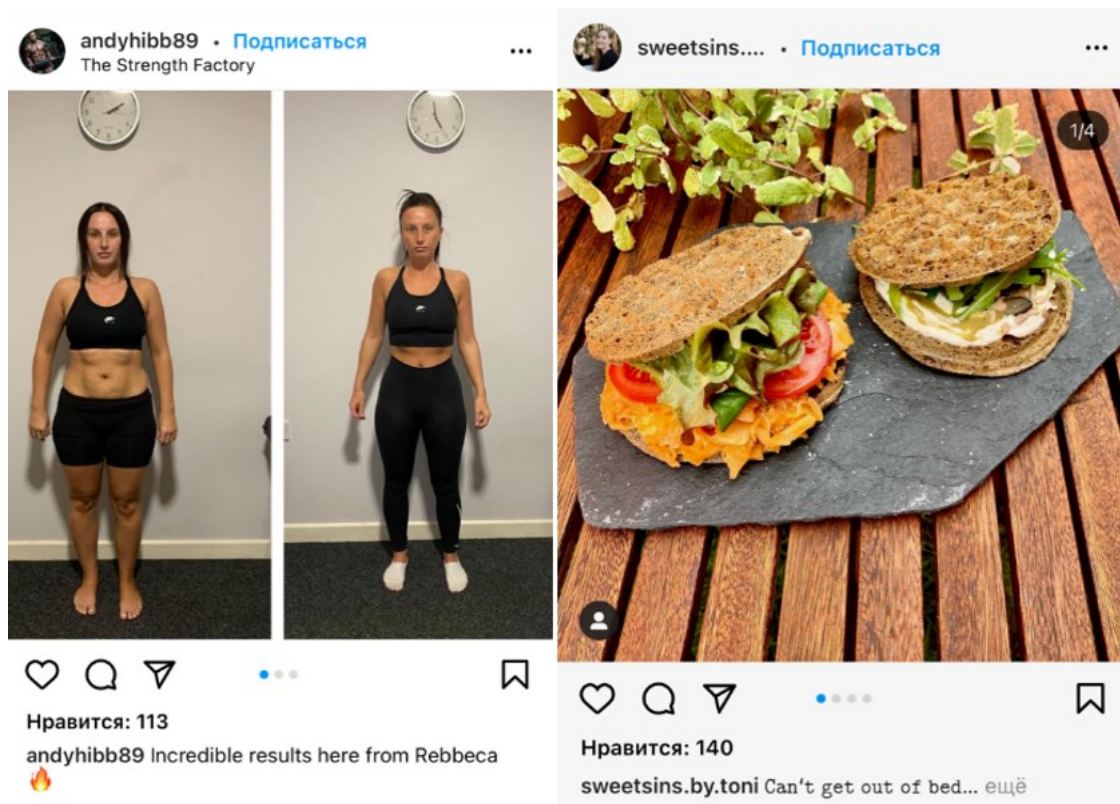
“Care of the self” practices include a large variety of practices that are oriented towards the objective of self-mastery. Through “care of the self” practices, individual forms oneself as an ethical subject, taking advantage of and opening up to more possibilities for oneself.

Ethical practices, including liberating “care of the self” practices require theoretical knowledge and practical training. Through self-mastery individual is regulating their own behavior, recognizing oneself as the subject of one's own actions. While employing a form of governmentality over oneself through “care of the self” practice, the subject still leaves some space for flexibility and adaptation. By stating this, I finish the outline of the conceptual framework for this thesis.

Chapter II

The rise of social media has opened up an online forum that is reflective of our diet culture. Followers regularly see images and discussions about diet, while online ads target specific audiences wherein being thin matters. Instagram currently has close to 130 million posts under the hash tags “diet” and “weight loss.” Scrolling through these hashtags will lead to seeing images of men and women showing off their fit bodies, posting before-and-after weight loss photos, images of so-called healthy meals, and motivational sayings. Many of the images and diet trends found on Instagram promote the message that thin is beautiful, and it is aspirational and acceptable to try to lose weight by any means.

Fig. 1, 2:



Source: Instagram, hash tag: #diet⁸¹

⁸¹ Instagram, hash tag #diet, from: <https://www.Instagram.com>. [15.06.2021].

Whereas in some cases, when excessive amount of weight can lead to health complications, weight loss is a medically prescribed solution, in other cases weight loss pursued for merely aesthetical reasons. My work is mostly focused on the latter cases, even though the base of such differentiation is problematic itself and can be deconstructed.

The most common statement of diet culture is that weight loss is necessary for overweight people to become healthier ⁸². Such a claim is based on assumption that overweight person is inevitably unhealthy, with weight being the main factor for it. But what is “unhealthy” anyway? To what extend can a person be unhealthy? Is the criterion for a person being “unhealthy” their inability to move freely in space or rather the results of an individual’s blood test that indicates some pathologies in their body functioning? Can a person be classified as unhealthy if, from the medical perspective, certain variables in their blood test do not fall under the normal range, but such deviations from the norm do not bother this individual nor restrict them from usual daily activities? These questions might serve as a base for a large-scale debate on the relevance of the opposition healthy/unhealthy when referred to an individual.

Another controversial opposition, or rather scale, is slender/obese. From medical perspective, BMI (Body Mass Index) is one of the most frequently used tools to diagnose individual with obesity ⁸³. BMI is calculated by dividing weight by height squared (kg/m^2). BMI is being widely used in medical practice since it is a relatively simple and low-cost indirect measure for assessing obesity which provides reasonable height standardization.

⁸² National Eating Disorders Association, from: <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/blog> [15.06.2021].

⁸³ WHO Obesity and overweight, from: <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight> [15.06.2021].

Table 1:

BMI	Nutritional status
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.5–24.9	Normal weight
25.0–29.9	Pre-obesity
30.0–34.9	Obesity class I
35.0–39.9	Obesity class II
Above 40	Obesity class III

Source: WHO Europe ⁸⁴

The generally accepted view, which is confirmed by data from WHO Europe BMI Chart above, is that a BMI of 25–29.9 indicates that individual is ‘overweight’, whilst 30 or above classifies one as obese (Obesity class I). Thus, starting with BMI over 30, an individual can no longer be considered healthy, as a person with obesity diagnosis under no circumstances be classified as perfectly healthy due to cardiovascular and decreased mobility risks; having a BMI above 35 suggests one is ‘grossly obese’ (Obesity class II), so that even for routine elective surgery, such a patient might need to discuss their options with the anaesthetist. BMI above 40 is ‘bariatric’ or ‘morbidly obese’ (Obesity class III) and may well need help with being moved in space. At the other end of the scale, anything below 18.5 is also generally regarded as distinctly unhealthy or underweight: a score below 17.5 in fact might well indicate anorexia, and 15 is usually taken as the upper limit of ‘starvation’. For reference, a BMI of 18 became, after much debate, the minimum acceptable measurement for models in Milan fashion week in 2006 ⁸⁵.

⁸⁴ WHO BMI, from: <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/nutrition/a-healthy-lifestyle/body-mass-index-bmi> [15.06.2021].

⁸⁵ Humphreys S. (2010). The unethical use of BMI in contemporary general practice. *The British journal of general practice: the journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, 60(578), PP 696–697.

However, although BMI is strongly correlated with gold standard body fat measures, the index is being massively criticized in intellectual circles. One of the issues connected to this type of measurements is that it cannot distinguish between lean and fat mass and provides no indication of body fat distribution. This way, one who regularly engages in resistance training and has built up significant muscle mass, might be classified as overweight if exclusively BMI is taken into account. Another problematic point is that BMI cannot be used for kids and adolescents, as their body is still being developed. Additionally, the origin of BMI as a measurement conveys even more controversy: it can be traced back, to Adolphe Quetelet who, being interested in the emerging discipline of statistics in the mid-1830s, collected data on, exclusively, men's heights and weights at various ages. From this study, which he wished would allow him to determine the 'average' man, he formulated the Quetelet formula, which is now known as the BMI. This results in BMI being designed for Belgian men, thus, not being so straightforwardly applicable to other populations and various ethnic groups ⁸⁶.

With aforementioned arguments in mind it is safe to state that one of the most widely used tool to diagnose obesity – BMI - is not unflawed, suggesting that the state of a person as healthy or unhealthy cannot be merely judged by the correlation of their weight to their height.

However, the opposition – slender/obese – becomes even more complicated when individual's personal body image is considered. Body dysmorphia, being defined as a preoccupation with an "imagined" defect in one's appearance, is very common among teenagers and young adults ⁸⁷. The adults who are suffering from body dissatisfaction have markedly excessive concern in case there is a slight physical anomaly. Thereby, body dysmorphia and general prevalence of dissatisfaction with one's body set up advantageous conditions for diet culture to operate by inclining an individual to restlessly pursue the dogmatic aesthetical ideal of the body.

The ideal of the body being ultra-thin has been widely promoted by media and is believed to contribute to body image issues and, consequently, to eating disturbances. A significant amount of attention has been paid to internalization of such media images in psychology and related

⁸⁶ Humphreys S. (2010). The unethical use of BMI in contemporary general practice. *The British journal of general practice: the journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, 60(578), PP 696–697.

⁸⁷ Veale, D. (2004). Body dysmorphic disorder. *Postgraduate Medical Journal*. 80: PP 67-71.

research fields in the recent decades only to prove that exposure to thin aesthetical ideal through media is a risk-factor for development of body dissatisfaction⁸⁸. Thin ideal is hardly attainable for most women; hence it is thought to be directly promoting weight concerns alongside with dieting as a means of achieving a slenderer body. Body dissatisfaction and dieting then increase the risk of eating pathology development, which by no means can be considered healthy. It was independently found by several different researchers that self-reported dieting predicted eating disorder symptoms onset. Moreover, the individuals, who acted according to restrained eating patterns, scored higher on a measure of thin-ideal internalization. For that reason, both dieting and body dissatisfaction are considered to be risk factors for development of eating pathology, and both are thought to arise from extreme level of the thin ideal internalization⁸⁹.

Despite media images, including advertisements and celebrities, have recently evolved toward a more fit and muscular physique, appearance of the new culturally acceptable body ideal has not added up to changing the body dissatisfaction tendency⁹⁰. Consistent with this shift, the percentage of women dissatisfied with their muscle tone nearly doubled from 1972 to 1996⁹¹. Additionally, recent studies show that thin body ideal and fit body ideal tend to coexist on contemporary social media platforms⁹².

Presence of difficultly attainable and aesthetically ideal body references in the online space tends to affect most individuals, who do not meet the beauty standard requirement, with no regard towards their state of health or body mass index. To clarify, having achieved aesthetically ideal body shape, regular people, in many cases, might not necessarily fit into the normal BMI range or

⁸⁸ Thompson JK, Stice E. (2001). Thin-Ideal Internalization: Mounting Evidence for a New Risk Factor for Body-Image Disturbance and Eating Pathology. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 10(5), PP 181-183.

⁸⁹ Homan, K. (2010). Athletic-ideal and thin-ideal internalization as prospective predictors of body dissatisfaction, dieting, and compulsive exercise, *Body Image, Volume 7, Issue 3*.

⁹⁰ Homan, K. (2010). Athletic-ideal and thin-ideal internalization as prospective predictors of body dissatisfaction, dieting, and compulsive exercise, *Body Image, Volume 7, Issue 3*.

⁹¹ Muth, J. L., & Cash, T. F. (1997). Body-image attitudes: What difference does gender make? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 27, PP 1438-1452.

⁹² Alberga, A.S., Withnell, S.J. & von Ranson, K.M. (2018). Fitspiration and thinspiration: a comparison across three social networking sites. *J Eat Disord* 6, P 39.

rather settle at the lower, medically more associated with health-related risks, end of the range. Thereby, from the medical perspective, an individual with aesthetically pleasing external body characteristics might not be considered healthy. What is more, the process of achieving the dogmatic body ideal might be coupled with dieting and excessive exercising which, under certain conditions, can lead to disordered eating development.

For my work, normalizing role of aesthetic body ideal is more significant than such of BMI charts, because, even taking in consideration the debatable nature of BMI table as universal tool, it still presumably demonstrates norm as a rather healthy - for majority of population - range, whereas the dogmatic body ideal is merely popularized as being universally healthy, whilst in reality this might not be the case.

Later in this chapter, I will aim at more detailed study of normalizing implication of aesthetic body ideals by analyzing videos of the extremely popular format on YouTube – “My weight loss journey”. As it was already mentioned in the beginning of this chapter my goal will be to focus mainly on weight loss for aesthetic purposes, meaning that the starting point of the person under analysis is not ultimate obesity (BMI over 30), but rather slightly excessive amount of weight or even physique that might fit into normal BMI range. So, it will be easier to spot diet culture’s disciplinary implication, as well as to judge whether any dietary practice or its element can be considered as “care of the self” – liberating practice of freedom in Foucauldian sense.

My weight loss journey

“My weight loss journey” is highly popular format on YouTube, where content creators share verbal stories and visuals of their body transformation, conventionally, from the state of being somewhat overweight to a thinner, more socially acceptable body physique. Generally, the story, that includes a lengthy description of weight loss process with tips and advice, is accompanied by “before and after” photos demonstration and motivational rhetoric. In majority of cases, if not articulated openly, such videos imply that all the changes in video maker’s body are positive, and following the advice provided, YouTubers’ audience will be able to attain similar results.

In this work such a format was chosen for contemporary diet culture analysis, since, while being a huge phenomenon on YouTube with massive following, it, assumably, conveys significant

parts of contemporary diet culture's discourse, which seems beneficial and promising when the objective is to unfold disciplinary tendencies and enabling moments of dietary practices.

Case 1.

The first weight loss journey under analysis will be the one posted by Alivia D'Andrea, a vlogger, who is known for her self-titled YouTube channel, where she has accumulated 2,21 million subscribers by posting holistic health, yoga and weight loss content as well as short films and vlogs. The specific video that I will review was posted on 26th of January, 2021, by the title "*How I lost 32 pounds of FAT and 10 inches off my waist*", and has been viewed more than 3 million times by the time my work is being written ⁹³.

The video starts by Alivia acknowledging the audience of the video content structure: "*Before you see the results, I'm about to show you how I achieved it. I need to take you back to the beginning: it started as an innocent fitness goal, but then it spiraled into a destructive weight loss journey.*" Hence, the video can be logically divided into two parts: in the first part Alivia is building up the audience's anticipation to see the result of her physique transformation by sharing the struggles she was confronted with throughout the whole duration period of her attempts to lose weight. In the second part, having cathartically revealed her significant achievements in weight loss, she, pairing up with a professional trainer, provides practical pieces of advice that are expected to help her viewers, by implementing these changes into their lives, to reach their goal weight and body shape.

First, it is thought-provoking that the first part of the video is further divided into chronological parts with intention to demonstrate how Alivia's relationship with food and exercise evolved throughout the years, starting 2017. Attentive viewer can notice disciplinary power implication at that point. Alivia's time is retrospectively divided by her into as fractional intervals as possible in order to create the increasing amount of opportunities to monitor and evaluate the outcomes.

Thus, she provides short clips with her highly emotional and compelling monologues on how miserable she felt having some fat in her problem areas, and how complicated the whole idea

⁹³ How I lost 32 pounds of FAT and 10 inches off my waist, from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C20LLr4PaoA> [15.06.2021].

of restriction diet is to her: *“OK, honestly, it's so stupid that I'm even crying about weight loss because I should not be... It's, like, stupid! Every time I've done it, I always lose; I always binge in the end or something, and then I cannot get back... I am stuck”*. She adds: *“My behavior made me lose respect for myself, and it shattered my confidence when I'm bingeing and eating like this”*. The cited narration shows that weight loss and certain body standards present an outstanding value to Alivia, as inability to deprive her body of certain foods and meals has a huge negative impact on her self-esteem. Here, one can trace the normalizing role of the aesthetic body ideal.

According to Foucault, one of the main characteristics of disciplinary power that is, at the same time, one of its key goals is to produce a norm. In this sense, diet culture acts purely disciplinarily by setting up thin, or rather thin-and-fit body, as a standard to strive for. Individuals, who, naturally or as a result of series of efforts, fit into the norm are rewarded by being generally judged by society as having strong will and tough personality, whilst people, who do not fit, receive strikingly opposite feedback from the public.

Typically, with diets it is challenging to distinguish the disciplinary authority itself. In many cases an individual tends to internalize the authority and produce normalizing judgements themselves: *“When I am bingeing and eating... like... I feel a little bit powerless and weak”* and *“I am the only one in my family that struggles with, like, the eating issues and that's why I am a lot chubbier than the rest of my family...”* Here, Alivia uses normalizing judgements to homogenize and individualize herself as a subject by considering all members of a group – her family - with reference to a particular normative body shape. Additionally, she assesses her actions through the prism of conformity with the norm only to identify herself with her own actions and feel miserable as a result of not meeting the expectation. The external cause of her distress is worth highlighting here. If not for the existence and wide popularization of dogmatic beauty standards that include certain body shape ideal, the young woman would not be so traumatized when failing to discipline herself to subjugate her unruly body.

As mentioned in the first chapter, the object of disciplinary power application is individual's body, whereas the aim is to produce a “docile body”. The goal is reached by introducing certain training and drilling techniques. In Alivia's case, the achievement of the goal was dependent on her ability to follow a restrictive diet and exercise regularly. Up until turning to a professional trainer to ask for help, she failed to comply. The very moment the professional trainer, Steve Zim, appears on the screen, it becomes clear that he will impersonalize the

disciplinary authority, that has been yet omnipresent. He encourages Alivia by praising her success, chooses not to punish, when she breaks the rules which are inevitably produced by him being informed by scientific knowledge and diet culture discourse. Having overeaten on Thanksgiving Day, Alivia says: *“It’s an absolute disaster! You know, Steve says “cheat meal”, I had a cheat day... I don’t know it’s all my fault though and I feel so guilty, like, I don’t know what Steve’s gonna say...”* The fear of inevitable punishment that might be executed by disciplinary authority is easily sensed in this statement. It is worth noting that Alivia relies on external, in this case Steve’s, expertise in weight loss sphere more than on her own body needs. Not surprisingly, Alivia also confirms that having someone holding her responsible for her actions feels right to her:

- Alivia: *“I’ve never been so excited for something!”*
- Her friend: *“And it’s good to have someone that’s holding you accountable!”*
- Alivia: *“Yes”*.

Having set up an objective of attaining certain look, Alivia feels guilty when failing to keep up with the necessary “drilling and training” that is due to discipline her. Hence, one can notice the guilt that is being induced in an individual, when they cannot conform. It is not necessarily prompted by the disciplinary authority itself, rather an individual has already internalized the disciplinary power techniques effectively enough to implement them through self-objectivation.

Thus, an individual feels guilty when they cannot take control over their own body and its desires. Opposition of one’s mental against their physical lays at the basis of dualism concept, that proves to keep being influential in our everyday life. Dualistic mentality is first uncovered in Alivia’s narratives when she claims to have little control over her binge-eating episodes: *“I always binge in the end or something, and then I cannot get back...”*. Eventually, the entire video ends up being dedicated to her attempts to put the mind over body. In the end Alivia’s efforts pay off and viewer can finally witness her results in the form of before and after videos and pictures.

Pic. 3:



Pic. 4:



Source: YouTube ⁹⁴

Before and after pictures present a very prominent asset of diet culture. They serve to establish a connection with the on-lookers, suggesting that methods for achievement of the “after” result could work for others just as efficiently. Additionally, the audience can be triggered to problematize their own body shape, which will connect the narrator with the viewers on a much

⁹⁴ YouTube.com, user: Fiercelivvy, from: <https://www.youtube.com/user/fiercelivvy> [15.06.2021].

deeper level, as the viewers would expect a solution for their newly invented issue. In the light of Foucault's disciplinary power conceptualization, before and after pictures can be interpreted as a mode of confession intertwined with self-surveillance.

Confession is a documented phenomenon that has become relatively popular in the last century via cultural mediums such as therapy and television talk shows ⁹⁵. Foucault was among the first scholars to acknowledge confession as a technique embedded in social hierarchies and power relations. He underlined that confession should not be considered merely as a private interaction between two equal parties, confession should rather be highlighted as “*an interaction between a powerful authority figure (one who decides what constitutes the truth) and the one who makes the confession (and thus reiterates their truth from a culturally acceptable narrative). Confession, from this perspective, is not merely the production of truth unmediated by external forces, but, rather, constitutes the reiteration of certain cultural norms*” ⁹⁶. Many dietary discourses implement various modes of confession as means of encouraging one's surveillant gaze over their bodies and eating behavior. In other words, through confession an individual is engaged into a practice of policing themselves. Under such circumstances, when disciplinary authority is so vividly present, confession is no longer considered to be a liberating revelation of the truth, that is unmediated by external forces, on the contrary, “*the act of confession implicitly serves as a marker of panoptic control through its associations with liberal-individualist concepts such as choice and personal responsibility*” ⁹⁷.

Hence, by inserting before and after shots in the most cathartic part of the video Alivia not only makes a confession of how far from ideal her body used to be, but also implicitly encourages her viewers to be engaged in a body-conscious narrative. This way, Alivia adopts the disciplinary function of both self-surveillance and confession to reinforce the sense of body-consciousness in her viewers - intentionally or not. The before pictures of Alivia's body serve as a type of visual confession of her past disciplinary failure, which was additionally reiterated by her in the

⁹⁵ Landry, J.M. (2009). Confession, obedience, and subjectivity: Michel Foucault's unpublished lectures on the government of the living. *Telos*, 146(Spring), PP 111-123.

⁹⁶ Jovanovski N. (2017). Femininities-Lite: Diet Culture, Feminism and Body Policing. *In: Digesting Femininities. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.*

⁹⁷ Jovanovski N. (2017). Femininities-Lite: Diet Culture, Feminism and Body Policing. *In: Digesting Femininities. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.*

beginning of the video: “*Oh my... I'm sorry it's so hard to even see myself in this state because I look this heavy*”. Thereby, the negative judgement provided, the roundness and fleshiness of a body becomes a metaphor for a general lack of control and responsibility⁹⁸. Murray adds up by pointing out that negative connotations around the overweight female body are so deeply rooted in the cultural imaginary that just a sight of body fat on a female represents kind of a “virtual confessor” of her disordered relationship with food⁹⁹. Having been imprinted in cultural sphere so vividly, the contra-productive association of a overweight body with lack of will power and weakness cannot but be internalized by individuals who, consequently, might get engaged in self-disciplinary activities solely to empower diet culture discourse and strengthen its dominance in our media assets.

It is worth noting that Alivia’s video as a whole – not merely before and after shots part – serves as a multifaceted confession; one that involves revealing and providing updates to her subscribers on her newfound project of self-discipline. Much like the disciplinary function of visibility in Bentham’s panopticon¹⁰⁰, Alivia’s method of a multifaceted confession creates an environment of multiple gazes that the confessor inadvertently constructs through their weight-loss goals sharing. The act of confession, in this instance, merely reiterates the disciplinary power of a self-surveillance rather than creating it.

Whilst self-discipline is the explicit function of confession, research demonstrates that the implicit outcomes of on-going self-monitoring and confession present an increase in body consciousness and dysfunctional eating patterns¹⁰¹. In popular makeover TV shows and similar to Alivia’s weight loss YouTube videos, the before shot of the ‘fat’ body carries negative connotations such as sloth, gluttony and unbridled hedonism. The ‘fat’ body is required to confess and, therefore, provide evidence of one’s lack of will and self-restraint. Levy-Navarro elaborates that “*there is something coercive about what they [the ‘fat’ person] are compelled to say about*

⁹⁸ Levy-Navarro, E., (2012). I'm the New Me: Compelled Confession in Diet Discourse. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 45(2), PP 340-356.

⁹⁹ Murray, S., (2008). The 'fat' female body. *Springer*.

¹⁰⁰ Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. London: Penguin Books.

¹⁰¹ Duncan, M.C. (1994). The politics of women's body images and practices: Foucault, the panopticon, and Shape magazine. *Journal of sport and social issues*, 18(1), PP 48-65.

the 'before' self" as it serves as a reminder of one's 'fatness' as a form of pathology¹⁰². Hence, the aim of a confessor is to be esteemed through the after shot that is touted as the ideal.

Having achieved her "ideal" body, when speaking about her experience of successful body transformation, Alivia utters: *"I understood myself only after I destroyed myself, and only in the process of fixing myself did I know who I really was. When you heal, people typically think of returning to how you were before your problems, but there is no going back. You do not merely recover but reinvent yourself. You become something completely different from what you were before"*. From this exceptionally motivational quotation one can clearly conclude that weight loss, with the aim of control over body desires that comes in conjunction, turned out to be an empowering experience for Alivia. Many dieters tend to feel this way when the stubborn kilograms finally disappear from their bodies advancing them closer to the aesthetic body ideal. On the one hand, the satisfaction might be linked to them feeling more worthy due to the persistent association of fit and thin to healthy and successful. On the other hand, dieting as a form of bodily askesis can be empowering and liberating in Foucauldian "care of the self" sense.

By taking a closer look onto Alivia's weight loss journey, it becomes more clear that in her case activities, that she performed in order to attain the body shape she wanted, were more of internalized disciplinary power techniques rather than „care of the self" practices. One of the main reasons being, that the whole time Alivia was guided by external food and exercise rules that were dictated to her by the impersonalized disciplinary authority – Steve Zim – her personal trainer. For instance, he completely demonized sugar: *"So, to me sugar is the worst thing. We have to cut sugar out to get the body to change. And it sounds like an easy thing to do, but you find sugar in a lot of things that you are eating"*. Depriving one's body of sugar completely seems like a major food restriction that could not have been come intuitively, albeit the fact the viewer is aware that this rule was established by Steve, the professional trainer. Hence, one may point out that Alivia is being governed by code-oriented morality, since she has adhered to several food rules in order to keep up with her diet and exercise regimen. She has not been either listening to her own body in the process, nor grounding her experience in her personal feelings and emotions. By implementing in real life the pieces of advice provided by the third party, she has almost become

¹⁰² Levy-Navarro, E., (2012). I'm the New Me: Compelled Confession in Diet Discourse. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 45(2), PP 340-356.

a mere “docile” body striving to fit into the norm represented by the aesthetic body ideal. In particular, she stopped eating sugar, consumed the allowed food according to her workout schedule, did resistance training with a coach and topped it all up with cardio. All these actions were performed by Alivia in order to achieve a certain body look that is not necessarily natural for her and it endorsed by popular culture.

Despite aforementioned arguments in favor of Alivia’s experience being more of a coercive one, she still suggests that *“It’s not only about losing weight ... It’s looking in the mirror and trusting yourself again, knowing that you conquered the unhealthy habits that shredded your ambition and excitement for life to pieces, the toxic choices that caused your body to ache, and your heart to cry”*. Dietary practices seem to be inspiring and feel liberating as they do resemble practices of freedom in Foucauldian sense, for a subject working on self-mastery, although being unaware of disciplinary constituent of their activities. Subject remains blind to the presence of the disciplinary authority or, at least, they do not treat it as such. This adds up to weight loss programs with personal coaching being so appealing to general audience.

As Cressida Heyes formulated this phenomenon: *“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”* ¹⁰³. Both practices of internalized disciplinary power and “care of the self” require theoretical knowledge and practical training for a subject to achieve certain level of control over one’s own body. Dietary practices considered, an individual must possess some knowledge of nutrition and exercise, as well as put such knowledge into practice on daily basis in order to succeed. One of the problems, that can be derived from the latter, lies in the external nature of the knowledge that governs the activities of an individual on a diet, who tends to ignore their own body impulses such as hunger cues, tiredness and fatigue or muscle pain. When the punitive project of body transformation is taken to extremes, one can start disregarding more concerning signs of body dysfunction such as constantly feeling cold, constipated and other outcomes of macro- and micro- nutrient deficiency. In the worst cases, an individual can develop disordered eating habits leading to an eating disorder.

¹⁰³ Heyes, C. (2006). Foucault Goes to Weight Watchers. *Hypatia*, 21(2), PP 126-149.

Research supports the argument and shows that dieters display a tendency toward excessive eating or even bingeing when constraints are removed. Among concomitant effects there is also heightened emotional responsiveness and cognitive disruptions, including distractibility and a focus on food and eating ¹⁰⁴. The most compelling data is provided by the classic psychological study of food restriction, the World War II study by Keys et al. To study the effects of starvation, presumably nondieting normal-weight men were asked to restrict their eating for 6 months to lose 25% of their initial body weight. The study was set up in a way that the men's food intake was progressively limited: in the beginning, the men were fed only 75% of their normal calorie intake, and, later, when their weight loss stopped, while they were consuming such an amount, their food was further restricted until a significant amount of weight was lost ¹⁰⁵.

These subjects were carefully observed over several months, and a few newly discovered psychological reactions were worth noting. Firstly, the subjects became highly fixated on food; they started collecting recipes, hanging pinup pictures of food, some of them even changed their career plans to food-related activities such as becoming a chef. Secondly, they started to become more and more irritable, which resulted in their consistent fights with each other and their partners. Thirdly, men seemed to lose interest in sex, and, overall, appeared increasingly apathetic. One of the most noticeable changes occurred after weight was back to normal and the study had ended: when they let the study participants to consume as much food as those men wanted, these previously normal, healthy eaters starting self-indulging when attractive, calorie-dense foods were at hand ¹⁰⁶. To add, they reported feeling obsessed with food and completely out of control of their eating: some even attempted to steal food in a store. Hence, food restriction appeared to produce binge eating in previously normal eaters.

Based on this study and multiple anecdotal stories shared by ex-dieters, one can conclude that despite eliciting feeling of control and empowerment in the moment – Alivia's statement is worth mentioning here: "*You do not merely recover but reinvent yourself. You become something*

¹⁰⁴ Polivy, J. (1996). Psychological consequences of food restriction. *Journal of the American dietetic association*, 96(6), PP 589-592.

¹⁰⁵ Keys, A., Brožek, J., Henschel, A., Mickelsen, O. and Taylor, H.L. (1950). The biology of human starvation (2 vols).

¹⁰⁶ Franklin, J.C., Schiele, B.C., Brozek, J. and Keys, A. (1958). Observations on human behavior in experimental semistarvation and rehabilitation.

completely different from what you were before” – in the end, constant food limitation and certain food group deprivation may lead to actually feeling extremely out of control, which is manifested in overeating or bingeing. Excessive food consumption, in turn, might result in weight regaining, and, if your moral worth is closely tied to the shape of your body or your success at controlling its desires, you will inevitably feel guilty and weak, which can instigate you to start dieting again. This might trigger the offset of the vicious circle of so called “yoyo” dieting, when one is stuck in a loop of repetitive actions and feelings. In Alivia’s YouTube video her own words seem to prove the point: “*I felt lost and confused because I failed so many times*” and “*When I am bingeing and eating... like... I feel a little bit powerless and weak*”.

What is more, according to another research, most human dieters do not appear to be particularly successful at depriving themselves — at least not successful enough to reduce their weight on any long-term basis ¹⁰⁷. In fact, persons whose weights fluctuate over time appear to have lower general well-being and eating self-efficacy and higher stress levels than “non-fluctuators” ¹⁰⁸. This argument does not fit into “care of the self” paradigm, since for diet to be liberating practice of freedom in Foucauldian sense, it should take advantage of and open up to more possibilities for the subject themselves. The studies provided above, on the contrary, demonstrate that, following external food related restraints, an individual typically starts suffering from cognitive disruptions that lead to their mind being preoccupied by thoughts about food.

To sum up, in Alivia’s story, so elaborately narrated in her YouTube video, diet culture’s disciplinary potential is clearly revealed. Mainly, disciplinary power is traced due to impersonalized presence of the coercive authority in the video: Steve Zim, Alivia’s personal trainer, establishes certain food rules and an exercise plan for the young woman to follow. During her body transformation, Alivia starts feeling more empowered. One of the reasons is that self-transformation, even initially started at the midst of power relations, includes several enabling points due to its resemblance to Foucauldian “care of the self” practices. Similarly to “care of the self” practices, body changes require some form of askesis, self-awareness and control, however,

¹⁰⁷ Heatherton, T.F., Polivy, J. and Herman, C.P. (1991). Restraint, weight loss, and variability of body weight. *Journal of abnormal psychology*, 100(1), P 78.

¹⁰⁸ Foreyt, J.P., Brunner, R.L., Goodrick, G.K., Cutter, G., Brownell, K.D. and St. Jeor, S.T. (1995). Psychological correlates of weight fluctuation. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 17(3), PP 263-275.

in contrast to Alivia's dietary experience, "care of the self" practices require from an individual to ground their experience in themselves and be guided by internal cues, while being aware of external rules. An individual must always check external principles against their inner feelings and thoughts.

Moreover, in Alivia's story the goal of her practices presents some extra controversy. She has not started her weight loss because of any health complications, in fact, her starting point seems to fit into the normal BMI range. The initial unsettlement with her physique is provoked by social construct of what is considered attractive, "ideal" and aesthetically pleasing. Therefore, by studying Alivia's case, one can notice how disciplinary power problematizes the sphere of life that might have not been questioned before, and aims at normalization, according to socially glorified standard of thin-and-fit body ideal, in that sphere too.

Case 2.

The second video that I will review is posted on another YouTube channel with a massive following of 1,1M subscribers – All Things Adrienne ¹⁰⁹. The channel belongs to Adrienne Houghton, an American singer, actress, and television host. On this channel she shares her tips and tricks on beauty, fashion, home decoration and entertaining. Hence, the topic of weight loss could not help but made it to one of her videos, which is very straightforwardly called "*My weight loss journey*" and has as many as 2,7M views as of now ¹¹⁰.

In this video Adrienne associates health with slimness a lot: "*I looked at myself in the mirror and I was just like: What are the things that I want to change? And one of those things was I want to be healthy, and I don't want to go on, like, a diet I want this to be a lifestyle*". She treats her physical shape as though it speaks volumes of her overall health, whilst, in fact, the weight of an individual and their overall health, despite having some correlation, are not directly interdependent. The book "*The obesity myth: Why America's obsession with weight is hazardous to your health*" by Paul Campos is extremely efficient at debunking the myth of the tight

¹⁰⁹ YouTube.com, channel: All Things Adrienne, from:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCE1FRQFAcRXE5KVp721vo9A> [15.06.2021].

¹¹⁰ My Weight Loss Journey, from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3m_OtYrebs4&t=5s

[15.06.2021].

correlation between one's weight and health by citing studies, which suggest that the health risks associated with increasing weight are relatively small, especially compared to those associated with, for instance, being poor. Those risks have a tendency to vanish when factors other than weight are accounted with. For example, overweight but active people's life expectancy is longer than such of slender but sedentary people, and similar to slender active people. Additionally, according to the book, there seems to be no satisfying evidence that significant long-term weight is beneficial to one's health, whilst so called yoyo dieting proves to be medically harmful. What is more concerning, the author writes that "*frequent dieting is perhaps the single best predictor of future weight gain*"¹¹¹. For that reason, one can argue that Adrienne's linking the way she looks to the state of her health is rather misinformed.

Further controversy occurs when Adrienne encourages her audience to "*forget about the results and focus on the goal of being healthy, and then the results will come in*". Adrienne seem to play with words and label her restrictive eating with the word "healthy". She does it several times during the video, underlining that her restrictive eating is not dieting but rather lifestyle, which seems to present some sort of concepts constitution. By doing so, Adrienne seems to mask diet culture's normalizing message that thin-and-fit equals attractive and healthy, whilst some extra weight and fat inevitably classify a body as disgusting, unhealthy and worth improving. Nevertheless, concealing diet culture's implication in normalizing by misleading use of the term "healthy" solely serves to intensify the normalizing impact.

Additional argument for the concept of "health" being used ambiguously by Adrienne is that in the aforementioned statement she suggests that as a result of focusing on being "healthy" one will inevitably see some positive weight loss results, which is not true for everyone in reality, unless you create a sufficient caloric deficit by either limitation of food intake or introduction of regular exercising schedule. In other words, unless you voluntarily make an effort to lose weight, it is highly unlikely that focusing on being "healthy" will help you achieve significant weight loss. Anyway, for my work the problematic aspect of Adrienne's statements is not the spread of quite misleading information, but rather influential individual's assemblage with the disciplinary

¹¹¹ Campos, P.F. (2004). *The obesity myth: Why America's obsession with weight is hazardous to your health*. Penguin: London.

authority on reiterating rules to live by in order to fit into the normalizing frames of a thin-and-fit body ideal.

Another linguistic evidence of punitive diet culture discourse dominance in Adrienne's narrative is division of food into two categories – good or bad -, and later association of those attributes with own moral qualities. Talking of some low-calorie snack alternatives, Adrienne says: “*these are my friends, and I love them very much, and they got me through when I wanted crappy snacks*”. Such food categorization is extremely common among dieters, who do not just intuitively learn what foods to consume and which to avoid, on the contrary, dieters are informed of “good” and “bad” food choices by nutritional science or the food production industry. Thereby, Adrienne - just like any other individual – proves to be immersed in social sphere, that is preoccupied by a vast web of power relations which are inseparable from a vast web of beliefs, since, according to Foucault, systems of power, whether governmental, academic, cultural, corporate, or scientific, are all justified and upheld by a complex web of beliefs generally accepted as “truth” or as “knowledge” by people of various ranks and roles within any particular context, including the context of health or dieting.

Dietary knowledge, being produced through research in nutritional sciences, cannot be separated from power relation and is affected by which viewpoints, utterances, and research agendas are included in or excluded from the domain of “truth” and “knowledge” in nutritional science at specifically given time. Whereas diet culture's pieces of advice tend to mimic knowledge produced by nutritional sciences, they are commonly interpreted in a very populist and concise way. Such interpretation presents an opportunity for further simplification to such food labels as “good” and “bad”, similar to Adrienne's contemptuous labeling of “*crappy snacks*”.

Below is a typical visual representation of very simplified, hence concerning, food labeling found on one of hundreds fitness blogs on the Internet:

Pic. 5:



Source: Khan Aesthetics Blog ¹¹²

Internalizing of such biased and extremely deficient piece of knowledge does not merely play a normalizing role but can lead to various mental health issues that restrictive eating can be a precursor of ¹¹³.

As it has been previously stated, both disciplinary power and “care of the self” technologies are tightly connected to knowledge and so called “truth games”. Although, the kind of knowledge that serves as a base is slightly different. In case of internalized disciplinary power – the knowledge is rooted in the data that was produced in the midst of power relations and can be used by

¹¹² Good Vs Bad Foods – The Nutritional Blueprint, from: <http://khan-aesthetics.com/good-vs-bad-foods-the-nutritional-blueprint> [15.06.2021].

¹¹³ Schaumberg, K., Welch, E., Breithaupt, L., et al. (2017). The Science Behind the Academy for Eating Disorders' Nine Truths About Eating Disorders. *European eating disorders review: the journal of the Eating Disorders Association*, 25(6), PP 432–450.

disciplinary authority to execute governance over bodies. In contrast, the knowledge in “care of the self” practices is largely constituted through thorough self-examination. “Care of the self” practices, according to Foucault, require deep knowledge of oneself alongside with acknowledgement of the acceptable rules of conduct: to take care of oneself, an individual is required to be aware of where ethics is connected to the game of truth.

In the video Adrienne seem to be equipped with both modes of knowledge: one that comes from within through self-observation, and another that is being presented as scientifically proven nutritional principles. She states: *“Ashapops are amazing! this is my favorite flavor - it comes in popped water lily seeds: 100 calories for this entire bag and it only has 17 carbs - dietary fiber – it is amazing”*. This line demonstrates Adrienne’s basic understanding of macronutrients, calories and overall products’ nutritional value, the type of knowledge that one can accumulate by studying scientific information about food and its properties. In the following statement Adrienne also proves to show some knowledge about her own body and its functioning: *“I do not eat bread, I do not eat pasta, I do not eat anything that is white refined carbs, like, that's just not good for me. I recognize that it makes me feel sluggish”*. One can underline that Adrienne’s refusal to consume bread is not entirely based on some external authority’s prohibition, but she is also governed by feelings of discomfort related to her eating certain products. In comparison to the first video and Alivia, who cut out sugar completely because Steve – her personal trainer – demonized it, Adrienne seems to be guided by internal cues, which complies with Foucauldian conceptualization of “care of the self” practice more.

It is no wonder then that, consequently, Adrienne also testifies of feeling empowered when her self-transformation journey has been approaching its endpoint: *“I absolutely can do this, it is possible it just takes self-discipline, and that makes me feel great knowing that it's something that I absolutely have control over”*. Such an utterance only highlights Foucault’s thesis that the growth of capabilities occurs in conjunction with the intensification of power relations. It seems contradictory that the very same practice that increases one’s capabilities by inciting self-transformation can at the same time normalize an individual and lessen them to a position of a dieter. The aspect of “care of the self” practice and its enabling and liberating potential can possibly serve as a satisfactory clue to resolve the contradiction.

Natalie Jovanovski in her pro-feminist book *“Femininities-Lite: Diet Culture, Feminism and Body Policing”* interprets empowering aspects of diet from a different perspective, criticizing

the entire tendency of portraying women as being enabled by dieting and its results, and suggesting, after Naomi Wolf, that diet is nothing but “*political sedative*”¹¹⁴. Jovanovski finds fault with the body transformation trend and its reliance on neoliberal and consumerist ideologies, and consequent application of feminist terminology typically associated with emancipation and empowerment to weight-loss practices. Jovanovski underlines that in the fashion and beauty arena feminist narratives are frequently used in discourses on self-improvement, signifying a shift in approach of how beauty and dieting discourses are marketed to appeal to women. Jovanovski goes on by stating that the purpose of adopting narratives of empowerment in diet discourses is to address women’s lack of trust in diet culture. This way, the discussion is currently centered around “*women’s [basic] right to be beautiful*” to distract from their need to adjust to the culturally acceptable aesthetic standards¹¹⁵. Lately, the newly feminist viewpoint on diet culture appeared, proposing that women are not the victims of it, on the contrary, diet culture is rather female-friendly and meets women’s needs for self-nourishing and healthy well-being.

To support this argument Jovanovski refers to Dubriwny who, being compliant with Jovanovski’s suggestion, describes a contemporary feminist figure as the vulnerable–empowered subject, whose body is directly vulnerable to poor health but who is, simultaneously, empowered as an individual to make the necessary interventions related to health. Dubriwny defines the vulnerable–empowered subject of contemporary health discourses as follows: “*As subjects who make choices, women are represented in discourses about their health as free to construct their own lives, to take responsibility for their bodies, and to craft better selves*”¹¹⁶.

Indeed, the transformation YouTube videos chosen for analysis in this chapter reflect Dubriwny’s account of the vulnerable–empowered subject. Nevertheless, not taking into consideration the critique from feminists’ side, from the standpoint of theoretical base of this work, Dubriwny’s positioning of a subject seems to disregard disciplinary implications of body transformation rhetoric, while advocating diet culture’s narratives that suggest individual moral self-evaluation according to their ability or disability to make “healthy” choices. Dubriwny’s

¹¹⁴ Wolf, N., (2013). *The beauty myth: How images of beauty are used against women*. Random House.

¹¹⁵ Lazar, M. M. (2009). Entitled to consume: Postfeminist femininity and a culture of post-critique. *Discourse and Communication*, 3(4), PP 371–400.

¹¹⁶ Dubriwny, T. N. (2012). *The vulnerable empowered woman: Feminism, postfeminism, and women’s health*. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press.

positioning of the subject does underline, though, the enabling moments of self-transformation which are reiterated multiple times by the heroines of YouTube videos under analysis. To illustrate, Adrienne says: *“Because when you recognize how strong your willpower is, and how strong your mind is to stop you from eating things or making great decisions, you recognize that that ends up being a common thread throughout every area of your life”*.

Thus, stating that dieting and body transformation is merely being marketed as empowering is quite biased, multiple accounts of both women and men suggest the contrary – the process of acquiring more knowledge of nutrition and workouts and implementing this knowledge into one’s life in order to transform one’s body, and, subsequently, lifestyle, can be counted as an empowering experience itself. In other words, this experience does not have to be marketed to the audience as enabling, in fact, it is enabling. According to Foucault, any intensification of power relations leads to more knowledge production that brings along increasing number of new skills and capabilities.

Another interesting aspect of Adrienne’s self-transformation that is worth mentioning for its resemblance to “care of the self” practice: her journey was not entirely dedicated to changes made to her body, but her mind and soul altogether. She states: *“For me this wasn't just, like, a body makeover, it was also... it was mind body and soul. So, I did what's called “first 15” - I don't know if you, guys, ever heard of it - you take 5 minutes to pray, 5 minutes to write and 5 minutes to read the word. I would wake up in the morning and I would pray, I would write while I was listening to like worship music”*. The way Adrienne describes this practice, it seems very similar to what Foucault conceptualizes as “care of the self” practices which are concentrated both on body and soul. What is more, diseases of the soul are thought by Foucault to present more of a threat as they are less perceptible than disorders of the body. Thereby, “care of the self” through purposeful processing of universal principles, including, supposedly, religious ones, is meant to recover the possibilities for autonomy and self-mastery, for them to become the base of freedom and fulfillment. In turn, more purposeful existence adds up to a sense of individual’s sense of belonging, as opposed to separation.

To conclude, in her video Adrienne, on the one hand, undeliberately strengthens diet culture discourse by reiterating some of its most controversial theses to her large audience. Having equated slenderness with health and labeling entire food groups as “bad” or “good”, Adrienne, unintentionally, unites with disciplinary authority and solely adds up to enhancing diet culture

discourse prevalence in our cultural space. On the other hand, one can find some techniques, executed by Adrienne, resembling to “care of the self” practices; she has not been merely centered around her body transformation but trained her mind through “first 15” morning activities too. During those activities, like Ancient Greeks, she was journaling and reminding herself of eternal life principles to be guided by. Additionally, while restricting certain products, she was not following external food rules, but rather tried to focus on personal preferences. Nevertheless, to my mind, Adrienne’s dependence on external narratives seem to be more dominant in her dieting experience for her weight loss journey to fall under the category of “care of the self” – liberating – practice.

Case 3.

The third video for analysis is one posted by Claudia Sulewski, who is an American-Polish lifestyle blogger with a following of 2,4M subscribers on YouTube. The video is titled “*How I lost Weight & My Body Confidence Journey*” and has been watched over 2,1M times¹¹⁷. From the very beginning the aforementioned video seems to stand at stark contrast to the videos from case 1 and case 2, as Claudia openly proclaims that the objective of the video is not to define her slightly heavier body from the beginning of her lifestyle changes as less beautiful or worthy in comparison to the thinner one, therefore, she does not share a typical full body “before and after” photos. She states: “*I don't want this video to feel like “this is what I looked like before and that was bad and that wasn't beautiful, and this is what I look like now” - both versions of myself are beautiful*”.

What is more significant for this work, she underlines: “*Beauty and self-confidence just go so much deeper than how you look on the outside. It is so much about how you feel in your body and feeling comfortable in your skin*”.

Her focus here is shifted from individual’s physique to one’s being at peace with themselves, suggesting that body shape does not define a human being, which draws her viewers away from diet culture’s narratives that tend to put aesthetically pleasing body on a pedestal and incline subjects towards striving for it regardless.

¹¹⁷ How I Lost Weight & My Body Confidence Journey, from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9L4udlH5E5A> [15.06.2021].

Overall, Claudia seems to put more emphasis on how she, personally, feels in her body, claiming that it is not the external beauty standards that force her to change but the internal need for self-transformation: *“Accepting that my body will always be changing was the first, like, freeing moment for me. The reason why this video felt important for me to make is because I look back on that version of myself - and it's not about how I looked or how I fit in clothes – but it was the relationship that I had with my body, and the way that I treated myself. And the amount of guilt that I would hold on myself - it was so consuming! I just felt my intentions were in the wrong place and I was doing things for the wrong reasons”*. Her intention seems to be not losing weight at all cost by following some external food rules and exercise plans, but rather reconnection with her feelings and emotions to find what suits her best. Such attitude to self-transformation cannot but remind of “care of the self” practice that is conceptualized around awareness of external rules but their adaptation to individual requirements. One’s personal efforts on achieving “ethics of control” cannot be completely autonomous from cultural context and socially acceptable immutable principles, however, to be liberating, those efforts must be grounded in individual.

Ethics, in Foucault’s conceptualization, is always on the level of the self. It is identified as regulating one's own behavior, recognizing oneself as the subject of personal actions, and employing sort of governmentality over oneself via self-regulation. Likewise, Claudia holds herself accountable for all the changes she has made to her lifestyle not merely to lose weight but also to provide sustainable nourishment to her body. For instance, in the course of her journey, Claudia realizes that even moderate consumption of alcohol does not sit well with her body, for that reason, she makes an effort in self-regulation and cutting alcohol off completely.

Additional changes were made to her diet too. She says: *“I really wanted to try taking dairy and red meat out of my diet. Both of those food categories just never sat well in my stomach: dairy would just break me out and make me gassy, and then red meat would just make me feel really like backed up and bloated because it would take longer for my body to digest”*.

Research shows that a higher intake of red meat is, in fact, associated with higher risks of heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and premature death, whereas lower red and processed meat intake generally involves lower health risks. Thus, general recommendation is to eat red meat in

moderation, approximately two or three servings per week ¹¹⁸. As for dairy products, they are recommended to be included in adults' diets, since they provide a number of essential nutrients, unobtainable on a dairy-free diet. Despite concomitant health benefits, some people have a tendency to avoid dairy products in their diet because of the popularity of beliefs that dairy might be detrimental to health, mainly in cases with weight management issues, osteoarthritis, lactose intolerance, rheumatoid arthritis, or cardiovascular disease ¹¹⁹.

Certainly, Claudia seems to be informed of aforementioned research on dairy and red meat, but it is worth highlighting that Claudia does her best in adapting external food regulating rules, that might be abused in diet culture discourse, to her personal needs. In her statements, she frequently describes her personal experience, emphasizing that she is aware of general recommendations but is rather guided by her inner feelings. To elaborate, I am not implying that Claudia exists independently from power relations net and is not affected by disciplinary power, because it is practically impossible if you live in a society. In fact, Claudia's knowledge on nutrition is inseparable from power, based on Foucauldian power/knowledge concept. What I am underlining here is that, despite being informed by some external nutritional principles, Claudia makes her food choices pervasively according to internal cues. By doing so, she remains the subject of her own conduct, which adds up to her flexibility when it comes to diet.

Freedom that is, according to Foucault, still attainable within certain limits, comes from an informed choice to take control over oneself. To establish control over one's conduct, an individual must be the subject of their actions. Disciplinary power, that partially governs through normalization, operates through similar techniques; one is not deprived of subjectivity, they rather exist in both modes – as an object and as a subject - due to the process of disciplinary power internalization. Typically, disciplinary power internalization happens without due awareness from the subject themselves, so that one keeps reproducing a set of actions that helps to approximate the norm. Consequently, the subject regulates themselves at the level of, what Foucault calls, code-

¹¹⁸ What's the beef with red meat? Harvard Health Publishing, from:

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/whats-the-beef-with-red-meat> [15.06.2021].

¹¹⁹ Rozenberg, S., Body, J. J., Bruyère, O., Bergmann, P., et. Al. (2016). Effects of Dairy Products Consumption on Health: Benefits and Beliefs--A Commentary from the Belgian Bone Club and the European Society for Clinical and Economic Aspects of Osteoporosis, Osteoarthritis and Musculoskeletal Diseases. *Calcified tissue international*, 98(1), PP 1–17.

oriented morality. The individual can choose to obey assigned laws to escape punishment but does have other choices simultaneously. Through code implementation, one is forming oneself as an ethical subject. Hence, Foucault does not view the subject as passive, just being regulated by rules, but rather draws one's attention to the way subject responds proactively to rules through self-adjusting.

Therefore, following diet culture narratives to some extent, all three young women – Alivia, Adrienne and Claudia - do not lose their subjectivity. They, somewhat, establish their relation to the food rules, and recognize to what degree this rule should be put into practice with intention to avoid punishment. Then a question inevitably arises: what might be the punishment in the context of dieting?

The answer to this question might be rooted in close association of thin-and-fit ideal with success and happiness. Media, anecdotal stories and our personal experience, for the most part, speak for the fact that a person's life opportunities are majorly affected by their physical appearance. From an everyman's viewpoint, it seems that attractive people enjoy plenty of perks, for instance, upon a first impression, good-looking people are judged as ones possessing a number of positive personality traits, such as intelligence and stability, in contrast to less attractive people. Such privileged position of good-looking people is even supported by research. For example, David Hamermesh in his book *"Beauty Pays"* demonstrates that it is more likely for attractive people to be get a job. When employed, in the workplace they also tend to be paid higher salary. When it comes to personal life, at the dating market attractive people are more likely to find better-looking spouses of higher status. Even for criminals, attractiveness can be a single factor for getting less strict sentences in court. Thus, appearance discrimination proves to be rather widespread, as it takes place in the workplace, dating market, and even in court system ¹²⁰.

This way, socially acceptable prejudice against less attractive people and fat-phobia reinforced by diet culture discourse, make it seem like falling out of the normal BMI range equals failure. In other words, the punishment for not following dietary rules is feeling deprived of opportunities to be successful. It means that the punishment itself might not be necessarily real for an individual to feel doomed unless they obey. In the matter of dieting, pervasively both

¹²⁰ Hamermesh, D. (2011). *Beauty Pays: Why Attractive People Are More Successful*. PRINCETON; OXFORD: Princeton University Press. [15.06.2021].

disciplinary authority and punishment are internalized, and exist at the level of the self. The self that engages in a constant confrontation with what their body desires. For that reason, in Case 3 YouTube video Claudia highlights how important it is not to be too prejudice to one's own body: *“At the end of the day, whatever works for you might totally not work for someone else. I'm not going to recommend you know you should have three meals a day or you should have six smaller meals a day - there are so many different diets and lifestyles that work for people and work for their schedules”*.

With such a statement she forces her audience to reconnect with themselves. Simultaneously, she also unconsciously emphasizes the objectiveness of our selves: one must present an object for self-observation and self-assessment to become an ethical subject through “care of the self” practices. Liberation, which appears more attainable within ethics-oriented morality, requires awareness: both of the self and of the social. When an individual deliberately takes time to acknowledge their state of mind, feelings, emotions, and compare them against what is expected on the level of social, then such an individual is significantly more flexible in their choice.

To sum up, while inevitably being immersed in the vast web of power relations, Claudia does an outstanding job of critically assessing external dietary principles and comparing them against her personal body requirements. Reconnecting with own body's senses requires treating oneself as an object of self-mastering practices and focusing on techniques that can potentially help to achieve tighter bond between body and mind. Therefore, the young woman's self-regulating techniques seem to be the most resemblant to “care of the self” practice, hence more adaptable and flexible. What is more, Claudia states to have accepted the fact that her body will be constantly changing throughout her life, which means that she might be less affected by the normalizing implication of thin-and-fit body ideal.

Conclusion

In conclusion, within the scope of contemporary diet culture this thesis has applied Foucauldian theoretical conceptualization of disciplinary power practices and “care of the self” practices to singular dieters’ experiences, shared in YouTube videos in the format of “My Weight Loss Journey”, in order to find out if dietary practices can be considered as mainly disciplinary or liberating (within Foucauldian conceptualization of “care of the self” practices).

The analysis of three cases in Chapter II shows that contemporary dietary practices seem to exemplify the paradox that Foucault outlined so well that disciplinary practices despite being normalizing are also enabling of new skills and capacities. Disciplinary implication of dietary practices is conveyed in normalizing prevalence of the thin-and-fit aesthetic body ideal in our social space. Through diet culture discourses, reinforced by influential individuals, including YouTube content creators, such an ideal is then strongly associated with health and success, while realistically being unattainable for many individuals. Popularity of various coercive dietary rules that are produced amid power relations in the form of knowledge or “truths” adds up to disciplinary potential of diet culture.

Nevertheless, in all the three cases reviewed in this thesis, dietary practices have proved to be empowering for the individuals involved. Presumably, one of the main reasons is that engaging in a diet requires certain knowledge and training, which results in self-transformation. Self-mastery and control achieved through diet resembles Foucauldian “care of the self” practices, as body alteration requires some form of askesis and self-awareness in the frame of code-oriented morality, which posits an individual, simultaneously, as a subject to the external diet rules, and as an object of self-regulation.

Despite the enabling moments, most contemporary dietary practices should not be considered as liberating in Foucauldian sense due to the external nature of the norm that inclines individuals to follow a diet. Additionally, engagement in a typical dietary practice seems to open up more possibilities to an individual only in the beginning, while, in the end one, might be caught up in a vicious circle of weight loss and regain.

In the light of Foucauldian conception of liberating practices, Case 3 proves to be the most promising, as the heroine of the video emphasized the importance of grounding her experience in

herself and her own feelings, not external dietary rules. Alongside, she has also pointed out that weight loss is not the intention of her self-transformation, she has been rather focused on finding the balance for her body and mind. Therefore, the practices that have led to her lifestyle change and accompanying weight loss seem to be more resemblant of Foucauldian “care of the self” practices with more potential of being liberating.

Therefore, I suggest focusing on possibilities for alteration of contemporarily popular dietary practices to become more liberating in Foucauldian sense as potentially intriguing scope of future research.

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