The Other Side of Weight Loss:
A Lacanian Autoethnography of Weight-anxiety

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Abstract

This thesis critically re-thinks the organisation of the weight loss industry using a psychoanalytic framework derived from the work of Jacques Lacan, including his discourse theory. Further, I develop critical methodology by focusing on my own experiences and culture. I do this by gathering and analysing autoethnographic data. The main findings of this thesis occur in three broad topic areas. First I re-conceptualise the unconscious processes of the weight-loss subject and subsequently re-focus on the weight loss industry's unconscious target: anxiety. Second I re-think the gender of the weight-anxious subject, moving past biology and hegemony to think psychoanalytically about those subjects who identify as weight-anxious. Third I tackle the ethics of the wider weight loss industry, critically analysing its capitalistic focus and suggesting instead an ethics based on the desire of the weight-anxious subject. Finally I attempt to look at my thesis in reflection, by concluding in line with Lacan's four discourses, finishing as the psychoanalyst might by placing the thesis on the couch.

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Finally, thanks also to the Massey University Doctoral Scholarship and the College of Business Doctoral Scholarship for funding my thesis. It would have been a long and painful process without this support.

The Massey University Human Ethics Committee has given approval for this project, their letter is attached as appendix A.

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1. Introduction

This thesis is an autoethnography, so I want to start with a story:

In 2006 over a period of about 4 months I lost a lot of weight, in the vicinity of 40kgs. This was a strange event for me, as usually I fluctuated in my weight loss attempts. I would grow increasingly upset about how fat I was and then make a short concerted effort, drop a small amount of weight and subsequently gain it again. But in 2006 something changed; specifically on advice from my GP I took a weight-loss medication called Reductil (which is no longer available in New Zealand). The impact of this drug was sudden, I lost my appetite and my metabolism was altered to encourage my body to burn more energy for longer. The weight loss was dramatic, in the first month alone I lost about 20kgs, for a while averaging about 5kgs a week.

I was ludicrously happy with this progress, I felt for the first time like I could see the 'real' me coming out from under the cover of fatness - emerging into the light to live forever more with the 'normal' sized people. Everyone was joyful (accept perhaps for my still-fat friends and family) and anyone who knew the situation would take it upon themselves to tell me how much happier and healthier I must be.

Time passed, I reduced the Reductil, and then stopped it altogether. My appetite slowly came back, and I was worried about my metabolism returning to the 'old andy' so I became vigilant. I counted every calorie, measured my exercise and

balanced the books everyday. I weighed myself every morning and evening, and analysed why the results were different (good or bad). At least once a week I would exercise to the point of moderate dehydration and weigh myself to get the thrill of a low-weight appearing on the digital readout. The scales and calorie counters were my gospel.

After a while cracks started to appear in the system. By this stage I was a vegetarian and alcohol-free (meat and beer equaled calories for me) and I was struggling to incorporate my new regime into everyday life. I avoided eating away from home if I could, and began to starve myself before functions that I had to attend. My wife was frustrated that I was always out running or exercising and I was beginning to wear out my dogs!

My worst fear was weight-gain. My wife used to say 'would it be so bad if you were to be a bit heavier'? which would send me into an anxious tailspin, though I couldn't explain why. (Research Diary, 13-10-2011)

It is the anxiety in the final paragraph above that drove me in the direction that I pursue in this thesis, this is an anxiety that exists regardless of weight lost or weight gained, I term it 'weight-anxiety' – it is the subject of my thesis.

Critical researchers looking at the effect of the weight-loss industry have tended to use discursive models, usually courtesy of Foucault or his followers. This way of understanding the 'subject' of the weight-loss industry, which plays an important role (see for instance Cressida Heyes's important work 'Foucault goes to Weight Watchers' (Heyes, 2006)), for me does not adequately explain how the weight-loss industry uses the

function of weight anxiety as means of generating its profits. This is not how previous critical studies of the weight-loss industry have proceeded; instead it is more usual for them to focus on the 'discourses' that drive the industry's message and corrupt consumers into action. What they overlook is the unconscious mechanisms that operate on a subject's desire; generating, maintaining or exacerbating weight-anxiety. To approach this I have turned to psychoanalysis as a means of interpreting the dogmatic and uncanny language of the unconscious, where desire and anxiety rule.

It is specifically the uncanny and dogmatic nature of language that allows a psychoanalyst to rustle around in a subject's unconscious. The dogma of our unconscious provides highly structured routines that govern the way we live our lives; these predefined and acceptable routes of language guide our social relationships strictly. However when this dogma fleetingly collapses we experience something of the uncanny. We are unnerved when language does not work smoothly, when we experience slips of the tongue, become lost for speech, mislay meaning during a conversation or use perculiar turns of phrase. Analysing both the dogmatic structure of unconscious language and the uncanny rejections of this dogma provide a pathway into understanding how a subject's unconscious experiences the weight-loss industry.

The art and science of promoting weight loss is big business. This business has been operating for many decades, but since the late 1970s, has boomed to the point that estimates put the total U.S. monetary spend on weight loss activities in 2009 at more than

58.6 billion U.S. dollars[1]. This works out to just over $190 for every man, woman and child in the United States.

The target market of this industry is not difficult to pin down; it is those people for whom weight is 'an issue'. That is, those people who worry about their weight on the scales and what they look like and subsequently attempt to change this through some type of engagement with the wider weight loss industry. I call these people anxious weight loss consumers. I specifically chose the term 'anxious' when naming this group to refocus the attention from weight reality to weight anxiety, as this latter concept is at the heart of the success of the wider weight loss industry.

I am a member of this group; I suffer from weight anxiety. I can track a conscious memory of being anxious about weight back to 1991, when I was 13 years old. Since 1991 weight has been constantly on my mind, my weight reality changed regularly (most commonly known as 'yo-yo dieting') through until 2006 when my body lost more than 40kgs and stabilised in a weight range. My weight anxiety however has continued essentially unabated, though perhaps more sophisticated, in that it now appears to be somewhat more obviously detached from my weight reality.

Through my own experiences I began to see the wider weight loss industry not as just a repertoire of consumer products, services and information designed for the weighty to sample in their conscious rational attempts to lose weight but also as an industry made buoyant and profitable by unconscious general anxiety attached to body weight. It is not only the weight loss industry, trading in the conscious and rational, but also the weight

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[1] http://www.marketdataenterprises.com/FullIndustryStudies.htm#USWeight10thEdition

anxiety industry, trading in the unconscious and irrational. It is this second element that I explore in this thesis.

In the early stages of my project I was keen to focus my attention specifically on men's issues within the domain of weight anxiety. In some ways I have done this within, many of the references I make are to comments that men have made or are about men. That said I have come to conclusion that it is foolhardy to try and distinguish between men's issues and women's issues with regard to weight anxiety; they are inextricably intertwined. Gender is not a simple dialectic and as a concept it certainly plays a major role in the development of the argument in this thesis.

As I have said earlier my theoretical and philosophical position comes courtesy of psychoanalysis. Primarily I draw from the work of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Through Lacan's work I engage with psychoanalysis as a theoretical foundation. I attempt to focus Lacanian psychoanalysis both on the industry of weight anxiety that pervades the world but also on my 'self', specifically my unconscious desire.

It will be clear from this short introduction alone that my own life and experiences play a pivotal role in the gathering of data, analysis, discussion of results and conclusions I present in this thesis. I have chosen to embark on a methodology of autoethnography in an attempt to capture and document 'me', my culture and how the industry of weight anxiety influences both. In chapter two I detail this methodology and how I see it operating alongside Lacanian psychoanalysis. This chapter includes a discussion of what I see as the 'better ethics of autoethnography' and the various forms of autoethnographic

data collection. It also discusses the role and function of 'interpretation' in psychoanalytic studies.

Lacanian discourse theory is a major influence in my thesis. Throughout the remainder of my writing I work with Lacan's four discourses as they construct various authorial subject positions that speak my subjectivity and 'emerge' at different points for different reasons. In chapter three I give an overview of these discourses, the result is the chapter becomes a cross between a framing piece that gives context to the rest, and a data and results chapter as I present and analyse some of my own experiences and interactions with others.

Various literatures have influenced the development of my thesis in some way. These literatures are wide ranging, they extend from the science of weight gain/loss to the clinical psychology of eating disorders to the influence and reach Lacan has had in the field of organisational studies, to the sociology of body image in men, to specific psychoanalytic studies of eating issues and anxiety. The review of much of this literature appears in chapter four, which has the distinctive style of a product of the discourse of the university and is intended to demonstrate Mastery in the manner required for a doctoral argument.

In my first results and discussion chapter entitled 'The *Jouissance* of the Lard(er): desire and anxiety in the weight loss industry' I set out the relationship between two key concepts that I theorise as circulating within weight anxiety; *jouissance* and desire. In this chapter I attempt to trace the outline of the unconscious and irrational aspects of the industry of weight anxiety and to show how traumatic weight loss attempts can be for

individuals and society generally. This chapter has also appeared as an article in the journal *Culture & Organization* a copy of this article is included as appendix B.

In the second results and discussion chapter, entitled 'Perhaps fat is not a feminine issue: masculine fat in the phallic-symbolic order', I tackle gender. I first present a discussion entitled 'am I a man?' that aims to track down different ways of conceptualising masculinity and contrasting these with the very different approach to gender suggested by Lacan. I then undertake an analysis of Susie Orbach's famous text *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (1978) on two interwoven levels. The first considers the concept of 'bodily alienation' presented by Orbach as a fat woman's problem and re-reads this through Lacan's logic of the phallus, specifically considering how a 'man' like me can experience the same alienation. This ties in with the theory of phallic *jouissance* I present in chapter five. The second part of chapter six takes a broader view looking at Orbach's general project against patriarchy to analyse from a psychoanalytic perspective the impact this has had on the subject of the fat man. This chapter is written in part from the position of the hysteric (see chapter three) in that it questions the Master, represented by Orbach, asking "what is wrong with me. I am a man but after reading your book I feel more like a woman?"

In the final results and discussion chapter, entitled 'the ethics of the weight loss industry'. I assume a political stance and (un)ashamedly write from the position of the Master. Throughout my project I have formed strong arguments – what a Lacanian psychoanalyst might call 'Master signifiers' – which I think represent new foundations that my imaginary has used to construct an identity as a now more 'normal-sized' man who nonetheless still suffers from strong weight anxiety. These opinions include ideas about

why the existing weight-loss industry is ethically moribund but capitalistically successful. Chapter seven presents these ideas and then contrasts them with what I see as a more ethical weight-loss industry, one built on the ethics of desire. This chapter has strong roots in chapter two, particularly the first section of chapter two that explains my perspective on ethics in autoethnography.

In the final chapter I attempt to suture my thesis together into a cohesive entity. In this task I can confidently claim to have created, as Hoedemaekers so aptly describes, a "productive failure" (2007, p. 17): that is a summary that stays true to my psychoanalytic framework and methodology, that identifies the important conclusions I have uncovered when trying to answer my research questions, but also a summary that does not overlook the lack that exists central to all subjectivity, and the consequent failure of knowledge to create complete cohesion. The structure in this chapter follows broadly the structure of chapter three. I start by summarising the contributions of my thesis from the position of the discourses of the master and university; I then contradict this with the voice of the hysteric. In the last part of this final chapter I attempt to occupy the position of the analyst, using the text of my thesis as discourse from the analysand and offering reflective interpretations of this discourse.

Going through the process of this thesis has been a life changing experience for me. Coming to 'understand' the form and function of weight-anxiety for me personally and theorising how this works to structure the weight loss industry within society has been a privilege. I hope my reader (the Other) enjoys the story as much as I (*moi*) enjoyed writing it.

2. Methodology and Method

I typically tend to describe my methodology as a Lacanian autoethnography, which seems to have inspired quite a bit of concern and intrigue among my academic colleagues and reviewers. For instance a senior professor in my department commented after a presentation that I instead might consider describing my project as a Lacanian auto-discourse analysis or something similar. I think his concern related to my appropriation of a disciplined area of study – that is ethnography. This concern is interesting and anxiety provoking for me because it calls into question the theoretical grounding I use to claim a position from which to speak. But I chose to stand my ground and continue to claim my methodology as autoethnography; partly this is because the discipline of ethnography has much to offer my project, and partly because my project has a role as a critic of the very idea of a 'disciplined methodology' such as ethnography. In this chapter, I defend my claim by discussing the theoretical basis underpinning my chosen approach and the process I have used to generate and analyse my data. In doing this I will talk at some length about psychoanalytic concepts in relation to autoethnography – particularly Lacan's theorisation of subjectivity and self-hood. I begin with a particularly important paper, on the question of autoethnographic method, which provides a useful target for discussion.

In 2006 Susanne Gannon published an article intriguingly entitled "The (Im)Possibilities of Writing the Self-Writing: French Poststructural Theory and Autoethnography" (Gannon, 2006). This is her introduction to this paper:

"Poststructural theories problematize taken-for-granted humanist notions of the subject as capable of self-knowledge and self-articulation. By troubling positivist research practices and disciplinary boundaries, poststructural theories simultaneously provide a rationale for incorporating the personal into research. The body, the emotions, and lived experience are texts to be written and to be read in autoethnography" (p. 474)

Gannon discusses four main French poststructuralists in her article: Foucault, Barthes, Derrida and Cixous. The theory is that approaching autoethnography from the perspective of poststructuralism the researcher can 'trouble' traditional ways of doing research. My intent is show how Lacan's ideas can be used similarly to those on Gannon's list to achieve a similar end: In effect to show how conducting an autoethnography along a poststructurally psychoanalytic pathway can also do the dual role she describes above, to trouble traditional (auto)ethnographic research practices and in doing so provide a 'rationale for incorporating the personal into research'.

Gannon also identifies issues that sit at the very heart of contemporary autoethnographic research practices, she states that "much autoethnographic work leaves the speaking self relatively untroubled in the text" (2006, p. 477) and goes on to argue for:

"[A]n explicit and disruptive poststructural autoethnography, for deconstructive textual practices that represent and trouble the self at the same time… These texts will invert binary categories such as emotional/rational, personal/theoretical, social/individual, and they will collapse these categories into one another without

abandoning any of the frames available for thinking and being in the world"

(2006, p. 477).

I think what Gannon is asking for within these words is a type of autoethnography that reaches past one of its most common critiques; that is autoethnography is essentially 'me-search'. This criticism speaks to the body of autoethnographic work that often leaves the author untroubled in their authorial role, as Gannon points out. These texts tell stories that are often fascinating or heart-wrenching and that add value to the (generally) positivist literature by humanising concepts that other academic methods often look past or discard. The problem is that the 'me-searchers' often purport to really 'know' their self, to understand their dilemma/trauma and in the most extreme cases to reach untroubled conclusions about their past, present and future. In direct contrast to this in my autoethnographic approach I am actively aiming to trouble the author of this thesis, which is the main point of chapter three – to view my self and my relations (conscious and unconscious) through each of the social bonds described by Lacan's four discourses.

As a consequence this chapter and my thesis generally ends up being something of a risk taking venture: a play-off between a legitimating device that is required by the discourse of the university and a dissenting piece, reacting as the hysteric does, to the failures of the university's attempt to know the truth. In relation to this chapter I am making every effort to meet the requirements of the organised 'thesis' by producing a neat, contained and theoretically tight chapter on methodology and methods but I also encourage the consistent voice of the hysteric as I confront the 'truth' of the university with my impossible and unknowable desire. This hysterical voice speaks from within the confines

of the requirements of the university by appropriating ideas such as Gannon's which undermine the surface author of the chapter – me as a student of the university.

This chapter is separated into three main parts. To start I am going to tackle the ethics of autoethnography – as a discipline autoethnography is relatively new, and seems to be growing in popularity. This has inspired several recent papers on the issues of ethics when telling one's own story and this first section will contrast two of these contributions when demonstrating my own perspective on the ethics of autoethnography. In the second section I will undertake a detailed look at the use of psychoanalytic research practices and Lacanian subjectivity as methodology. The aim here is to set the scene for how I have gone about collecting and analysing my data. The final section describes the data collection process in detail by looking at the three areas from which I have sourced data.

2.1. On the ethics of a Lacanian autoethnography

In this section I want to summarise how I understand ethics to operate in a Lacanian autoethnography. Recently a flurry of autoethnographies has emerged into the academic sphere; it is clearly a popular emerging qualitative technique (Tolich, 2010). Any new technique must be subjected to the rules and regulations of the regime within which it attempts to gain ground – for autoethnography this regime is governed by the discourse of the university as this applies to 'qualitative research'. Some of these rules and regulations do not sit easily with respect to autoethnography, the processes and practices of research ethics is one of these. Recently two articles have been published on ethical issues and autoethnography. The first I cited above is by Martin Tolich and provides 'ten foundational guidelines for autoethnographers', the second is by Elizabeth Dauphinee and provides an altogether different approach to thinking about the ethics of

autoethnography. I am going to start with Dauphinee's article and particularly her description of how she 'heard' a conversation with one of her informants, recorded in a footnote:

"I did not record Stojan Sokolovic´'s words that night. I have written here my *impression* of what he said to me; the feeling it left with me that I had failed incontrovertibly. Perhaps some scholars would charge my 'methodology' as suspect, but I invite anyone who has ever interviewed another human being to dare say that she herself has not served as the sole interpreter of the significance of words captured on tiny little audiocassettes and manipulated them to fit carefully into the text she has crafted around the interview – or the text which has itself crafted the interview and the interview's content. We craft these statements to serve our own purposes – we tease them out in ways that serve us – to underwrite and legitimise our own intellectual projects and projections. I do not pretend to have spoken for Stojan Sokolovic´ – instead, I have rendered the substance of what I heard in his words, what it meant for my scholarship, and for my ability to be responsible. I have rendered what I heard in the charge – and so the translation is mine (as all translation invariably is and will ever be). I make no apologies for this. It is the state in which all of us who write necessarily find ourselves" (Dauphinee, 2010, p. 801, footnote 4).

In her text Dauphinee does an impressive job of representing how Stojan Sokolovic´'s words found a home within her subjectivity. For me this is a fine example of ethical autoethnography as she is making no attempt to say 'this is what Stojan Sokolovic´ believes' but is instead describing how his articulated beliefs find a home in her

subjectivity as researcher. You can feel Stojan Sokolovic´ in her text; you have an impression of him just as you develop an impression of someone from a physical description – what is more powerful, more legitimate and *more ethical* is the feeling you develop about Elizabeth Dauphinee as the subject of the research. Further on in her article Dauphinee directly confronts what I would call the legitimating power that is the discourse of the university, she says: "The academic gaze is an all-encompassing gaze. It seeks to make sense of everything it encounters and, more significantly, to *master* what it encounters" (2010, p. 806). To me this is explicitly de-veiling the master signifier that drives the discourse of the university:

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \xrightarrow{} // \frac{a}{\$}$$
$$U$$

In the position of truth the mastery demanded by the university *already* knows what it then purports to want to know. The sense-making is completely defined by the literature that has gone before and the voice that does not fit is the voice that is passed over (my argument is that this is the voice of the unconscious). Autoethnography, she argues, accomplishes something different; it focuses "attention on the relationship of the self to the world that is investigated. In this sense, it is not an appropriation of others… but rather a reflexive awareness of the self as a perpetrator of a certain kind of violence in the course of all writing and all representation – a violence, incidentally, that cannot be avoided" (p. 806). This analysis of the worth of the method resonates with me, primarily because in Dauphinee's approach she is working around the rules and regulations of her

discipline in what seems to me to be a classic hysterization of the discourse of the university.

Martin Tolich's paper is framed around scholarly concern, specifically scholarly concern for how the 'other' is treated in any autoethnographic text. The question he addresses in his paper is: "how the rights of the "other" in autoethnography are weighted against the interests of the self when the starting point of research is one's own sociological imagination and is likely to involve others" (2010, p. 1). This is certainly a valid and reasonable question to be asking for any researcher; Tolich approaches this question as something of an academic exercise that needs to be subjected to, rather than liberated from, the legitimating power of the discourse of the university. My argument is that the question (how should we treat the 'other'?) is in fact a hysterical question and if treated as such, like Dauphinee does, we reach a more useful and importantly a *more ethical* position. I will explain this in more detail at the end of this section – but first more on Tolich and the discourse of the university.

The reason that I consider Tolich's perspective on ethics and autoethnography to be a typical product of the discourse of the university is the absolute adherence his analysis and conclusions have to the ethics of the market, enacted in his work as the ethics underpinning the International Research Boards (IRBs). To begin exploring the specifics of this in more detail I want to borrow a quote from Cormac Gallagher, a psychoanalyst and long-time translator of Lacan's work. In the conclusion to his paper on the background of seminar XVII Gallagher quotes from Jean Clavreul's book '*Le désir et la loi*':

Our time, which has witnessed the birth of psychoanalysis, is one in which the discourse of the Master has achieved complete success. It brings with it an ethic of the Good and of commodities, but it also produces an ever more severe segregation with regard to its minorities. The mad, the addicts, the delinquents and all those who do not participate in a competitiveness that has been exalted into a principle, confront our society with problems that it resolves in the same way as it deals with industrial or radioactive waste.

Psychoanalysis takes this remainder, these symptoms, into account . . . It is based on an experience inaugurated by Freud, and takes care to ensure that Knowledge will not be an obstacle to the emergence of Truth. It is an *ethic of the Subject. . .* (Gallagher, 2002, p. 21)

The remainder that Clavreul here is pointing to is the ethical position of psychoanalysis – as ethic of the subject, rather than ethic of the Good. The 'Good' is what Tolich is creating in his paper; he takes the stories that autoethnographers tell and uses the discourse of the university's Knowledge to analyse, categorise and criticise, in other words to *subject* them with 'the new tyranny of knowledge' that tells us the correct way to do research in a university. In this task he is uniquely successful, he creates a compelling (master)piece of Knowledge direct from the mouth of the university that I imagine will be extremely appealing to the swath of PhD students flocking to join the autoethnographic revolution. Tolich's contribution will possibly become the ethical bar by which fresh autoethnographic researchers' will approach this newly subject-ed discipline.

My problem is the ethic that lies at the root of Tolich's perspective. An alternative is the ethic of the subject, which I will develop in some detail in chapter seven in relation to the ethics of the weight-loss industry; here I want to consider just one example that would challenge Tolich's approach along the lines of the ethic of the subject. In part four of his paper he offers ten guidelines that he hopes offer "a clear pathway for those approaching an autoethnography" as although the "autoethnographer might have rights to his or her story… so do the others mentioned in the text" (Tolich, 2010, p. 9). The first of these guidelines is designed to 'protect' the aforementioned 'others' – it reads: "Respect participants' autonomy and the voluntary nature of participation, and document the informed consent processes that are foundational to qualitative inquiry". It seems almost impossible to argue with this rational statement, but I want to pry it open and think a little more critically about, at least, its first part. It talks of 'participants' and their assumed autonomy and the importance of making them understand that they can participate voluntarily. In chapter five I offer as an autoethnographic excavation a story about my family's Christmas dinner experiences when I was growing up. In this I mention my parents, my brother and a few other family members. The story I tell is uniquely my own, my construction of events that we all were present to *at that time*. It is not possible to untangle an autonomous individual from this experience, either me or another family member as each subject took part only in relation to the other subjects present. There are no autonomous participants from which to gain consent. In addition enforcing a 'voluntary nature of participation' is particularly troublesome. One is not voluntarily part of a family; we cannot disengage from the relationship in such a way that would allow any volunteering (as understood by the discourse of the university) to occur.

The reason that autonomy and voluntary participation are not often contested in research processes resides in the nature of the researcher-researched relationship. If I had pursued a more typical in-depth interview strategy in an attempt to answer my research questions I would have shelved my personal relationship with the topic (at least on the surface) and instead focused on the participants. In this scenario autonomy and voluntary participation are benign concepts. If the researcher does not know the participants socially then it is easy to coat the relationship with the veneer of autonomy, and voluntary participation becomes perfunctionary. It is my argument that Tolich's description of ethics have become the status quo for qualitative research precisely because of the banality of the concepts in the typical researcher-researched relationship. Autoethnographers need to reject the façade of autonomy and voluntary participation that makes a mockery of the relations between subjects. It is patently ridiculous to suggest that I ask a third party to approach my family for consent, just consider the harm that would result from that polarising betrayal of familial relations. What autoethnographers (and I would argue, all qualitative researchers) need is a different ethic, one based on the subject.

The ethic of the subject that Clavreul discusses above opens an avenue to consider Tolich's guidelines in a radically different way. The subjects in my family story are not the same subjects as the people who exist today. What my Mother or brother would have said/done then is not what they would say or do now. In this way by telling and analysing and reflecting on this family Christmas story I open the door to re-signification, by me and by the Other. If deemed risky in terms of potential harm by Tolich, the risk is insignificant in comparison to the harm that would befall my relations if I asked a third party to gain (the façade of) 'permission'. Tolich's ethics are clearly those of the

university, based on the ethics of the minimal liberal subject who seems to be found in the singular, live human being. These ethics screen out the historical location of subjectivity, ignoring the dead, the past, and the multiple – the larger units of human subjectivity. So it makes sense for Tolich to suggest inserting a third party between a daughter and her mother to gain 'voluntary consent', as under this system of ethics, these people only exist in the now. My argument is that the harm this suggestion could cause is relational, in that by inserting a someone in the space between a mother and daughter, Tolich enforces the now, but crucially outcasts the past. As the unconscious does not adhere to the same timeline as Tolich's IRBs, the past is as now as now. By following the ethic of the subject, rather than the ethic of the Good I argue that I am being ethical in a sense that Tolich might not appreciate.

It would be fair to say that moving from Dauphinee's text to Tolich's text is something of an experiential shift. The change you experience when comparing the texts is where the power of the comparison achieves its true worth when considering ethics, as it is the movement between discourses where the analyst potentially emerges, as Dominic Hoens explains in the following passage:

> This can explain the famous but obscure sentence from Seminar XX: "There is some emergence of analytic discourse with each shift from one discourse to another"… Put differently, the analytic discourse allows one to confront the origin of speech (the point where the subject gets represented in its disappearance) and as such allows one to be engaged in discourse (Hoens, 2006, p. 94).

Let us, for a moment, assume that Tolich's text is basically representative of the discourse of the university (as I argued above) and that Dauphinee's text basically representative of the discourse of the hysteric:

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \xrightarrow{} \frac{a}{\cancel{S}} \qquad\qquad \frac{\cancel{S}}{a} \xrightarrow{} \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$
$$\text{U} \qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad \text{H}$$

By contrasting these texts and seeing the inherent collapse of Tolich's argument under the incessant questioning of Dauphinee's hysteric perhaps an ethical pathway emerges, one based on the ethics of desire. The origin of Tolich's 'speech on the ethics of autoethnography' is the university – as author-subject he disappears as he becomes represented by the legitimating force of the university, his knowledge (S_2) is revealed as driven by the master signifier (S_1) that masquerades as truth (the IRBs lists are good examples of this), and the desire of the subject (a) is bombarded with the truth (ten foundational principles emerge) as the subject slips away under the bar. The origin of Dauphinee's 'speech on the ethics of autoethnography' is in contrast her hysterical position – as author-subject she disappears when she becomes represented by her desire (a) and her resulting text demonstrates her vulnerability as she questions how the university undertakes its business (the hysteric addresses the master signifier - S_1). By moving between these positions in my own discussion I think that a moment of analysis emerges, providing space for an ethical autoethnography that does not become solely subjected to the discourse of the university and instead also addresses the subject from the position of desire:

$$\frac{a \longrightarrow \mathbb{\$}}{S_2 \;/\!/\; S_1}$$
$$A$$

In actively criticising Tolich's approach to theorising ethics in autoethnography I am not attempting to absolve myself of any ethical responsibility concerning my data, I am however making every attempt to follow the ethics of desire, so for example I felt uncomfortable publishing my family Christmas experiences without discussing these with my brother. After he read my story and my analysis he responded by saying that his experience of these events was completely different, and he didn't remember certain things happening in the way I had described. He also expressed concern about my intention to show our Mother as this would upset her. As a result of discussing this with my brother I decided I would show my Mother, as I felt strongly that I should. I upset her, but less than my brother predicted I would, and moved on. I could describe the freedom that I and my Mother may have found by doing this act – the ability to talk somewhat openly (though perhaps anxiously!) about food and fat for the first time, etc… but, other than this brief mention, it is not autoethnographic data that interests me. My actions are not unethical when as a subject, using and analysing my story, as I do in chapter five, is following the ethics of desire.

By following the ethics of desire I am heavily invested in Lacanian subjectivity, therefore in the next section I outline Lacan's theory of the subject and discuss how Lacanian psychoanalysis can be operated as method in conjunction with autoethnography.

2.2.   The Lacanian subject and psychoanalysis as method

At its essence psychoanalytic study is the study of the unconscious which, for Lacan, is structured like a language. A subject's unconscious learns its trade by experiencing the Symbolic as reflected by the Other and uses this system of signification to communicate. As such research data for Lacan and indeed all psychoanalysts and psychoanalytically minded researchers must be our language; our data is found both in the discourse within and the discourse we share – but particularly it is the uncanny parts of discourse that intrigue, as Arnaud & Vanheule describe:

> The Lacanian assumption, that the unconscious too is to be situated within this universe of language, implies that the study of it comes down to a study of the logic and the structure of people's discourses. More specifically, interest is taken in the breaches and twists in people's speech, and the unconscious is regarded as equal to the unanticipated and surprising moves discourse makes. It comes down to our stumbling in the use of language, to the slips in our speech and to the gaps that our discourses contain, but is also there where we fail to act in the way we anticipated (Arnaud & Vanheule, 2007, p. 361).

But discourse, either that within or between subjects is not situated independently of our social and cultural inheritance – when we use language we unconsciously enact our cultural situation (the Symbolic), and it is this enacting of the Symbolic that interests me, this is why I refer to autoethnography: the 'ethno' refers to the enacting of the Symbolic which is broader than specific instances of individual discourse – it is also about broader discursive movements – such as the 'healthy' discourse that I refer to often in my thesis. So data in a Lacanian autoethnography includes my language and the discourse I share

with those in my ethnographic sphere. To analyse this data we[2] interpret the language, either our own or others to pick those instances that question or throw doubt on truth and knowledge when considering the organisation of fat, fatness and men's bodies. It is to this tricky notion of interpretation that I now turn.

Interpretation in psychoanalysis is rather important. Many would argue that it is in fact the work of the analyst – to interpret the analysand's language by offering language of their own. Different flavours of psychoanalysis see different outcomes of this work; I am interested particularly in how Lacan saw interpretation functioning in the analytic relationship. Harper describes the methodology behind Lacanian interpretation with these words "it is a type of intervention that upsets understanding rather than offering a type of meaning that is achieved through understanding" (2006, p. 123). This sentence neatly encapsulates the untidiness of Lacanian interpretation in clinical practice – it serves to upset understanding and this too is the aim of the interpretations I offer in this thesis. As well as attempting to build a new foundation of meaning/truth (a new master signifier) I aim to engage Lacanian theory as a reading practice to disrupt, disturb and upset the master signifiers that currently govern the organisation of fat, fatness and body image for men.

Testing or judging the analyses that I make in this thesis as against any accuracy or truth is fairly difficult. Zizek quotes Lacan in relation to the test of an analyst's interpretations and adds his own tidy conclusion that I think must act as a guide for social researchers reading Lacan:

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[2] Not 'we' generally, but me specifically and the blokes I have co-opted into this process which I explain in more detail below.

"Lacan provided a succinct definition of the truth of interpretation in psychoanalysis: "Interpretation is not tested by a truth that would decide by yes or no, it unleashes truth as such. It is only true inasmuch as it is truly followed". There is nothing "theological" in this precise formulation, only the insight into the properly dialectical unity of theory and practice in (not only) psychoanalytic interpretation: the "test" of the analyst's interpretation lies in the truth-effect it unleashes in the patient" (Zizek, 2010, p. xiii).

For me this means that to judge the analytical interpretations I make in this thesis one needs only to look to the patient (which is of course me, but is also the Other who suffers with weight anxiety) to see if it unleashes any truth-effect. I comment in relation to this in some detail in final part of the chapter eight.

The beauty of using a psychoanalytical framework resides in its ability to reposition the subject outside of traditional assumptions about self-hood. Like Wendy Hollway (Hollway, 1989) and Ian Parker (I. Parker, 1997, 2005) I am interested in 'changing the subject' whilst also aiming to challenge me as the subject. However, doing psychoanalytically based research is problematic. At minimum, problems exist from the perspective of identifying a subject of study, theorising epistemology and considering ethics. My subject of study is a man like me (an anxious fat man) – someone who has been struggling to lose weight within the institutional spaces in which he (I or we) reside. Ethically this is difficult – do I shoulder tap fat blokes and ask them to participate and then try to represent these individuals' psychoanalytic positions directly? I don't see this as following the ethics of desire because I then claim to hold some kind of knowledge-as-truth about their struggles; rather if I do involve other fat men I hold that it is more honest

and useful to consider how I, as a previously weight anxious man myself, intersect their stories with my own experiences. This means that my epistemology is one not only of Real knowledge, but also of Symbolic knowledge – that is knowledge created by relations between signifiers, and these are my relations. They may share things in common with others, and therefore be usefully intriguing, challenging and disruptive, but I can claim ethically only to 'fail to know' my own. That is not to say that I do not feel justified in reflecting on other's comments (as I do within each of the subsequent chapters) the important demarcation is that my analyses reflect why these comments are important to me as a subject with weight anxiety. Consequently I am using autoethnography as this type of methodology predominantly positions my-self-within-my-culture as the subject of study. I particularly like how Ellis and Bochner describe autoethnography; it resonates with me:

> Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739)

I like this description because it privileges both the self and the Symbolic, which allows room for the traumatic kernel of the Real at the centre of my self to emerge whilst scanning the Symbolic as culture, though I would amend the definition to include also 'multiple layers of unconsciousness'. Hence, as I see it, autoethnography is not

specifically about me, but in fact it is about the cultural context in which I exist as an active member (above I said 'my-self-within-my-culture'). As Karra & Phillips describe, autoethnography "does not mean that the researcher studies only himself or herself, but that the researcher is an insider who can draw on personal experience, cultural competence, and linguistic resources to frame and shape research in a way that an outsider cannot" (2008, p. 547).

The rest of this section is dedicated to exploring the formulation of Lacanian subjectivity and how this is useful when thinking theoretically about selves and my 'self'. Negotiating the myriad views of academic thought on the notion of selfhood is a treacherous undertaking. What is easy to say is that I don't think that the modernist conception of self as a conscious-rational being is useful to my project. By ignoring the equally valid dynamic of unconscious-irrational we only ever see part of the picture. Instead, I see a self as a split subject, part conscious, part unconscious – with complex permutations of interaction between the two. If we then add in the aspect of social interaction we see the potential for impossibly complex sets of interrelationships, constructing and re-constructing selves through patterns of relations. To me this conception of self is efficacious as, in contrast to traditional positivist psychological theory, it allows a voice for both the unconscious and for the social. Hollway showed how trying to understand someone in this way is much more likely to get to the root of a psycho-social issue. Take this passage for instance where she explains how a traditionally biased psychiatrist failed to understand a woman with agoraphobia:

> [I]t is worth noting that it is not surprising that the psychiatrist did not get anywhere asking why…; by positioning Ivy as a rational unitary subject who

knew the sources of her own behaviour. If he had posited a defended, psycho-social subject whose unconscious conflict was enacted through a symptom, his intervention might have been more effective (Hollway, 2001, p. 21)

I am interested in the psychosocial makeup of myself and other men in New Zealand who struggle with weight, fatness, fitness and their selves, and particularly how the unconscious mind protects the self from or 'deals with' anxiety through psycho-social mechanisms produced through and by the interactions with the Other. To investigate this I am utilising Lacan's theory of subjectivity as I believe it provides an excellent point from which to theorise this amorphous thing called a 'self'. Specifically, for my project it provides a new and radical way to understand what transpires for the weight-anxious subject under the gaze of the weight-loss industry.

To conceptualise a Lacanian self it is important to understand how Lacan represents the relationship between language, the Other and the unconscious. The assimilation of language essentially forms the Lacanian self. This is because language is what the unconscious is built from (Fink, 1995) and in Lacan's theory the unconscious comes into being when a young child begins to understand language (Georgaca, 2001). The language they begin to understand is the language of the child's significant others including (usually) the mother and father, but also many others significant to the child, other family members, siblings, carers, peers and so on. The child begins to hear how they are spoken about; how they are referred to and how they are characterised in particular ways. They assimilate these notions within their unconscious and essentially they 'become them'. Shawver gives the example of a young child being told that he is selfish for wanting the

last cookie and extrapolates, hypothetically, how this act of linguistic naming comes to rest in a psyche:

> Her words stung you with shame, and the simple unnamed reality of undichotomized selfless-selfishness disappeared, for you, forever. Your psychological world became divided into the truth and the lie and you would always be haunted as to which was which (Shawver, 1998, p. 334).

In this example prior to assimilating language the child did not distinguish between being selfish and not being selfish (because in the Lacanian Real there is no language, as soon as language arrives the Symbolic becomes reality for the subject). This dichotomy only exists through inter-subjective relations as linguistic beings – where by the Other (a family member in this case) labels the child as one, which therefore creates the binary (selfish-selfless) and pops the self in one of those positions. This example allows me to say that a Lacanian subject lives in the register of the Symbolic. That is the Symbolic as a social space that we as a collective group of subjects inhabit together – the trick with the Symbolic is that each of us has our own signifier-signified relationships, our own Imaginary fantasies so that meaning-between is always slippery.

This section has only briefly discussed Lacan's theory of subjectivity by introducing the idea of the development of the unconscious within the context of language acquisition. In the next section I am going to focus on the details of data gathering and analysis by explaining the research procedures and processes I have used.

2.3.   Data: Location, collection and analysis

My social and cultural context is the western world of weight loss and fat loathing and the organisation of this into discourses of truth, knowledge and control that we anxious fat folk inhabit. I have engaged with this world in a number of ways when generating autoethnographic data, including three main mechanisms that I will explain in this section. Firstly I have engaged directly with men who have tried to lose weight in a number of ways; sometimes calling myself a 'weight management trainer' as this title seemed to sit comfortably for most of the men within the social discourses of the weight loss industry and the personal training industry. It seems that they understood me to be combination of weight loss expert, nutritionist, therapist and personal trainer. Most important, they were happy to share their stories with me and as such formed a rich source of data from which I continue to draw much inspiration. I also conducted interviews with groups of men for whom weight is an issue, though I have done this with a twist. Secondly I have made a sustained attempt to engage with the 'healthy' discourse by engineering a role as an article writer for the popular magazine *Healthy Food Guide.* I will explain in this chapter the methodological role my involvement with this publication has. Thirdly I have collected resources that have come, in some capacity, from the weight loss industry that have meaning for me; an example of this is Susie Orbach's text *Fat is a Feminist Issue* that I explore in detail in chapter six.

Susanne Gannon describes how she believes 'knowledge' in autoethnography should be sourced like this: "Knowledge in poststructural autoethnography is sourced from our particular locations in particular bodies with particular feelings, flesh, and thoughts that become possible in particular sociocultural-spatial contexts… Bodies themselves engage

in theory making" (Gannon, 2006, pp. 476-477). I think this is an apt way of describing the method that I have undertaken. I have purposefully put my self – my feelings, flesh and thoughts – on the front line when trying to locate data. This means that rather than trying to represent any subjects' psychoanalytic position directly I hold that it is more honest and useful to consider how I blend their stories with my own experiences of being a fat man struggling to lose weight within the institutional spaces in New Zealand. Thus I am studying my intersubjective relationships with other subjects negotiating their selves through their experiences of health and weight loss / weight management. In this way I am condensing my self into my culture.

2.3.1. Fat blokes and ethical interview strategies

In Lacanian terms gathering autoethnographic data involves my self entering into metonymic[3] relationships within my own culture, so that I can linguistically probe the signifying relationships used to establish meaning as a psycho-social man with weight anxiety residing within various institutional spaces in New Zealand. As men we occupy (and are expected to occupy) various positions in our institutional environs, my plan has been to try and understand men's experience of fat, fatness and body image within these spaces. First I want to turn to the 'graphy' part of autoethnography – that is exactly how do I plan on collecting data from and representing these fat blokes?

I can't escape the fact that I want to help men who find themselves constantly frustrated in attempts to lose weight; in fact I have often found myself functioning (and wanting to) as a weight management therapist – because I want to help them change their lives. I was

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[3] By metonymic I refer to the movement along the signifying chain by which 'meaning' is transferred between signifiers, for instance the signifier BMI is metonymically transferred along the signifying chain to mean something with regard to self-control or laziness.

really drawn to how Ellis and Bochner describe their desire for their autoethnographies to have a therapeutic value (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, in particular see page 754). Their position is that it would in fact be unethical to not act in a therapeutic fashion if the people involved in the ethnography would benefit from this. I agree, though I remain uncomfortable with the idea that I am benefitting an 'other' when I am probably benefitting me, as the subject, by attempting to be a therapist for the Other. So I make my first point – I want to empirically involve the men I work with as a weight management trainer (read: therapist).

But how can I empirically involve these men? I don't want to interview them and then try to force my analysis across their stories, because that feels like I would be inappropriately extrapolating meaning from *their* signifying relationships. How can I claim to understand their slippery chains of signification when all I am doing is layering my own Imaginary ego-driven analysis on top? If I did I would be enacting the university's discourse – because it *must* be knowledgeable. The university researcher is expected to speak from a position of knowledge but is in fact driven by the 'truth' of their own master signifier – not reality. There is no way I can completely avoid this conspicuous pattern of relating as I am indeed in a university – this thesis for instance claims to have created knowledge, at least at some level. However I do believe that there are ways one can conduct empirical research which falls into step with the master or university but also involves attempting to favour patterns of relating that more closely resemble that of the analyst's or hysteric's discourse as, instead of speaking from a position of truth or knowledge, they seek, in different ways, to upset understanding.

I want to share here a passage from Ellis and Bochner's chapter; they are recounting a conversation they had with one of Carolyn Bochner's graduate students about the role of the 'interviewer's' life experience in the interview setting:

CB: I want to know more about how you would respond if you were an interviewee. What would make you comfortable enough to tell your story?

GS: To know the other person was listening, I'd want someone I could cry in front of, actually who might cry with me. A person who might tell me some of her story if she had been through a similar experience.

CB: So are you going to share your story with your participants? I ask

GS: Ah… I think…

CB: Go on

GS: Well I was going to say that my story would contaminate theirs, but I'm not so sure anymore (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 755)

To me this encapsulates the importance of the contribution an autoethnography can make, because the interviewer has often experienced the pain and pleasure of the interviewee they reside in the same Symbolic spaces, even though they would apply a different set of signifiers to represent this space. So why would I artificially try to separate my experience of being a fat man in my family, in my places of work and within the weight loss industry from the experiences of other men. Instead I want to share my stories with them and hear what resonates and what does not with their experience of our shared

institutional environs. In this way I am allowing my signifying relationships to become metonymically entwined with theirs, enacting the Symbolic in the interview situation.

In practical terms I gathered men who struggle to negotiate their selves within the institutional spaces we share, sometimes in small groups, sometimes individually. I then provided the men with five written stories describing my own experiences of fat, anxiety, weight loss and body image. Using this as a basis I then asked the men to interview me about my experiences. Most often this began by the blokes reflecting on each story in terms of their life experiences, often sharing their stories in relation to my own. They also asked questions of me – sometimes humorously and other times painfully. All the sessions were difficult for me as the stories I shared were personal accounts of my anxiety, my success and my failure. I recorded each session on audio tape and used these conversations as one of my sources of data. I have included the five stories as appendix C.

Some of these men I knew personally, others I did not. All of them responded to me, either because they knew me and wanted to be involved or they came across my work and interests in the health and exercise industry. In total I involved fifteen blokes. Some were very fat and some had no fat, most were somewhere in between. Some had lost a large amount of weight and others' weight had fluctuated across their entire lives. The common denominator was that they responded when I said 'I am looking for blokes for whom weight is often on their mind'.

2.3.2. Writing the healthy discourse: conflicting mirror images

Between September 2008 and December 2009 I wrote a monthly column for a popular magazine in New Zealand called 'Healthy Food Guide' which has a readership of around 240,000 people in New Zealand and Australia. In the magazine I was referred to as a 'weight-loss expert' with a speciality in men's weight issues and wrote a short article each month on a range of topics, generally of my choice. I landed this job after bugging the editor for more than a year subsequent to reading a particularly frustrating article published in the March 2007 edition entitled "Healthy Eating for Men" (Williams, 2007). In this article the author, nutritionist Cindy Williams, unleashed the greatest hits of the cliché world to describe men and male eating habits and suggested a range of things for fat blokes to focus on to improve themselves. When I read this I was inspired to email the editor and offer my services as a writer on men's weight issues. Initially I felt that I could offer a better article, one that would be more directly relevant for men; however a year later when the editor finally accepted me as a contributor I had different ideas.

By this stage I had read some of Lacan's 17th seminar and understood (if one can say such a thing about seminar 17) a little more about the generative impact of the discourse of the university and more so the opportunity provided by the challenge of psychoanalysis – the hysterisation of discourse, or as Lacan puts it "the structural introduction, under artificial conditions, of the hysteric's discourse" (Lacan, 2007 (1969-70), p. 33). My involvement with *Healthy Food Guide* provided an opportunity to try and get some articles in press that spoke to some degree from the position of the barred subject or the *objet a* into a media that I think is absolutely controlled by the legitimating power of the discourse of the university.

In terms of practicality I think that the magazine certainly serves a purpose for their readership. It is very consumable, predictable (in a good way) and has achieved marked success in the difficult world of magazine publication. I do not have a general problem with the activities of *Healthy Food Guide* and I have always enjoyed a good relationship with the editor. I have been up-front about my intentions, although I explained these in terms less radical than Lacan might have used. In the beginning I particularly tried to explain my desire to change the way people thought about weight issues by looking at the way 'discourses' were experienced by people with weight issues. Here is an extract from an email I sent to the editor on the 28th of February 2007, after reading the "Healthy Eating for Men" article where I tried to explain my perspective on why some men struggle with weight issues:

> "It basically works like this: Numerous messages bombard our unconscious and influence our perceptions about what we take to be 'normal', 'sensible' and 'manly'. As an example the idea of spending $50 at a restaurant serving small, but beautiful (and healthy) food would be intolerable to many men as you could get a dozen export gold and fish and chips for the family for the same price. The value is assessed by the quantity (of calories) and specifically NOT the quality (nutritional value etc…). So the unconscious message is that value = size and this message determines our actions"

It seems that this idea was appealing at some level to the editor at that point, though it took an entire year before I was actually contracted to write an article – possibly because of the difficulty the editor experienced when trying to assimilate my ideas into the tone of the magazine.

Certainly my involvement as a writer for *Healthy Food Guide* was not an unpleasant experience – nor was it one where I felt silenced. What I did feel was the discourse of the university grinding against my hysterical voice on numerous occasions where I wanted to appear as authoritative and legitimate by virtue of my qualifications and experience while simultaneously and perhaps surreptitiously leaving vulnerable holes where the hysterical voice could ask the question of the master 'what is wrong with me?'

My involvement with *Healthy Food Guide* trickled to an end around late 2009 and early 2010 due on my part mainly to family, work and study pressures. Not all of the articles I wrote where accepted and published by the magazine, perhaps the most 'left-field' article was one I wrote trying to popularise my theory of phallic *jouissance* and weight loss failure that I develop in chapter five – this article was accepted by the editor, I was paid for the article but it never appeared in print:

"The Strange Pleasure of Failing

It seems to be a peculiar feature of our society that people who permanently lose a lot of weight are an oddity – they are not normal. It is in fact very normal to fail to permanently lose weight. One dietician and academic concludes that about 95% of the people whom attempt to lose weight will fail to do so permanently. The most used explanation for this failure is that people initially make a sudden unsustainable dietary change (i.e. they go on a diet) and then 'give in' and revert back to their old patterns of eating (you might be thinking: 'yeah… I've done that'). The idea behind this explanation is that people at some stage consciously choose to 'give in' and then later regret their decision. I want to suggest an

alternative explanation in this article; I think that there is a strange pleasure attached to our failed attempts to lose weight.

This isn't the kind of pleasure you get out of watching a favourite movie or basking in the sun, I like to describe it as an 'uncanny' pleasure – because it is weird – and it exists to preserve our desire. Let me explain. Success and failure are judged against desire, which is a tricky beast as it can seem obvious but unattainable at the same time. Often our desire becomes wrapped up in an object or target – for instance when I was fat I used to (and in many ways still do) desire a 'slim' body. This then became the yardstick against which I unconsciously measured my success or failure.

To fail is a very human undertaking – most of the time we attempt things we fail to achieve the full extent of what we fantasised we might achieve. I think this is a good thing and a necessary way to live because total success is very uncomfortable. Those that do succeed often talk afterwards about the emptiness or lack that can come with ultimate success – I think this comes about as a result of the lack of desire.

It works like this: You desire a new body, maybe you can't rationalise it easily in words, but it becomes so important it is rarely out of your thoughts – even if it just simmers below the surface. So you try everything you can to achieve it – diets, pills, exercise regimes and others. As you begin to lose weight your emotions are mixed, partly excited and motivated but also tense and anxious. I think the anxiety is because the desire is in part becoming fulfilled and the emptiness of having

your ultimate goal satisfied looms. So you make an unconscious choice to stop dieting and remove the threat away from your desire. It's a strange pleasure, a relief; one you can't find the language to explain – but it's there along with the desire and longing for weight loss.

The strange pleasure we get out of failing is an important part of our psychology. It allows us to reinstate desire – and who would want to live without desire? For me the problem is where my desire lies – to desire a 'slim' body. Now that I have lost weight I feel partially trapped, between a lack of desire and the pressure to lose more weight (because eventually I will be slim?). What I try to do now is identify when these feelings are present and allow my unconscious desire to become re-positioned onto other things. This is not easy and I often fail in these attempts as well. I hope that one day my desire will be located in another object – but at the moment the idea of giving up the ideal of the 'slim body' is fairly anxiety provoking. Having said this I do have some tips – perhaps these can be thought of as 'food for thought':

1. Try to find words to explain your strange mixed feelings when it comes to weight loss, language is a powerful force in changing your unconscious feelings. If you can't share words with others try writing to yourself.

2. Give yourself a break – it's ok to fail, in fact it's important. All of those people who have looked down on you for failing are totally out of touch with their unconscious." (Accepted August 2009)

I still really like this article and for a time at least the editor felt they might be able to use it for a weight-loss feature article. However, this never happened and I never tracked down why. I like to think that at some level the hysteric and analyst's voices within this article resonated with the editor to the point that they felt there was worth in printing the article despite the obvious potential backlash from the university/master. It is likely that the university prevented the article from proceeding any further in the publication process, perhaps the editor never considered it again, perhaps it was rejected at review by another. Either way for me it shows the worth of persisting with the hysterisation of the master's discourse as you can make ground – even if it is a slow and somewhat tortuous process. I have included a selection of these articles as appendix D.

2.3.3. Research journal, autoethnographic excavations and 'Other' data

In addition to the sessions with blokes and interactions with 'healthy' media that I described above I have kept a research journal since undertaking this project. Rather than write every day I write stories and experiences and commentaries about things as they emerge as being 'of interest'. I always aim to write whatever lands in my mind and I often share these with significant others in my world. Examples of these others include primarily my PhD supervisors, my wife and my immediate family. But I have also shared these with colleagues and other friends.

I have also 'excavated' data from my past – this includes things I have written in the past regarding fat, anxiety and body image. Often I have stumbled across this material whilst doing something else and it has caught my eye and resonated with me at some level. I use these journal entries and past excavations and the Other's response to them throughout

the analysis chapters of this thesis – where I use these I will include copies of the relevant material.

'Other' data includes material that has come from outside but has become part of my own direct experiences, possibly the best example of this would be the analysis I undertake of Susie Orbach's text *Fat is a Feminist Issue* written around the time of my birth in 1977. I see this as an artefact of the 'fat discourse' that held water for women of my mother's generation, and as such it forms part of my ethnographic environment. I explain this in more detail in chapter six.

My aim is to analyse these various pieces of data by using a Lacanian analytical practice to read these accounts. This is because Lacanian analysis, and particularly the later Lacan, provides a reading practice that can extend our understanding beyond just individual clinical accounts of the specific experiences of subjects to accounts of the Symbolic order that we all experience. Through understanding elements of that Symbolic order I hope to be able to question the chains of signification that work to structure our relations and subsequently our identities. Sometimes this involves de-veiling what Lacan calls 'quilting points' (*points de capiton*) or points that hold the structure of the Symbolic order in place:

> [A]llow me to represent the function of the signifier by a spatializing device… This point around which all concrete analysis of discourse must operate I shall call a quilting point… Everything radiates out from and is organized around this signifier, similar to these little lines of force that an upholstery button forms on the surface of a material. It's the point of convergence that enables everything that

happens in this discourse to be situated retroactively and prospectively (Lacan, 1993, pp. 267-268).

These 'structuring signifiers' are essential to understand how the Symbolic functions for the weight anxious amongst us.

2.4.   In summary on method

By undertaking a methodology of psychoanalytic autoethnography I am attempting to allow space within my thesis for my unconscious to have a role as author. This can be a very uncomfortable and risky position to place myself because it requires me to question my own master signifier whilst simultaneously being judged by the university. In this way I am forced to be genuinely, anxiously and theoretically interested in both what fits with my ego-driven Imaginary reality and what does not – what does not fit can be understood as evoking my unconscious and giving it a pen.

In this opening chapter I have referred regularly to Lacanian theory, some of this is explained within but how I understand and attempt to appropriate Lacan's four discourses theory and the triad: Real, Symbolic, Imaginary have not. In the next chapter I focus on Lacan's 17th seminar – in an attempt to demonstrate the worth and application of a Lacanian multi-authorial approach.

3. The Four Discourses as Authors

This focus of this chapter is on Lacan's theory of discourses. However prior to tackling this subject I want to provide a brief overview of one of the key tenets of Lacanian theory, the triad: Real, Symbolic, Imaginary, as this logic is seminal to the analysis I pursue in this thesis.

3.1. Real, Symbolic, Imaginary

The three registers sit as a key principle of Lacanian psychoanalysis. For Lacan they provided a way to partition the subject of psychoanalysis in order to understand how that subject is *subjected* to the ordering effects of language.

Caspar Hoedemaekers does a nice simple job when he explains that the "Symbolic can be thought of as the unconscious dimension of subjectivity" (Hoedemaekers, 2007, p. 50). It is this register that receives much attention from social scholars, Lacanian or otherwise, as they attempt to make sense of the various paradigms that swirl around humanity. For Lacan the unconscious is structured like a language; the encoded signifying chains that make up this language form the Symbolic register, they provide the repertoire of available ways of articulation for a subject. Different signifiers in this field of signification operate in different ways, which we experience as different opinions between subjects. But more important are the similarities, the sets of signification are very-often shared between subjects, these are structurally positioned by certain Master-signifiers that function in a similar way to quilting points in upholstery. In this thesis I argue for example the Body Mass Index (BMI) as quilting point in the 'healthy' discourse as it provides a structure for the weight-anxious subject to position other language (bad-

good, wrong-right, fat-thin and others). I spend a fair amount of time analysing this elusive Symbolic register in this thesis as it is the permanent but flexible link between me and all of the other weight-anxious subjects that grapple with their bodies.

The Imaginary register functions in parallel to the Symbolic register but is instead the consciousness of the subject, a representation of the ego. It is my Imaginary sitting at the keyboard tapping out this explanation. The Imaginary register provides the subject with some much needed individuality, it allows the ego to space itself from the Symbolic and Real registers and enunciate 'I am…' to the world. Hoedemaekers describes this slightly more technically when he says "the ego continually readjusts itself, and gives itself a (erroneous) status of autonomy" (Hoedemaekers, 2007, p. 52). The key point here is the erroneousness of the process of identification that goes on in the Imaginary, the falseness is comforting and provides head-space for the subject, but the very idea of autonomy is nothing more than a charade of necessity.

The register of the Real, simply put, comprises the unsymbolisable, those images and moments that are not able to be subjected to the signification networks operating in the Symbolic register. A way of thinking about the Real is to consider the development of the infant – as the child grows he (please excuse the 'he' here, but my Imaginary forces the picture of my own wee boy into the conceptual picture I am writing, thus the masculine pronoun. Of course the phallic structure of the Symbolic would likely stress the masculine pronoun regardless) becomes subjected by the Symbolic register, he is talked about constantly and begins to talk himself. When he gets wild with anger or despair his language disappears into intensity, but slowly and surely as time passes his parents begin to say 'use your words' in an attempt to understand (via the Symbolic register) what he

wants. He recognises the suggestion and begins to articulate 'hurt, hungry, tired' and the Real of the emotion is replaced by signifiers in the signification network. But, sometimes there are no words; some things are simply 'not-able-to-be-said', these remnants, sometimes pleasure, sometimes pain, reside in the Real. This unsayable pleasure-pain is an often-given description of "what Lacan calls *jouissance*" (Hoedemaekers, 2007, p. 51), as it is permanently-intertwined with the subject's desire.

These three registers say something about the subject and provide the conditions upon which various social bonds with the Other are enacted. Specifically the registers speak to the lack of unification and emphasise the permanent 'split' that exists central to every subject. They also provide a very specific reading of 'healing', removing it from the Catersian frame that suggests healing results in a stronger ego with more conscious mastery of the world of things, others and self. Instead the split demonstrates constant processes of re-signification and re-identification within the subject. The disconnected interaction between the dogmatic and uncanny functions of language point to the split in the subject and provide one pathway into these processes of re-signification and re-identification. Lacan's way of digging into these processes is via the four discourses, as these are ways of understanding the structure of the Symbolic register, and therefore the subsequent acts of human communication that form the 'data' for my project. In particular they are also ways of probing at the split in the subject of the thesis (*moi*) which may allow a (healing) glimpse of the Real and subsequent re-signification and re-identification.

3.2. Lacan's Theory of Discourses

"[N]o dialogue is possible unless it is situated at the level of discourse" (Lacan, 2007 (1969-70), p. 55). Lacan is saying that it is only possible for us to share dialogue (including constructing theses) because we situate our speech and text within the human relationships structured by discourse. For Lacan discourse can be understood in terms of four social bonds (Malone, 2008) defining the act of human communication (speech and text). He calls these discourses that of the master, university, hysteric and analyst.

For me Lacanian discourse theory has been critical in allowing (and encouraging) a voice for all of the authors speaking my subjectivity. I have tried at times to silence one or other of these authors as they have criticised or questioned the development of my ideas and my thesis. However these attempts always prove futile as any repressed author will emerge in some form through my unconscious. So over time I began to realise that it would be more honest and useful to introduce these authors and the role that they play, through Lacan's four discourses, in this chapter.

Thus this chapter is intended as a 'framing' device, different to methods and methodology and different to data and analysis even though it contains elements of both. This chapter should be read as an introduction to the various authors who speak my subjectivity and how they attempt to wrestle with each other. These tensions play throughout my thesis and this chapter will provide context for these tensions to be understood. In presenting the four discourses as authors I will engage with certain pieces of autoethnographic data to demonstrate how the various subject positions run up against each other. Mostly this data is related to my engagement with the media as the media

(and society generally) tend to enact the master's or university discourse. Before continuing I want to make two observations as guiding remarks.

Firstly I want to place Lacan's notion of discourse in context with Foucauldian-inspired discursive analysis, some of which is found in organisation studies (Knights, 1992, 2002; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2011; Townley, 1993). As tricky as that may seem Paul Verhaeghe made the job relatively simple when he assembled this set of signifiers: "Foucault works with the concrete material of the signifier, which puts the accent on the **content** of a discourse. Lacan, on the contrary, works beyond the content and places the accent on the formal relationships that each discourse draws through the act of speaking" (1995, p. 4, emphasis in original). So each discourse structure is fundamentally empty of content – they form the limits of social communication and as such can be 'filled up' with any given speech or text. The form of each discourse does not change depending on its content but rather it determines the form of the content (Verhaeghe, 1995), that is the way the signifiers interact. Although I haven't explored Foucault's notion of discourse in any detail in this thesis I certainly do not see Foucauldian and Lacanian ideas of discourse as incommensurate. I don't know how they could be 'used together' or excluded from each other for that matter – what I do know is that Lacan's formulation of discourse as I present in this chapter is a radically alternative way of signifying something that has been 'Foucault-ed' at least to some degree, that is the industry of weight anxiety.

Secondly I want to mention a problem with the utilisation of Lacanian discourse theory as described by Nobus & Quinn (2005). They say of the academic application of the four discourses: "A besetting problem of commentary on Lacan is that the danger of dismemberment and loss is never worked through within the structure of the

commentary, so that the four discourses are treated as interpretative options, rather than as four contingent solutions to the intrinsic collapse of the communicative act into stupidity, non-knowledge and the circuits of desire" (2005, p. 137). The problem they are describing is the use of Lacan's four discourses as frameworks academics utilise to analyse discourse – whilst failing (ironically) to realise the inevitable disintegration of the communication they are trying to make sense of. I think what Nobus & Quinn (2005) are saying is that in trying to make sense by using the four discourses academics miss the point that sense does not exist (in the sense of sensible academic knowledge). We might focus instead on the circuits of desire as articulated through the communicative act that interests us. This is what I attempt to do by presenting each of the discourses as a facet of my subjectivity – thus attempting to sensibly represent the tensions that exist in my fractured self.

3.3.   An overview of the discourses

In Seminar XVII Lacan "formalizes and articulates the social bonds that are created because we speak" (Malone, 2008, p. 184). The formulaic structure that Lacan provides to articulate these social bonds revolves around four positions that remain static within the system. These are:

$$\uparrow \; \frac{\text{agent}}{\text{truth}} \longrightarrow \; // \; \frac{\text{Other}}{\text{product}} \; \downarrow$$
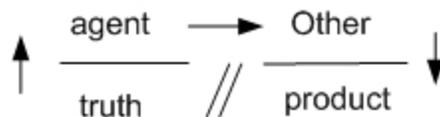
The relationship of discourse from agent to Other "represents the ideal of conscious speech, in which a speaker communicates with a receiver and produces a result" (Nobus & Quinn, 2005, p. 132). The result is not one that we might immediately conceive of and

it is not the product that cognitive communication theory would suggest where the transmission from intent of the speaking agent to the interpretation of the listening Other is theoretically possible (though much could also go awry with the transmission in this account). In Lacanian theory the relationship between the speaking agent and the Other is characterised as impossible exactly because the product of the act of speech or text will always fail to achieve its intent. This impossibility is one of two 'disjunctions' within the structure of the discourse, these signify disruptions to the communicative process of the discourse (Verhaeghe, 1995). The final position is truth, which should be understood as the first position as "[t]he position of the truth is the aristotelian Prime Mover, affecting the whole structure of the discourse" (Verhaeghe, 1995, p. 5). This 'truth' is the agent of the act of discourse – the agency of the position 'agent' therefore is a fantasy, as Verhaeghe puts it, it is "only apparently the agent" (1995, p. 5). The relationship between the product of the discourse and the truth underwriting it is one of impotence or inability (Nobus & Quinn, 2005) because the result of any discourse is fundamentally barred (//) from the truth of the cause of the discourse. This is the second of the disjunctions and has the effect of defining discourse as being a one-way street from truth to a product via the impossible relationship between the lacking agent and the Other:
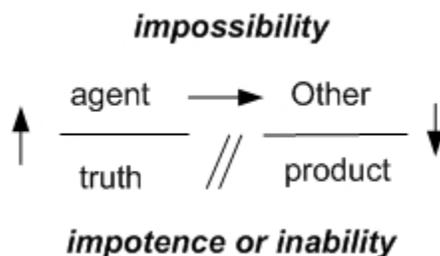
This underlying structure is essential to understanding the uncanny and dogmatic nature of much speech and text, as I explained in chapter one. If we assume that all discourse is

structurally bound by the disjunctions of impossibility and inability represented above and that it always results in failure then the social bond underpinning specific dogma of various institutions and the subjects they interact with it is revealed (or de-veiled). As Verhaeghe puts it:

> Suffice it to say that the bridge between agent and other is always a bridge too far with, as an important result, the fact that the agent remains stuck with an impossible desire. This is important because it forms the basis of a particular social bond, characterising each discourse. **So each of the four discourses will unite a group of subjects through a particular impossibility of a particular desire** (Verhaeghe, 1995, p. 6, emphasis in original)

The final sentence here is crucial as it provides a basis for analysing various instances of the discourses in action – in that they arise from the true desire of an inarticulate agent but produce an unexpected result.

Each of the four discursive formulations emerges as the following terms are inserted, in a particular way, within the structure above. These terms, which come from Lacanian theory, are: S_1, the Master signifier, that special signifier which attempts to "fill up the lack" (ibid, p. 7); S_2, the rest of the signifiers that Lacan has referred to as the "battery of signifiers" (Lacan, 2007 (1969-70), p. 13), it is the interaction between these two terms that generate the most obvious of interactions within the master's discourse, when 'I' addresses the rest of the signifiers, for example 'I know that people with a BMI over 25 need to lose weight'. The addressed party here represents the knowledge contained within the signifying chain that tells us things about BMI (Body Mass Index), people's body

weight, health, weight loss and many other signifiers within the 'battery'. So the master signifier is addressing these 'Other' signifiers with some sort of truth statement ('I know that…'). In the case of the master's discourse the split subject ($) sits in the position of truth and acts as an underwriter for the master signifier and the final term is the elusive *object a*, the object cause of desire – which in the case of the master's discourse is produced:

$$\frac{S_1}{\$} \longrightarrow \mathrel{/\!/} \frac{S_2}{a}$$

M

Each of the other formulae emerges via a ¼ turn of the terms:

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \longrightarrow \mathrel{/\!/} \frac{a}{\$}$$

U

$$\frac{\$}{a} \longrightarrow \mathrel{/\!/} \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$

H

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \longrightarrow \mathrel{/\!/} \frac{\$}{S_1}$$

A

In the sections below I will explore each of these social bonds in relation to my experience of being fat and losing weight within the context of the wider weight loss

industry. As I said earlier these should act as 'frames of reference' for the rest of the thesis.

3.4.   The Master always speaks the truth

$$\frac{S_1 \longrightarrow S_2}{\$ \quad // \quad a}$$
$$M$$

As I see it the master's discourse is the start point for any discussion of authorship. This is because mastery provides the basic structure of the symbolic order (Verhaeghe, 1995). Mastery assumes it knows the real truth, and speaks from this position of authority. The majority of human communication starts in this way (often via the proxy offered by the discourse of the university). As a consequence to the prevalence of mastery it is impossible for me to avoid repeating this discourse as it is thrown at me from every angle; two examples best illustrate this point.

The first is my relationship to the blokes that I work with as a weight management trainer. These men come to me as a master, asking for help to lose weight – and the master-author facet of my subjectivity often engages with them exactly where they would expect, espousing ideas, facts, strategies – in essence enslaving them within the discourse.

The second is the general medicalisation of body weight. The medical practitioner is the ultimate master: here Verhaeghe describes how Jean Clavreul explained the role of the medical doctor in his French text (Clavreul, 1978):

A medical doctor functions as a master signifier, without any respect for his being divided as a subject; his dividedness is situated underneath, as part of a hidden truth. In functioning as master-signifier, he will reduce the patient to an object of his knowledge, and this shows in the terminology used, e.g. when referring to a patient as the "cardiac failure of room 16" (Verhaeghe, 1995, p. 9)

This reduction of the patient can be neatly seen in the main (non-psychoanalytic) treatments for anxious weight loss consumers in our contemporary society. These being food diets prescribed by nutritionists and dieticians, exercise plans prescribed by personal trainers and pharmacological substances prescribed by doctors, pharmacists or natural health practitioners. These medical treatments all claim a 'truth' basis in science and reduce the patient to a physiological object. Their power, by way of the master signifier is absolutely compelling – for instance when I first wrote about the master's discourse in relation to the medical discourse and weight I wrote this note in my research journal:

A small reflection: At this moment I am sorely tempted to try and justify my position vis a vis the science. It is so powerful a master signifier that even when I 'know' it is operating on me via the communicative act of this paper I am still swayed by its power (Research Journal, 9-2-09).

Consequently I am often drawn into a discussion where my 'I' speaks from a position within the master's discourse, or is co-opted by someone re-producing the discourse because of my apparent 'successes' at losing weight. However, as Verhaeghe describes above, underneath the façade of the omnipotent master is the divided subject, this reveals that the "discourse of the master is nothing but a set of rationalizations, concealing what

Lacan refers to as the secret shame of the master, his fundamental impotence" (Nobus & Quinn, 2005, p. 131). What this means for the master in the wider weight loss industry is that under the surface of the exclamations about obesogenic environments, fast food advertising, calorie restriction, healthy food and exercise programmes is the truth in the master's discourse. That is the divided subject of the master – the castrated master, ineffective and impotent. The one who is not even One (whole) but split and is incapable of mastering the change of signifiers that does not represent the truth.

Certainly this is what I have experienced when trying to to represent my mastery of weight loss for Others attempting to lose weight. When I attempt(ed) to address the 'battery of signifiers' the reflection was exactly what I asked for from my loyal enslaved fat blokes [4]– they position(ed) themselves as the master's knowledge. Lacan calls this "putting oneself in the right position" (Lacan, 2007 (1969-70), p. 22), they then become "a knowledge that does not know itself" (Zupančič, 2006, p. 161). The way this operates is that anxious weight loss consumers within the master's discourse 'know' (the master's knowledge) that their weight is about eating too much and not exercising enough, but this 'knowledge' does not know about their self. What is produced through this act of discourse is the *objet a*, the object cause of desire. I can imagine here the fat subject leaving their doctors office having just had the classic master's discourse medical obesity conversation:

DR: "You need to lose some weight; here are some pamphlets on healthy eating and ways to get active!"

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[4] I use the term 'enslaved' here to point towards the master-slave relationship that is so common in the weight-loss industry.

FS: "Yes, I know I need to eat less and exercise more – I just have a soft spot for beer and wedges!" *nervous laugh followed by awkward silence.* "I'll join my local gym and banish sugary and fatty food from the house!"

DR: "That's what will work!"

This exchange occurs with alarming frequency in medical offices all over the planet. The masterful Doctor does what they believe to be correct, educate the uneducated. The intended product from this exchange is weight-loss, specifically the labouring of the fat person to produce a smaller number on the Doctor's scales. However what is actually produced is something quite different. That is, a surplus, the elusive object cause of desire. This, Zupančič says is "a positive waste, which is not exactly the unaccounted-for work, but rather the result of the knowledge-at-work being accounted for and articulated" (2006, p. 163). So on the surface the discourse appears faultless – master addresses Other with solution, Other responds with the master's knowledge – but under the bar the impotent divided subject of the master dwells unsettled still chasing the elusive object cause of desire. This is the Doctor's desire, it is their lack and their search for the 'thing' that drives the master's discourse in the clinic. The fat subject is willingly complicit in this exchange, though perhaps from a hysterical position with regard to desire. I will expand on this in the Hysteric's section below.

It is unsurprising then that I felt very frustrated by my attempts to help others in their expressed desire to lose weight, I was (and still am), as Verhaeghe articulates: "overwhelmed by his own being as a divided subject, confronted with his ever-receding truth, and in his turn looking for a master signifier which would provide him with a

satisfying answer" (Verhaeghe, 1995, p. 10). Inherent in the futility of the master's command is the failed results of mastery. These are simultaneously re-mastered by shifting the blame to the Other (they didn't listen to my command) but also the impotence is experienced as an uncanny pain, uncomfortable and unnerving. It is in this space that I think I began to speak my subjectivity in a different way, one that relates to desire in a very different way.

3.5. Never (always) trust a Hysteric

$$\frac{\$}{a} \quad \mathbin{/\!/} \quad \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$

$$H$$

Since I began reading about psychoanalysis I have been fascinated with the hysteric. Something about the hysteric in society is alluring to me – I've come to the conclusion that it is because the hysteric questions the law of the master, and seems to create an opening for the hidden truth of the master's discourse to be exposed for the world to see. Thus it is with a certain amount of glee that I turn to hysteric's discourse and the author who speaks hysterically.

Generally I try to call my hysterical author 'Andy' as this signifier represents my struggles with weight and conceptualisation of 'self'. This has been on-going in my life and throughout the thesis I will refer to 'Andy' in different guises, as a young boy growing up in small town, as a young man studying towards his first degree, and indeed as a grown man and doctoral candidate attempting to speak into a society already

crammed full of the master's discourse. It is through my experiences as Andy I open the door to the symbolic world of anxious fat men.

As this author I should be understood as speaking from the position of the hysteric, in that I attempt to address the master signifier that is the agent of the master's discourse and is the truth of agency in the university's discourse (see next section). The hysteric's discourse is the discourse of the impossible desire – articulated by the divided subject (Verhaeghe, 1995):

$$\frac{\$}{a}$$

The hysteric is driven by their object cause of desire, and addresses the Other as the master signifier, in essence they question the master by confronting him with their problem. The product of this confrontation is knowledge, pouring out from all available orifices of intellect (stupid or otherwise) yet the divided subject is left bereft of a solution to their question. They are answer-rich, solution-none!

This is how Gérard Wajcman describes the history of hysteria:

> The history of hysteria presents three salient aspects: (1) requesting an answer, hysteria generates knowledge; (2) responding to the symptom, knowledge states what the hysteric is (a witch, a saint, a patient, a subject); (3) no answer settles the hysteric's question; all answers fail to master their object, none can silence the hysteric. (Wajcman, 2003, Section: 'The Discourse of the Hysteric' paragraph 22)

I think Wajcman's analysis above is an excellent metaphor to examine the complaint of the anxious fat subject. In hysterical terms the anxious fat subject requests an answer to their symptom – which importantly is 'tell me what is wrong with me?' and the discourse generates multiple knowledges (calorie inflation, exercise poverty, pharmaceuticals, hypnosis and others). Crucially these knowledges state what the anxious fat subject is (lazy, stupid, out of control and others) and none of the answers settle the anxious fat subject's question 'tell me what is wrong with me?' because the Other as master has already put that question to rest when they enunciate the knowledge "you are *what* I say" (Wajcman, 2003, Section: 'The Discourse of the Hysteric' paragraph 16). The Other (master signifier) in the hysteric's discourse then objectifies the divided subject as a 'what'. I have a good example of this in action – the following is an excerpt from my research journal:

A reporter from TV One[5] rang me yesterday and asked if I would like to appear on the 6pm news. It is fair to say that I felt a subtle blend of excitement and suspicion. She was doing a story on a recent report that rated New Zealand as being the third fattest nation in the OECD (based on BMI) and she explained to me that she wanted to hear from someone who had lost a lot of weight to contextualise the story, and also to get my opinion on whether the government was doing enough to help 'fight the obesity epidemic'. I thought this was a fantastic opportunity for me to express my views to a reasonably wide audience – certainly to some who might listen to a man who actually has something useful (but not alarmist) to say into the discourse around the evils of fat. About an hour

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[5] State owned broadcaster, main daily TV news program and part of the media duopoly that controls TV news in New Zealand.

later a reporter and camera operator from TV One turned up at my house and interviewed me for about 20 minutes. I think I did a fairly good job of summarising some of my key views about weight anxiety and the problem with focusing on body weight, though I was sceptical about what might actually appear on the news. This is what my wife Anna said about my interview performance and the subsequently appearing article:

> *"I'm so proud of you, and I want people to know how clever and thoughtful you are. You have great ideas and you really think about things, rather than just accept things wholesale. Yesterday, you did a great job of balancing sounding like a 'real' person, part of our society and not just a 'fanatic' type person, with pointing out something different from the usual. You couldn't have been clearer in that regard. You kept the technical stuff to a minimum, told your story, but at the same time, tried to present a different perspective. But it just didn't fit with the angle they were taking. Unfortunately. A perfect example of the sensationalism and bias the media is prone to make. Bugger.***"** (Research Journal, 14-7-09)

I (Andy the hysteric) spoke to this reporter; I was as honest about my weight anxiety as I could legitimately hope to carry off in a 20 minute interview but what appeared on the news was me as an object of the 'obesity epidemic' discourse, specifically as someone who had 'shed the pounds' and fought the good fight against the creeping bulge of the belly[6]. The story appeared like 'the Master' himself had written the script – alarmist,

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[6] The TV One news report can be found here: http://tvnz.co.nz/health-news/kiwis-fatties-report-shows-2841411/video

focussed entirely on the physical and featuring the thin 'experts' who purported to know 'the truth' about how to solve this 'grave' problem, it was like my ideas did not exist.

The hysteric's discourse is the discourse of "every normal neurotic" (Verhaeghe, 1995, p. 10) and importantly the hysteric "sees through the veil of illusion or falsity spawned by the discourse of the master and the discourse of the university" (Kovacevic, 2007, p. 133). So though in the example above the neurotic hysteric in me was bulldozed beneath the discourse of the master and university I could see this in action; before, during and after it occurred – it certainly didn't take me by surprise and yet I still participated willingly, I think because unconsciously I want to ask the question of the master – 'I've lost all of this weight, why am I still anxious?' This demonstrates the power of the hysteric's discourse to resist the master (and the university). Regardless of my realisation that my attempt would be futile I carried on with the question, I continued to push right to the end. I even contacted the reporter to ask why she had ignored my question, even though I knew she would not understand what I was saying. The hysteric requires an answer.

For me, there is persistant and powerful emancipatory direction in the hysteric's discourse because structurally it is fundamentally generative in that it provides the question for science to generate knowledge (the S_2 is produced). Paul Verhaeghe describes it like this:

> If you look at the history of science, you will see that it is essentially a *hystory*: science has always been an attempt to answer the existential questions, and the only result of that attempt is science itself… This is all the more clear in human

sciences where, for example, even psychoanalysis is a product of hysteria (Verhaeghe, 1995, p. 11).

Freud founded psychoanalysis in an attempt to help 'the hysterics' and as such I attempt to allow the voice of my own neurotic weight anxious hysteric to play a serious authorial role in this thesis – particularly as it was he who provided the original research question!

The inverse of the hysteric's discourse is the discourse of the university – it is this that is the subject of the following section.

3.6. The University as (unwitting) purveyor of the Master's 'truth'

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \xrightarrow{} \frac{a}{\$}$$
$$//$$
$$U$$

I find the discourse of the university a rather troubling phenomenon, Kovacevic does a nice job of explaining why: "In a certain way, the discourse of the university resembles an attempt at seduction, seduction of the other by the display of the apparent coherence and rigor of one's knowledge" (2007, p. 128). This is troubling to me because of the productive process of the discourse of the university. It is such that as a member of a university I am 'in the game' of knowledge production and it is alluring to want this knowledge to seduce you, the reader, into my game. In essence I want (you) to believe (me). I personally want to believe what I am producing through the social bond that is this thesis *and* I want you to believe me too. However I am wary of the knowledge touted by the university's discourse because beneath its confidence and expansiveness is the master signifier in the position of truth. The result is as Kovacevic says, quoting Lacan,

"truth is elsewhere" (2007, p. 128), though this is perhaps better translated by Russell Grigg as "Now the *sign* of the truth is somewhere else" (Lacan, 2007 (1969-70), p. 32, my emphasis). What Lacan is saying is that speaking from the discourse of the university does not produce truth (that he argues results from the discourse of the analyst and hysteric – in different ways), but that it does appear "all-knowing [*tout-savoir*]" (2007 (1969-70), p. 31). The ramifications of speaking from this position are therefore troubling because I can appear all-knowing whilst the signifier of truth eludes me (and you), only to exist somewhere else.

I see the university discourse in evidence rather potently within the debate over the authenticity of the so-called 'obesity epidemic'. What seems to have happened in this debate over the past decade is a flurry of communication above the bar of the university discourse. That is a raft of people (mainly, but not exclusively from universities) generating 'knowledges' to address the *objet a* in the position of Other. This is, unfortunately, impossible because their object cause of desire eludes signification, that is their attempts to produce an answer will enevitably miss the mark. Therefore the product of this impossible discourse is "an ever-increased division of the subject: the more knowledge one uses to reach for the object, the more one becomes divided between signifiers, and the further one gets away from home, that is from the true cause of desire" (Verhaeghe, 1995, p. 12). Thus for all of those working to understand the idea of an 'obesity epidemic' – be these the nutritionists and epidemiologists generating knowledges as to the cause of a 'real' epidemic or indeed social scientists generating theory to explain why fat is so abhorred in our society the result of their endeavours within the university discourse is *not* a better understanding of reality (either reality!) but a further division of

the subject – that is the fat anxious subject. The university discourse is structurally doomed to fail.

This "failure of the university discourse" (Nobus & Quinn, 2005, p. 135) can be felt within the New Zealand government's actions towards those classed as overweight or obese (by BMI). Nobus and Quinn describe how modern governments produce "students of all of their citizens, without exception" who are expected also to "speak product and thus intellectualize their alienation" (p. 135). This is extremely revealing when looking at the anti-obesity policies of most western nations. For instance the 2005-2008 Labour government introduced 'HEHA' (Healthy Eating, Healthy Action) and 'Push Play'; both policies spoke with substantial underpinning evidenced-based 'bodies of knowledge' but simply managed to produce, as Nobus and Quinn describe above, citizens who now 'speak those products' and use them to 'intellectualise their alienation' – hence we get a common view in society that corresponds to the university discourse associated with being overweight and obese, which is immense amounts of 'knowledge' produced, reiterated, re-formed and re-packaged by the government's loyal students, citizens of our society.

There is no doubt that I also am complicit as agent within the university discourse. The obvious example of this is through the communicative act of this thesis. The very fact that I have undertaken a PhD in order to 'better understand' my topic suggests that I am attempting to generate knowledge in search of my object of desire. The fact that I am structurally doomed to fail (in that I will not find my object of desire) does not however in any way compromise the importance of the act of scholarship. It is just that we, in the

academy, must be satisfied to only ever produce what Casper Hoedemaekers calls "a productive failure" (2007, p. 17).

Outside of the specific setting of the university I still find myself writing from the position of S_2. For instance, when writing for *Healthy Food Guide* I attempted to allow a voice for my inner analyst in order to provide something alternative within what is primarily an artefact of the university discourse. Mostly this has been impossible as when I have attempted to say something not supported by 'evidenced-based research' the weight of the university has been applied. An interesting example of this revolved around what we refer to in New Zealand as 'blue-top milk', or milk that is not reduced in fat. In an article about foods that had been villainised in society I originally wrote the following:

> **Blue top milk** – *trim milk made a grand market entrance a number of years ago and relegated blue top milk to the sideline, claiming to be lower fat and therefore better for you. But blue top milk is perfectly ok too; it is still relatively low in fat and in my opinion makes much better flat whites and scones! The key as always is moderation – don't skull 2L a day! (Research Journal, 28-1-09)*

The editor's response to this section was:

> *I like the tone of this, but really it's not suitable for HFG as it is… blue top milk is problematic – we would not recommend it for anyone but small kids, in line with NHF and MoH guidelines (Research Journal, 28-1-09)*

The editor here is referring to the National Health Framework (NFH) and Ministry of Health (MoH) guidelines as to the appropriateness of blue top milk. To me the action of

the university discourse is very clear in this exchange, although I was still including classic university speech based on evidence-based reductionist research (such as saying in the final line 'the key is moderation') the general suggestion of blue top milk flew in the face of 'accepted knowledge' in the field and as such was rebuked via the stringent conditions enforced by the discourse the university.

Although I wrote for *Healthy Food Guide* for 18 months I only managed to have three articles (two printed, one accepted but not printed) that are not entirely based on the structure of the university discourse. I will use aspects of these articles to talk about the analyst's discourse in the next section.

3.7.   The Elusive Analyst

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \longrightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1}$$

$$//$$

$$A$$

I will start this section by stating categorically that I am not attempting to represent myself as a trained Lacanian psychoanalyst. I feel that I need to say this because I use the signifier 'analyst's discourse' throughout my thesis and it is fair to assume that some may read this in the sense of the role of the analyst in individual psychoanalysis. Of course it is Lacan's own experience first as analysand and then as psychoanalyst, and throughout as a close observer of human interaction that underpinned the development of the four discourses. He refers to these as "necessary structures that go well beyond speech" (Lacan, 2007 (1969-70), p. 12), these exist both in the process of an individual subject's psychoanalysis and within any particular social setting: they are social bonds that

structure discourse *generally* and *specifically*. Therefore I do see myself as an analyst, but only in the sense of the social setting, it is within this context that I feel justified and entitled to attempt (and fail to) enact the analyst's discourse.

The analyst speaks from the position of the subject's *object a*. This is why I have entitled this section the 'elusive analyst' because the process of psychoanalysis proves elusive, as the analysand is generally left feeling confused about where exactly the analyst 'is' (in all senses of this peculiar word). In discourse typical of the master or university the addressed generally know exactly where they stand, even if they feel overwhelmed by truth or knowledge. In the case of the master – they are slave, in the case of the university, a student. In the analyst's discourse the addressed Other is the divided subject and in contrast to these other discourses they feel bereft of certainty as the agent addressing them is the desired object, which will forever be beyond their reach.

The purpose of confronting a subject with this object is to attempt to shake up and as I see it 're-signify' the existing master signifier that is currently at work within their lives. It is because of the 'ill-fit' of this extant master signifier that the subject seeks help in the first place. Ironically as Lacan himself says "it is fairly curious that what he produces is nothing other than the master's discourse, since it's S_1 which comes to occupy the place of production" (2007 (1969-70), p. 176):

$$\frac{\$}{S_1}$$

Lacan goes on to say that it may be "from the analyst's discourse that there can emerge another style of the master signifier" (ibid, p. 176). I read from this that it is through the

process of the analyst's discourse that an attempt can be made to encourage the subject to invoke a 'new law', a new master signifier. I see this as similar to the productive process of the hysteric's discourse, as Kovacevic describes both discourses "are more open to the truth of the subject's unconscious" (2007, p. 126) than either the master's or university's. But perhaps more importantly both are open to processes of re-signification (change in the master signifier) rather than repetition of the extant master signifier.

Underpinning the agent in the analyst's discourse is S_2, or knowledge, in the form of what the analyst knows about the situation. But this knowledge is frustrating for the analyst because it is structurally forced into a position *under the bar.* Which, for Paul Verhaeghe at least, means that the analyst necessarily takes the position of "*Docta Ignorantia*" or 'learned ignorance' (1995, p. 13). With regard to attempts to analyse social theory this is, of course, a rather difficult undertaking because the analyst's discourse does not lend itself well to writing academic or indeed popular texts. In fact on this exact topic Lacan states "because I am stating this from up here on a podium there is in effect a risk of error, an element of refraction, which means that in some respects it will fall under the influence of the university discourse" (2007 (1969-70), p. 41). For Filip Kovacevic this is something that must be worked with "for the analyst discourse to produce meaningful results, the dominant discourse structure in a given society needs to be that of the university" (2007, p. 132). But crucially the knowledge 'used' by the analyst is not the same knowledge as the university. Zizek describes the difference as such: "the knowledge gained here will not be the neutral objective knowledge of scientific adequacy, but the knowledge that concerns the subject (analysand) in the truth of his subjective position" (Zizek, 2006, p. 115). So for me the voice of my analyst does

indeed speak through the discourse of the university, it's just that the articulations are related to the truth of the fat subject's weight anxiety.

One example of these attempts can be seen in the reactions from the weight-anxious readers of *Healthy Food Guide*. In one article where I wrote about the notion of 'weight cycling' (repeated fluctuations in body weight brought about by dieting) I provided the following 'tip' to avoid weight cycling patterns:

> Eat when you are hungry and stop when you are full – a simple piece of advice!
>
> (Research Journal, 30-4-09)

For those weight-anxious subjects this tip seemed to fly in the face of accepted knowledge. 'The law' of weight loss (as directed by the master and educated by the university) is 'careful portions' and 'controlled hunger'. I included this tip because I consciously felt it was important to confront the weight-anxious subject with the uncomfortable truth of the not-weight-anxious subject, which is that they eat when they are hungry and stop when they are full. During my weight loss journey I had discovered this peculiar idea and I had discovered how confronting it was for the weight-anxious. I now think that by writing this tip I confronted the weight-anxious subject with their object a, as surplus *jouissance*:

$$a \longrightarrow \$$$

I think you can see this social interaction in the following response I received from a reader of *Healthy Food Guide*:

I was surprised to read in June 2009's issue a comment made in relation to weight-loss for men. It stated: "basically just eat until you are full." Really? What happened to portion sizes and waiting 20 minutes? I am a huge food lover and it would be all my dreams come true to be able to eat until I was full!! I know that if I followed this advice I would soon be gaining weight (even if the food I was consuming was healthy) as being an avid reader of HFG I have it drummed into me that if you eat more energy than you are burning off you will gain weight. So as I see it, unless you do excessive amounts of exercise eating until you are full is not ideal advice for weight loss. (Research Journal, 31-7-09)

On the surface I think this response is a fairly classic student response to the university's discourse, challenging certain signifiers with other knowledge that they have learned. However in terms of the analyst's discourse it appears as a weight-anxious subject confronted with the Real of the *objet a*, that is the Real threatened to debase the object that represented desire. The reader states *'it would be all my dreams come true to eat until I was full'*. Although I feel uncomfortable interpreting without knowing a great deal about the particular of the reader it seems to me that this sentence is almost pulsing with the allure and trauma of *jouissance* whilst also being unconsciously aware of the very lack that drives the comment. Clearly I was not attempting to enact the analyst's discourse in this exchange – I had no idea that this reader would respond as such – it is just what occurred.

It may just be my own fantasy of emancipation from the master but perhaps this encounter suggests a small step towards the reader moving between discourses, maybe

from the master's (or university) to the hysteric's? Something that Dominiek Hoens describes suggests this possibility:

> "There is some emergence of analytic discourse with each shift from one discourse to another"… Put differently, the analytic discourse allows one to confront the origin of speech (the point where the subject gets represented in its disappearance) and as such allows one to be engaged in discourse (Hoens, 2006, p. 94).

Throughout the thesis I will attempt to identify analytic discourse when I interpret it as occurring.

3.8.   Concluding comments

Earlier in this chapter I discussed Nobus and Quinn's warning regarding the application of the four discourses as "interpretative options" (2005, p. 137). I know that the interpretations that I make in each section of this chapter and indeed throughout my thesis could be interpreted very differently by 'Other' academic analysts. But if I were to spend time considering our different interpretations, weighing them up and arguing for my own, as might be expected, then I'd be falling into the trap that Nobus and Quinn warn against, because it is my own interpretations, with my own hystory, that give the four discourses their authorial power for my project. There is no 'real' and 'correct' analysis in the symbolic world – only interpretations that disrupt existing master signifiers and produce new ones. This process of re-signification *is* change.

What Lacanian analysis does is provide me with an alternative epistemology that recognises the value of the knowledge that is the unconscious, as Nobus and Quinn describe:

> Lacanian psychoanalysis radically inverts the infamous pop psychoanalytic moment of deep confession and sudden insight, in which the analysand starts to 'see the light' and receives new information about himself. Instead, it insists on the value of seeing the darkness that rests at the heart of the desire to know through an encounter with an unconscious knowledge in which we are concerned, but which does not concern us (Nobus & Quinn, 2005, p. 111).

By actively encouraging the hysteric and analyst authors who speak my subjectivity I am attempting (and naturally, failing) to see what constitutes my 'desire to know'. In Filip Kovacevic's opinion the discourse of the analyst and hysteric "can be used to underwrite social and political changes" (2007, p. 126). With this in mind I am attempting in this thesis to contribute towards change that would encourage society to be more accepting of a subject's (my) contradictory subjectivities.

A final word on my attempt at social change; Lacan makes the following comment with regard to the hysteric's discourse: "What the analyst establishes as analytic experience can be put simply – it's the hysterization of discourse. In other words, it is the structural introduction, under artificial conditions, of the hysteric's discourse" (Lacan, 2007 (1969-70), p. 33). This statement sums up the basis upon which I attempt to disrupt the organisation of the weight loss industry and its appropriation of the weight-anxious subject. Specifically, through the communicative act of this thesis I am attempting to

hystericize the master's and university's discourse that together provide the framework

for the social institution of weight-anxiety that currently pervades New Zealand society.

4. Literature Review

By its very nature the literature review functions as an indispensable actor in the structure of the discourse of the university:

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \xrightarrow{\quad} \frac{a}{\$}$$
$$/\!/$$
$$U$$

Knowledge is located in the position of agent in this structure, which means that anyone seeking to display legitimacy in the university must 'be knowledgeable' and the literature review is a researcher's main mechanism for demonstrating their expert and legitimate knowledge of their field. No academic would read a journal article or textbook that did not cite 'the required works' for that field without meeting serious scepticism, myself included. Clearly there is a purpose for this function; we might say that the purpose is the on-going production and building of a knowledge-base, though we could also say it is the on-going production of students who speak the same message as the hidden master. Either way a PhD student has no option but to follow the structure and write the literature review. I approach it thus with a healthy enthusiasm, and produce below a typical literature review, complete with numerous limiting caveats, as directed by the university.

4.1. Post-preamble

This literature review chapter covers a wide range of literature. This is because I have chosen to study a concept that is widely researched by scientists (who term it overweight and obesity), using a Lacanian psychoanalytic framework that prior to this has not been

applied to weight anxiety, within the discipline of critical organisation studies. Further I am taking a particular interest in my research on gender by autoethnographically using my own experiences. Consequently, in this chapter, I will cover literatures that are mostly tangentially related to my research questions. In true literature review style I will start broad and hone in (within each section and generally across the chapter) on the literature I have found most specifically related to my analysis.

I should also note that each results/conclusion chapter, including chapter three, introduces and explains a range of literature that I will not specifically address in this chapter. In particular I use a broad array of Lacanian concepts throughout the thesis and it would be repetitive to also address this body of work here. As a rough guide chapter three talks at some length about the Real, Symbolic Imaginary triad, and Lacanian discourse theory, chapter two about Lacan's theory of subjectivity, chapter five about anxiety, desire and *jouissance*, chapter six about gender and sexuality and chapter seven about the ethics of psychoanalysis. What I do explain in this chapter is how Lacan has been received and appropriated by those who study organisations.

Before I begin I want to clarify somewhat the terminology I use in this chapter and generally in the thesis. Within the obesity scientific literature terminology is relatively easily managed. The terms 'obesity' and 'overweight' have clinical definitions that are generally accepted across the range of biological scientific literatures. Within the discipline of psychological study the terminology is substantially more contested. Although the clinical definitions are used by many psychologists, mental illness also enters the literature in relation to obesity, fatness and body image. More complicating is terminology within the field of psychoanalytic study and particularly in Lacanian

analysis. Through its character Lacanian psychoanalysis would not try to specify general diagnostic criteria for obesity that can be applied across the spectrum of subjectivity – this would ignore the Symbolic and Imaginary intricacies of the subject in relation to their own fat, fatness and body image. In particular a Lacanian understanding of language and its relation to the unconscious renders 'universally accepted and understood' terminology as something of an absurdity. That is not to say that shared understanding does not exist within society, it's just that this understanding is lacking and temporary. For Lacan the best we can do is talk of signifiers; consequently what I aim to do in this chapter is talk about the signifiers 'fat', 'fatness' and 'body image' when discussing sociological and psychoanalytic literature and the clinical terms 'obesity' and 'overweight' only in relation to the biological and epidemiological scientific literatures.

4.2. The Science of Epidemics: Obesity as an epidemic or slimness as a moral ideology?

In this first section of my literature review I will discuss the scientific field of obesity research. Very broadly this literature can be separated into those that take the 'obesity epidemic' to be a scientific fact and those that do not; I have used this split to order this section, though the conflict is heavily in favour of the 'obesity epidemic as fact' group.

4.2.1. Obesity as epidemic

The majority of the scientific community now hold the view that many countries, including New Zealand, are in the grip of an 'obesity epidemic' that began in the late 1970s and continues to rise, essentially unabated (WHO, 2004). Since this trend has been measured, scientists across a wide spectrum of disciplines have become involved in trying to track down the reasons for this weight gain. This scientific research has resulted

in a proliferation of published work that appears to be growing at an astronomical pace. For instance in June 2009 I conducted a search of the database ISI web of knowledge using the search term 'obesity' in the field 'title' and returned a staggering 50,696 results. Even more telling is when these were published – 28,148 have a publication year between 2000 and 2009, 8,248 between 1990 and 1999, 6,097 between 1980 and 1989, 4,307 between 1970 and 1979 and 3,896 prior to 1970. So there was a rise in publications from the 1970s to the 1980s of 42%, from the 1980s to the 1990s of 35% and from the 1990s to the 2000s of 240%. Broken down further the following graph clearly demonstrates that from mid 1990s there has been an explosion of interest:
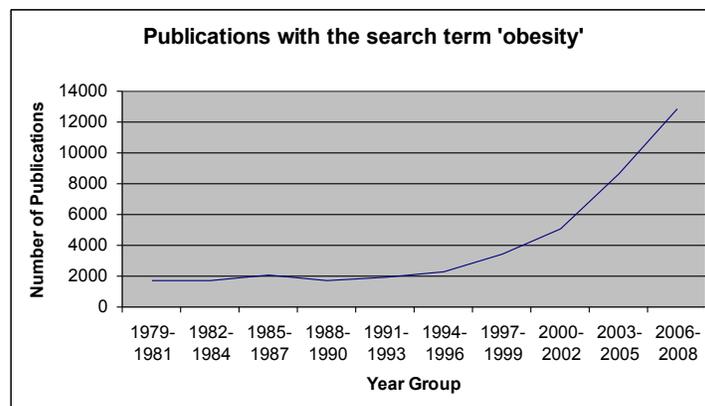
Figure 4.1: Publications from ISI Web of Knowledge featuring the term 'obesity'

Clearly this is a serious subject of interest in the scientific community. It is not necessary for me to summarise the extent of this literature in any comprehensive way but I do want to make a couple of observations about the scope and conclusions resulting from this extensive body of work.

All scientists seem to be joined in agreement over the physiological mechanism by which people have gained weight since the late 1970s – that is an energy imbalance; people

consuming more energy and expending less energy resulting in the body's physiology storing the excess as body fat. The cause of this excess energy is substantially more contentious, probably because science has not been able to definitively provide an answer.

In my reading the scientific obesity literature is now broadly split between studies in biology, biochemistry, chemistry and genetics that investigate the possible biological basis for obesity and epidemiological studies that are often multi-disciplinary involving public health, nutrition & dietetics, sociology and cognitive/behavioural psychology. Studies in each of these broad categories seem to only make a very general reference to each other, for instance Ichihara & Yamada in their review paper *Genetic factors for human obesity* make the following statement in reference to the epidemiological side: "Although environmental factors play an important role in obesity, genetic variants also contribute substantially to its pathogenesis" (2008, p. 1086). Similarly epidemiological studies tend to allow biology a space as an influencing factor in their models. For instance the application of the 'epidemiology triad' to obesity, which was first suggested by Egger, Swinburn and Rossner (2003), and has been used by New Zealand government agencies when designing public health interventions (Ministry of Health, 2003a, 2003b), allows biology a space as an influencing factor.

I think the focus of the 'cause of obesity research' has tended to drift towards epidemiology. In true epidemiological style this includes a range of factors, as Ogden and Flanagan describe: "As a means to explain this increase, researchers have focused their attention on the role of the obesogenic environment and have highlighted the importance of factors such as the food industry, food advertising, food labelling, the availability of

energy dense foods and an environment which has been increasingly designed to encourage a sedentary lifestyle through the use of cars, computers and television" (2008, p. 72). The biology literature is vast but is very speculative, in that it tends to be reductionist. I will make no serious attempt to summarise either bodies of literature, except to say that it is common place for epidemiological work to attempt to incorporate some aspect of psychology obesity 'cause' in their models. Primarily these are very generalised inclusions that treat psychology as 'factors' (psyhological factors) and then give a few examples such as peer-pressure and familial environment. Also the burgeoning area of neurobiology and particularly the effect of psychoactive pharmaceuticals on weight loss attempts and obesity is interesting, though tentative and in early development (see Morrison & Berthoud, 2007 for instance).

The Body Mass Index (BMI) features heavily in all of the studies in both categories. It is the basic measure of 'obese' and 'overweight' they all use to claim that there is a problem. It is extremely rare for a researcher to step out of the BMI framework, though increasingly they may refer to its accepted problems; such as it being a blunt instrument when comparing across ethnic boundaries. However the BMI remains the most widespread tool to label a person as 'obese' or 'overweight' in this type of research.

4.2.2. Anti-epidemic science

There is a substantial and growing body of literature that questions the validity of the obesity epidemic claims from within the ranks of science. Two books published in the mid-2000s question the validity of the scientific research that is used to create the spectacle of the obesity epidemic (Paul Campos, 2004; Gard & Wright, 2005). Campos and others have gone on to publish within the epidemiological literature; one of the most

cited of these is Campos, Saguy, Ernsberger, Oliver and Gaesser (2006). This article provides a compelling critique of the scientific evidence and suggests that perhaps the 'so-called' epidemic is more a moral panic than a public health crisis. Campos et al have called for more research into this area and the resultant publications have provided an interesting critical take on what is otherwise a 'taken for granted' fact. Certainly the prevailing view of obesity science as truth is not agreed the world over.

What this body of literature does not do is consider the psychodynamic or indeed discursive construction of the so-called obesity epidemic. As my research is not closely related to the science of obesity, I now turn to the psychodynamics of fat, fatness and body image. I have purposefully shifted signifiers here to move away from the clinical terminology.

4.3.   The psychodynamics of fat, fatness and body image

There is not a long history of research into the psychology of fat, fatness and related body image issues. The earliest research specifically on this issue I can find comes from the 1970s where two different types of research can be seen to be emerging. The first set of emerging literatures takes a psychotherapeutic and feminist position towards fatness and the diet industry, the second set is more traditionally focussed on a clinical psychoanalytic framework to understanding obesity, I will discuss both of these bodies of literature below.

One of the most prominent writers of the first type of research mentioned above is Susie Orbach (1978). Since the publication of her first book in 1978 *Fat is a Feminist Issue* Susie Orbach has waged a relentless crusade against the diet industry and in doing so has

applied psychoanalytic thinking to fat and the diet industry. *Fat is a Feminist Issue* is an early effort to explore the psychoanalytic basis of fat, fatness and body image. Orbach is definitive in her critique of these issues; her conclusion was that the fat, fatness and body image issues faced by women in the late 1970s must be considered from a feminist standpoint, as the relations between the sexes conspired to produce the unattainable body ideal sold to women by the diet and fashion industries. Orbach's publications have been widely read, for instance *Fat is a Feminist Issue* made three editions (most recently published in 1998) and has been cited academically in clinical psychology, psychiatry, women's studies, general psychology, nutrition and dietetics, sociology, psychoanalysis as well as many others.

In the 1970s and 1980s Orbach was specifically interested in the effect on girls and women, though in more recent times she has expanded this to include people who are biologically male. In a relatively recent commentary on the diet industry and the role of government regulation she says: "Addressing such concerns should be what drives the public health agenda so that those industries, which operate as a negative force on girls' and women's and increasingly boys' and men's self experience, are regulated out of existence" (Susie Orbach, 2006, p. 68). Perhaps this means that now fat is no longer just a feminist issue? I address this in detail in chapter six.

Orbach was one of several feminists who tackled weight issues in the last half of the twentieth century, however these tend to be less informed by psychoanalyic ideas than Orbach. These include Kim Chernin (Chernin, 1981), Shari Dworkin (Dworkin, 1988) and Sharlene Hesse-Biber (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, & Zoino, 2006) (Hesse-Biber,

1991) all of whom have been very influential in the general area of feminism and its relation to weight-issues.

Whilst not in the feminist literature Joyce Slochower's research on the psychodynamics of obesity was one of the first to point towards the potential of psychoanalytics in understanding the eating-issues, in her conclusion she states: "It first appeared that only interview studies supported the notion that certain types of anxiety states play a crucial role in overeating. Now, however, both quasi-experimental and experimental designs report results consistent with the theory" (Slochower, 1987, p. 156).

The second body of research in this category is more in accordance with Slochower's approach than the feminists, though it is less well known in the weight-loss community. That said, it has informed a number of researchers since its publication in the 1970s. Rand and Stunkard (1977, 1978, 1983) undertook a substantial study investigating the effect of psychoanalytic psychotherapy on obesity. They published a series of articles reporting the results of this work which tended to support the assertion that psychoanalytic treatment can result in a patient losing weight and sustaining that weight loss. Subsequent studies citing Rand and Stunkard's original works have tended to move away from a Freudian perspective on psychoanalysis, either towards a more psychotherapeutic interpretation of psychoanalysis or more commonly towards a positivist psychology perspective comparing and contrasting the impact of relatively short behavioural and psychodynamic treatment regimes. One example of the latter for instance compared the effectiveness of CBT and psychotherapy over a 49 day period when treating 'severely obese' persons. This study found both treatment regimes to be comparable in terms of results. (Beutel, Dippel, Szczepanski, Thiede, & Wiltink, 2006).

This thesis will engage primarily with the feminist psychodynamic discussions of fat, fatness and body image represented mainly by Susie Orbach. In the following section I tackle a set of literature related more directly to the weight loss industry.

4.4. Criticisms of the weight loss industry, public health campaigns and the media

In this section I am going to discuss a selection of literature that has focussed specifically and critically on the weight loss industry (and to some degree the fashion industry), public health campaigns addressed at fatness, and the notion of consumption of food more generally.

In the section on obesity science I discussed a body of literature that questioned the validity of the science used to construct the notion of an 'obesity epidemic'. Related to this literature is an article by Aphramor (2005) who also questioned the 'fact' of the obesity epidemic from her clinical position as a dietician. Aphramor's take on the obesity epidemic science is perhaps a more useful one for my project than others I have presented prior. Like Campos et al (2006) Aphramor also questions the science of weight loss trials, particularly the total lack of social or psychological frameworks within their scientific method, she states for instance that "standard weight loss trails [sic] model eating as primarily a cognitive and physiological activity" (2005, p. 317). However Aphramor's take on the weight loss industry extends Campos et al's argument against the weight-loss industry by considering in more detail the specific and particular psychosocial impacts of the function of the weight loss industry; her conclusions call for more to be done in this area. In a very recent article Bacon and Aphramor (2011) added to this call by challenging (again) the medical industry's focus on weight loss as the best treatment

measure for fat people, instead in this article they show with empirical data that promoting a Health at Every Size (HAES) model achieves better outcomes across a range of indicators, including physical measures and psychosocial outcomes. Their conclusion states that "[f]rom the perspective of efficacy as well as ethics, body weight is a poor target for public health intervention. There is sufficient evidence to recommend a paradigm shift from conventional weight management to Health at Every Size" (p. 9). It is interesting that the authors identify ethical issues in this statement. I look closely at ethical issues associated with the weight loss industry from a psychoanalytic perspective in chapter seven.

Public health campaigns focussing on obesity and nutrition have been criticised for a range of reasons. Most literatures critical of anti-obesity and nutritional public health campaigns do not question the stated aim of the campaigns to try and improve the health of the public; the criticisms instead tend to be focussed on the narrow range of disciplines these campaigns are based on (particularly science and epidemiology). For example Austin takes this view. In his opinion campaigns based on science in fact do more harm than good, he states: "Contemporary nutritional public health's profound allegiance to the biomedically conceived body and naiveté about the centrality of cultural meaning-making regarding eating, food, fat and gender do more harm than simply hobble efforts to promote healthful behaviour" (Austin, 1999, p. 246). Austin's assertion is that science is in fact complicit in the development of disordered eating and fatness associations in our society as its roots come from an "ideological project" based on the materialism of science that ignores the "cultural complexity" that intersects food and eating, bodies and our social relations. Austin's theoretical position comes courtesy of Foucault, and

particularly his writings on the discipline of medicine and the notion of surveillance (Foucault, 1995).

Following in Austin's theoretical line, Burns and Gavey (2004) used New Zealand empirical data to confront similar notions. Their article looks at the discourse of weight control circulating within bulimic patients. Their findings, educed through poststructuralist discourse analysis, reveal that the healthy weight discourse promoted by public health campaigns in fact reinforced bulimic behaviours as the goal of a "slender body" promoted by public health messages is commensurate with the binge – purge behaviour of bulimics.

Also following in this theoretical line, Allen (2008) has pursued a project that I think is more directly relevant than the previous to my position. Allen's article carries a certain psychoanalytic heritage, through a brief application of Judith Butler's psychoanalytic theory. In her article Allen critically analyses an Entertainment Tonight television show that presents an intervention in the life of an anorexic woman; she convincingly describes a metaphor between this show and a fairytale where the sufferer is positioned in the role of heroine. Entertainment Tonight and the show's participants are therefore complicit in normalising a view of a particularly severely anorexic woman as an ideal anorexic subject position – something that others may choose to strive for. The aspect of Allen's analysis that I find particularly interesting is that she demonstrates how the show constructs a "consistent and cohesive subjectivit[y]" for the sufferer to allow the viewers a chance to let her participate in their social (symbolic) world, when in fact anorexic subjectivities, like all subjectivities, are at best ambiguous and incoherent (2008, p. 591).

These ideas Allen accords to Judith Butler (1990), though the underlying understanding of subjectivity can comfortably be traced back to Lacanian understanding of subjectivity.

Allen also identifies the role that capitalism's contemporary neoliberal ideology plays in the construction of who is to 'blame' for the so-called 'obesity epidemic': "Neoliberal ideology situates the responsibility for health and body size in the hands of the individual; eliminating the role of the individual's social context" (2008, p. 595). I support her position here, particularly because it refers the analysis to the Lacan's Symbolic register, which Allen calls the individual's 'social context'.

One aspect of the individual's 'social context' that interests me specifically is gender. Implied in much of the literatures I have discussed to this point is the heavily gendered nature of the weight-loss industry; it is set up to function as almost exclusively as 'women's business'. Therefore in the next section I explore literatures that do interrogate men and masculinities in relation to the weight-loss industry.

4.5. Masculinity, Men, fat, fatness and body image

There isn't a great deal to say about men, fat, fatness and body image. In fact some argue that they have been silenced in the face of feminism's particular focus on women's issues (Bell & McNaughton, 2007). Though Bell and McNaughton do actually make a reasonably compelling argument that fat, fatness and body image have been on men's radars for at least as long as women's. It just appears that the wave of feminism (particularly the 2nd wave) has 'silenced' the fat man. Bell and McNaughton challenge others to pick on this silent fat man and this challenge has been answered, but only with lonely muted whispers in dark corridors.

In particular Lee Monaghan seems to have taken this challenge rather seriously; though I should note that he has been publishing on this topic since at least as early 2001. Since then Monaghan has published widely on men's issues and the obesity epidemic; he is firmly in the 'anti-epidemic' camp and has made a significant contribution to the literature on men, fat, fatness, body image and the so-called obesity epidemic (2001, 2002; 2002; 2005; 2006; 2007a, 2007b, 2008). Monaghan's work is primarily within the sociological framework of symbolic interactionism which considers the relationship between people and particularly the meaning people attribute to things in their world. Although this approach is not psychoanalytic, it certainly resonates somewhat with my experiences. However, I believe that by reading some of the issues that Monaghan identifies through Lacanian theory they can be more thoroughly 'worked over' psychoanalytically from the perspective of the unconscious and its relationship to the Symbolic. In particular one of the tenets of Monaghan's project is that society feminises fatness, he says: "a society in which fatness is routinely discredited as feminine and feminizing filth by institutions that are publicly reinforcing and amplifying fatphobic norms or sizism" (L. F. Monaghan, 2008, p. 97). I do not disagree with this analysis and psychoanalysis provides a very different pathway through which to consider the relationship between femininity/masculinity and physical gender. Those participants in Monaghan's work who identify as male are grouped as men/masculine, even if their ways of 'being' masculine within the weight-loss industry differ. In Lacanian theory I would not be so certain that their Imaginary male-ness defines their relationship to masculinity and femininity. I explore this in chapter six.

In contrast to the literatures specifically focussed on men, fat and fatness, masculinity as a concept is certainly not new to the research community. In fact masculinity literature is rather pervasive and extends across many discipline areas. Around the same time as the 'turn to language' in psychology there was a similar shift in focus in the masculinity literature from a focus on trait type models that aimed to identify the truth of what it meant to be a man to a more social constructionist approach termed 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The concept of hegemonic masculinity can be attributed in the most part to Connell; Wetherell & Edley describe Connell's position:

"He argues that masculine characters are not given. Rather, a range of possible styles and personae emerge from the gender regimes found in different cultures and historical periods. Among the possible variety of ways of being masculine, however, some become 'winning styles' and it is these with which men must engage" (1999, p. 336)

This position is certainly not without its critics, Wetherell and Edley included. They argue specifically that Connell's articulation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity does not account for how men's lives are actually regulated by the various dominant forms of hegemony at play in discourses of masculinity. Wetherell and Edley's approach represents a form and practice of discursive social psychology that has its roots in the 'turn to language' in psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Harré & Gillett, 1994; Hollway, 1989; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The discursive psychology project of (particularly) Nigel Edley has explored the notion of masculinity fairly thoroughly, and

those sympathetic to this approach tend to conclude, like Wetherell and Edley, that even the man:

> [w]ho describes himself as original, as beyond stereotypes, as having a personal, worked-out philosophy of masculinity or indeed as just ordinary and average has not escaped the familiar tropes of gender. He is precisely enmeshed by convention; subjectified, ordered and disciplined at the very moment he rehearses the language of personal taste, unconventionality and autonomy, or ordinariness and normality (1999, p. 353).

It is fair to say that the discursive psychology project has engaged with psychoanalysis, but this engagement is not altogether comfortable (Edley, 2006). One of the most prevalent authors in this area is Stephen Frosh (1994) and colleagues (S. Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2003). Frosh and colleague's engagement with psychoanalysis is primarily through the object-relations theory of Melanie Klein, although they do discuss Lacanian theory, particularly the mirror-stage and the Symbolic register. The reason why they favour Klein's approach is best explained in their own words: "the Lacanian version of things is not by any means the only, or necessarily the clearest, psychoanalytic approach offering leverage on the enculturation of what seems most personal—the inner life of each apparently separate individual" (2003, p. 41). I can't disagree with this statement, though I do think, at least to some extent, that this is an evasion by Frosh et al. Lacan is not just a difficult author – to me the lack of surface clarity in his language reflects the murky interior of our conscious-unconscious tension as subjects. Our language is not clear, it is tense and terse and hidden – if you favour the 'clear' you favour the conscious and run the risk of re-repressing the unconscious. I think that the murky depths of

Lacan's advanced formulation of sexuality developed in his Seminar XX (Lacan, 1998 (1972-73)) and discourse theory developed in Seminar XVII (Lacan, 2007 (1969-70)) provide an alternative lens to consider what it means to be a man. In a similar vein to Frosh, Brendan Gough (Gough, 2004) has combined discursive psychology and psychoanalysis to study men and masculinities also from a Kleinian perspective. Gough makes only passing reference to Lacanian theory to describe the vulnerabilities of masculinities with reference to "phallic illusions" (2004, p. 249). The contributions of these authors and others who combine discursive psychology and psychoanalysis are significant and relevant for my own reading of men, fat, fatness and body image. In particular both Gough (2004) and Frosh et al. (2003) talk of anxiety, Gough specifically discusses what he terms 'shared anxieties' at some length, explaining how these associate around areas of concern – such as homosexuality and men's role in relation to the women in their lives. I talk about anxiety, from a Lacanian perspective, at length in chapter five. This extends what I see as a rather surface level discussion regarding men's anxiety by linking this to desire in the context of the weight-loss industry.

I turn now to some literature that has considered masculinity from a more purely psychoanalytic perspective, though these literatures are rather limited. In fact in 2006 the Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association published the first part-special issue on the topic of masculinities and psychoanalysis. In the introduction Lieberman said: "For the past forty years or more the psychoanalytic literature on gender and sexuality has focused almost exclusively on female psychology and female development. Male psychology has for the most part been neglected, with the exception of a few scattered contributions" (2006, p. 1059). Several original articles appeared in this special issue

covering topics generally related to male identity; for instance Fogel considered masculinity from a psychoanalytic perspective in relation to bisexuality (Fogel, 2006) and Diamond wrote a piece on the root of male gender identity and the different ego positions men transition through as they age (M. J. Diamond, 2006). What is interesting to note is that only one of the papers in the special issue mentions masculinity with respect to Lacan, and then only in very general terms, even if rather eloquently phrased "[t]his may be an enduring characteristic of masculinity—that it house the unattainable—that, in that sense, it stands as both parallel and complement to "beauty"? (This line of thought, by the way, is directly indebted to Lacan's theorization of the "signification of the phallus.")" (see Moss, 2006, p. 1191). Moss makes an interesting point in this phrase, that masculinity houses something unattainable – though some may say that in fact the unattainable exists in Lacan's feminine. I touch on this further in chapter six.

A good example of other psychoanalytic literature on masculinities is Gadd who discusses masculinities as "defended psychosocial subjects" (2000, p. 429), when discussing men's violence. Gadd uses a psychoanalytic approach following Wendy Hollway. He contrasts this approach with hegemonic and discursive approaches by explaining the benefit of a psychoanalytic framework as such: "My argument is that a psychoanalytic interpretative reading of men's lives not only serves to highlight what many men have in common, but also opens up the possibility of change to theoretical engagement without denying the multitude of socio-structural and psychological factors that militate against it" (Gadd, 2000, p. 430).

Generally I agree with Gadd, in that I see how a psychoanalytic interpretative reading can highlight what men have in common in relation to fat, fatness and body image. The key

here to me is the 'what men have in common' and I think that Lacan's concept of the Symbolic and his formulation of sexuation provides a salient pathway to educing this commonality for men in our current Symbolic register.

It is clear from the above literature that there is not very much research investigating what it means to be a man concerned with fat, fatness or body image and there is very limited Lacanian psychoanalytic research specifically on men or masculinities. I would note at this point that Lacan himself engaged in detail with notions of masculinity and maleness from a range of theoretical and philosophical perspectives (Lacan, 1998 (1964-65), 1998 (1972-73), 2006a); in particular Lacan's discussion of the function of the phallus as signifier and his formulation of sexuality are rooted in the masculine-feminine tension (Lacan, 1998 (1972-73)). My argument is that Lacan's ideas have not been well 'run with' in studies of men and masculinity; I intend to go some way towards filling this gap, particularly in chapter six.

4.6.   An Introduction: Lacan's 'line of flight' into Organisation Studies

In each of the other chapters of my thesis I devote space to explaining and discussing specific aspects of Lacan's body of work. I did consider attempting to assemble all of this into the literature review – as that might be a more common pathway – but I decided that would be problematic as it would be out of context and more frustrating than it needs to be. That said in this section I am going someway towards explaining how Lacanian theory has appeared in the organisation studies literature to date.

In many ways trying to summarise Lacanian theory in any comprehensive way is futile because I will certainly fail to do justice to Lacan's own writings and that of subsequent

authors. Lacan's contribution to the clinical practice of psychoanalysis alone is immense. His seminars extend over more than two decades and introduce, analyse and detail an extensive array of inter-related concepts with a healthy disregard for discipline boundaries. Since the late 1970s Lacan's work has been applied to broad variety of fields including extensively in cultural studies, ideology, film theory, philosophy, literature, linguistics, social theory and many others. I cannot provide a coherent picture of this body of work in this thesis, but within this I do hope to be productive (see Hoedemaekers, 2007, p. 17 for a discussion of his concept of what constitutes a 'productive failure'). Specifically I hope to be productive by focussing on a selection of Lacan's primary work and other Lacanian literature on the discipline of organisation studies as it relates to fat, fatness and body image. This condensed body of literature is however still broad in discipline including some directly in organisation studies but also studies in philosophy, feminism, gender studies, clinical psychoanalysis, sociology and others. This body of work does not directly address the psychology of fat, but the way the scholars apply Lacan the study of organisations illuminates how I approach the industry of weight-anxiety.

Lacan's psychoanalytic framework represents a relatively new addition to what is a well established tradition of looking at the unconscious in organisational settings (Jones & Spicer, 2005). In the following paragraphs I attempt to briefly describe the 'line of flight' (Fleming, 2002) that I think demonstrates why Lacanian psychoanalysis has been added to the repertoire in organisation studies.

There are two strands to my analysis of this issue, one strand looks at the development of psychology as a discipline within management and organisation studies since the early

twentieth century. I see this movement as existing within the rational modernist perspective prevalent in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The second strand considers the influence of the 'turn to language' experienced within psychology and the human sciences generally in the 1970s and the subsequent evolution of the postmodern perspective in organisation studies. Both strands are necessary to trace Lacan's line of flight into organisation studies.

Cooper & Burrell began the introduction in their classic 1988 paper 'Modernism, Postmodernism and Organizational Analysis: An Introduction' with a summary of the "self-analysis and self doubt" (p. 92) that characterised the human sciences at the time. They explain that the debate was "polarized around two apparently conflicting epistemological positions: modernism with its belief in the essential capacity of humanity to perfect itself through the power of rational thought and postmodernism with its critical questioning, and often outright rejection, of the ethnocentric rationalism championed by modernism" (p. 92). Much water has travelled under the bridge since the publication of this paper and its contemporaries, including the introduction of many forms of critical analysis critiquing the rational modernist project of organisation studies. Psychoanalysis is a more recent entrant into this group and is becoming more and more used as a viable form of critical analysis in organisation studies. I think the reason for this growth in popularity is because of the radically different formulation of subjectivity offered by psychoanalysis. It rejects traditional rational notions of subject, and particularly the self as subject – in fact the beauty of using a psychoanalytic framework resides in its unique ability to re-position the subject outside of rational assumptions about self-hood therefore giving voice also to the irrational.

Organisation study's inheritance of Lacan has been described in some detail in Jones and Spicer (2005), whom discuss both the lack and uptake of general psychoanalytic and specifically Lacanian concepts in organisation studies. As Jones and Spicer explain, the body of research applying aspects of Lacanian theory to the study of organisations is growing, although Lacanian analysis of organisation is still an emerging field. Roberts (2005) for instance focussed Lacan's notion of the Imaginary on disciplinary processes in an organisation. Jones and Spicer (2005) themselves looked at the empty signifier of the 'entrepreneur' and expose both its broad influence and fundamental lack (of content) using Lacan's advanced conceptualisation of the three registers (Hoedemaekers, 2008) and particular the notion of the Real.

Drawing on Lacan's notion of the Symbolic, Gilles Arnaud (2002) has contributed significantly to providing an alternative reading of organisational activities. In particular his analysis on the compulsion to repeat as a playing out of an unconscious debt residing in long ago formed chains of signification add much to the understanding of managerial inappropriateness. Also his work on developing a framework for Lacanian inspired executive coaching adds a substantial amount to inspiring organisations to consider psychoanalytically based treatments to organisational problems (2003). In a similar vein Vanheule et al (2003) investigated organisational burnout using Lacan's 'intersubjective' relationship between the Imaginary and Symbolic registers.

More recently some Lacanian analysis of organisations has focussed on food within organisations. Driver includes some Lacanian analysis of employees' narrative accounts of eating in their organisational settings (2008). Driver's research is only a start at looking psychoanalytically at food in the workplace though she does show how using a

Lacanian understanding of the relationship of researcher to researched (or subject-supposed–to-know to patient) can be complicit in evoking specific notions from the researched. Driver has also contributed significantly in relation to organisational identity and lack (2009) and in relation to experiences of 'otherness' within organisational settings (2007). Fotaki has used psychoanalysis to explore health systems and policy-making (Fotaki, 2006, 2009) including using Lacanian ideas to demonstrate how the imaginary constructs reality and rationality. I like how Fotaki describes why she has "turned to psychoanalysis . . . for it provides us with one of the most sophisticated and most devastating critiques of the idea of a rational agent driven by the utility maximization principle in his/her actions" (2009, 143). This is one reason why I find myself drawn to Lacan - because of the nonsensicality of rationality in the weight-loss industry.

Also recently, Casper Hoedemaekers has provided a significant contribution to setting Lacan to work. His doctoral thesis is the first comprehensive empirical application of Lacan to the study of subjectivity at work, his analysis focussed around the three registers of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real. One of the most useful concepts Hoedemaekers introduces is the idea of a "productive failure" (Hoedemaekers, 2007, p. 17). He uses this when describing the kind of success a student of the university can expect when working in a Lacanian frame, this resonates with me as within the failure to represent resides a productive element.

My inheritance (Jones, 2002) of Lacan comes partly through another 'other', affiliated with organisation studies, but coming more directly through clinical psychoanalysis and social psychology. Partly this path has been forged by Wendy Hollway (1989). It seems that social and critical psychologists are incorporating psychoanalytic, including

Lacanian, concepts with increasing vigour. Parker explains that this may be to do with psychoanalysis's rather different formulation of subjectivity (Ian Parker, 2001) which gifts psychologists an alternative (and perhaps more useful?) way of understanding a subject. I have highlighted Hollway in particular because her heritage resonates with me. Hollway used several psychoanalytic sources, including Lacanian theory, to analyse and theorise human behaviour, the results of which were published in her 1989 book *Subjectivity and Method in Psychology*. She was particularly interested in the relationship between desire and subjectivity and in her early work was one of the first to show the worth of this approach for understanding how social relations can be understood with Lacanian subjectivity. I see my own work as inheriting an understanding of the application of Lacanian subjectivity from Hollway's work. Inheritors of Lacan via Hollway include authors such as Peter Branney (Branney, 2006, 2008) who applied psychoanalysis, including Lacanian psychoanalysis to examine domestic violence policy, including New Zealand domestic violence policy.

Finally psychoanalytic literature specifically approaching eating disorders from a Lacanian framework. Gabriella Ripa de Meana's book 'Figures of Lightness' on anorexia theorises how the desire a western self has to symbolically fit-in operates psychoanalytically (1999). I see links to Ripa de Meana's conceptualisation of anorexia with anxious fat men, particularly relating to the experiences of a shared system of signification and its generalisation to understanding the sets of neuroticisation that may be present within our society.

This section has only briefly introduced the array of Lacanian literatures in (and out) of organisation studies.

4.7.   My Research Question

Often a literature review culminates with a statement regarding the research question or hypothesis that is under scrutiny within the research project. I shall not let the reader down on this point and in this section I attempt to summarise the gap that I see in the literature and my subsequent articulation of a research question that this thesis addresses. I should note at this point that my research question evolves different facets with each chapter of the thesis and therefore the question(s) I address in the final chapter is (are) somewhat removed from that presented below. I do not see this as an issue but rather a reflection of the process of autoethnographic exploration. Below I briefly reiterate some key points from the literature review before summarising with my research question.

First: It should be clear to my reader that there is an overwhelming amount of research conducted by scientists, including biologists, geneticists, nutritionists, dieticians, epidemiologists and various forms of positivist psychologists into this thing called the 'obesity epidemic'. It should also be clear that there is growing opposition to the entire notion of the 'obesity epidemic'. I am not interested in siding directly with any part of this body of work. As far as I am concerned the discussions for and against are typical of the traditional machinations of the discourse of the university. The ramification of this for my research question then is a negation – I am not interested in the Other's classification of size or fatness, instead I am interested in a subject's perception of these in relation to their self, which is constituted from the Other.

Second: There is research that looks psychoanalytically at body image issues, however this has not been conducted by using a Lacanian framework, instead these studies tend to

be Kleinian in nature. Here I see what might be considered a 'gap' in the literature, how would Lacan interpret our society's fascination with the weight loss industry?

Third: I would agree that men have been rather absent as objects of inquiry in the discussions of weight, body image and fatness. Aside from a few notable exceptions, such as Lee Monaghan and Bell & McNaughton most researchers have bypassed blokes in favour of the more productive dieting woman. This is true both from the perspective of the weight-loss industry organisations but also those researching the industry. Perhaps this is changing in our current times as men are being targeted by weight-loss organisations such as Jenny Craig, recent examples include Buck Shelford in New Zealand and Ian 'Dicko' Dickson (no relation of mine – whew!) in Australia as marketing exemplars.

With these three points in mind my research question reads: How does the form and function of the wider weight-loss industry work to position men for whom weight is an issue?

5. The Jouissance of the Lard(er): Gender, desire and anxiety in the weight loss industry

Much of the content of this chapter has appeared in the journal *Culture & Organization* (Dickson, 2011); the complete article is attached as appendix B.

In this first results and discussion chapter I directly tackle the research question posed at the end of the previous chapter. Specifically I trace the countours of the psychoanalytic relationship between an anxious male weight loss consumer and the weight loss industry by negotiating the desire of weight anxious men to lose weight. Through this process I come to some understanding of how these circuits of desire work with regard to the operation of the weight loss industry. I explain my reasoning for focusing on men in the first part of the chapter. In the second part I discuss the two discourses that wrestle for control in this chapter specifically, the university and the hysteric.

The analysis I pursue in this chapter follows a Lacanian approach to understanding desire, anxiety, and *jouissance* in relation to Lacan's masculine and feminine structures, as outlined in Seminar XX, *Encore*. My analysis within is framed around two pieces of autoethnographic data which together form 'the case', this is set out in the third part of the chapter. The fourth and fifth sections set out my theory, I turn to the concept of phallic *jouissance* to describe how I see the relationship between the weight anxious consumer and the industry of weight loss and the relationship between truth and

knowledge before concluding with the implications that this analysis has for the study of organisations.

5.1.   Why men?

Whilst I certainly acknowledge the publicised plight of women under the gaze of the weight loss and fashion industries (Susie Orbach, 1993) I am explicitly interested in the men caught within this industry. In part I justify my focus on men by referring to Bell and McNaughton (2007) who discuss what they term the 'invisible fat man', and argue that many writers in the feminist tradition who critique the impact of the weight loss industry end up glossing over the 'man problem'. They for instance discuss Susie Orbach's text *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (Susie Orbach, 1978), and conclude that although she does not completely ignore the fat man, her conceptualisation of him is dismissive at best, they state: "male fat is difficult to conceptualize as anything other than an individual choice or pathology lacking in broader symbolic meaning or political connotations" (2007, p. 110). Generally, I agree with their assessment – Orbach's project was the emancipation of women, not men, and although she tried to leave a space for the invisible fat man, it was a very small one in which fat men do not fit.

For Lacanians, biological gender and hegemonic gender (as suggested by R W Connell (1995) for instance) represents only one facet of gender. Psychoanalytic gender sits in contrast to these others. Specifically Lacan's formulations do not distinguish using the logic of biology or hegemonic practices but instead use the logic of the phallus to define masculine and feminine positions with regard to a subject's relation to the Symbolic order (Lacan, 1998 (1972-73)). Although I may be biologically male, this does not mean, for Lacan, that I am solely subject to the order of the phallus (the masculine order).

Aspects (or indeed all) of my 'self' may reside in the feminine (Fink, 1995). This formulation means that although I am interested primarily in those who are biologically male, their gender in psychoanalytic terms is less clear. This is not to say that their maleness is irrelevant. What a Lacanian perspective on gender requires is that we do not accept that femininity is the sole domain of those who are biologically or hegemonically female. Females may be subject to the structure of the masculine and vice versa. Therefore fat may also be a masculine issue. What we do know about gender is that 'fat issues' have been traditionally linked to those that Orbach would call women and that the men with 'fat issues' are invisible – hence my focus on men. In this chapter I hope to lift the veil on these subjects – at least for a glimpse, in chapter six I go a step further to in an attempt to permanently re-locate the veil..

5.2.   The University meets the Hysteric

As outlined in chapter two there are many complexities associated with writing autoethnography, particularly when applying Lacanian theory. Some of these complexities include the tension inherent between the 'individual' and the whole, and between what is real versus what we symbolise. To speak into this tense space is not able to be done with a unified voice, therefore within this chapter at least three important subject positions (discourses) speak my subjectivy, each of which is complex in its own right. In the paragraphs below I will explain each of these positions before introducing the data.

Picking up from chapter three these subject positions are most usefully explained by reference to Lacanian discourse theory. In Seminar XVII, Lacan outlines four discourses, each of which explain something important about how relationship is enacted (Lacan,

2007 (1969-70)). These are the discourse of the master, the university, the analyst and the hysteric. The discourse of the university is the first position speaking my subjectivity in this chapter; I develop a focused theoretical position within that forms a start point for the rest of the thesis. This is good practice for the discourse of university, some might argue that it is fact essential in a doctoral thesis. It is however concerning specifically because of the productive process that the discourse of the university creates. To put it another way, if I was to leave the voice of the university untroubled in this chapter I run the significant risk of assembling a 'knowledge vortex' where new ideas and challenges just get sucked into line with the theory.

To some degree, I allay my concern in another of Lacan's discourses – that of the hysteric – and this is the signifier that represents my second subject position, 'Andy'. This signifier represents me as a boy and young man, and I use it to contextualise the two pieces of autoethnographic data I employ in this chapter. Andy struggled with weight and his conceptualisation of 'self' for many years, and it is through his experiences I open the door to the symbolic world of anxious fat men. To me, Andy can be understood to be speaking from the position of the hysteric, in that he addresses the master signifier that is the foundation for the agent of the university discourse. Kovacevic says, "the hysteric sees through the veil of illusion or falsity spawned by the discourse of the master and the discourse of the university" (2007, p. 133). In this way, I am attempting to balance the discourse of the university by using Andy's speech to also theorise the issues.

My third subject position is the symbolic realm inhabited by 'all anxious fat men', in which I operate my life. It is not defined by body size, fat content or even biological gender, but it is defined by anxiety – it involves the slippery sets of signification we

anxious fat men navigate when trying to make sense of our selves in relation to body weight.

Acknowledging three subject positions provides a challenge because it leaves unresolved tensions. These subject positions tend to contradict and confront each other, but within this non-reconciliation I hope that the tensions will go some way towards negotiating an understanding of the desire of the anxious weight loss consumer and the function of the weight loss industry at a psychoanalytic level.

5.3.   Exposing Fat Andy: autoethnography

In this section, I introduce the data I use in my analysis – autoethnographic excavations of my past as subject. These are not specifically about my experiences with the weight loss industry; instead, they are about the development of my subjectivity within a symbolic framework of anxiety and desire when trying to lose weight. This is what the weight loss industry trades in; therefore, this data can be seen as representative of all anxious weight loss consumers.

The benefits of autoethnography are extensive. But, as I argue in chapter two, most important for me is the ethical validity it adds to doing psychoanalytic study. Driver, in her paper on food in organisational life, uses Lacanian analysis to show how her research process could be viewed as being complicit in alienating her research participants by "validating [their and her own] imaginary self-constructions" (2009, p. 928). This concerns me also, but I think that by pursuing an autoethnographical process I am in part shelving the researcher-researched roles in the hope that I can at least question the academic superiority that threatens to emerge in critical organisation studies if left

unchallenged (Wray-Bliss, 2003). Further to this, Wray-bliss states that we, in the academic realm, can become "so sure of our knowledge that we do not seek to have our understandings challenged or broadened through actual engagement with the researched" (2003, p. 321). This to me is a manifestation of Lacan's discourse of the university (Lacan, 2007 (1969-70)); the danger present here is the imaginary construction that because I am in a university I am producing or have some privileged access to knowledge-as-truth.

I have used two pieces of autoethnographic data to formulate the theory I discuss in this chapter, each of which is quite different.

The first is a story I wrote in April 2008 about my childhood experiences of family Christmas dinner:

> *I have a reasonably large extended family. Although my nuclear family consists of only my mum, dad and one older brother all of my family holidays were spent with at least ten of my cousins and a variety of uncles, aunties and grandparents. Like many middle class western families in the early 1980s, Christmas for us (me, at least) was a big deal. My family and I always travelled to be with the rest of the clan in the town where I was born; usually we went up a couple of days before Christmas day and the build-up to present opening and (probably more so) binge eating was for me, at fever pitch.*

> *My family reports that for several years in a row I ate so much on Christmas day that I ended up throwing up. My cousins called it 'Andy's power chunder'. This series of binging events played a fairly major role in me developing a reputation, in my family and other associated networks (most notably the Presbyterian church community), for being a big eater throughout the rest of my life (it even continues today). I have very strong memories of us all standing around a table haemorrhaging with food, I move towards the table, eager for goodies, and one of the adults*

would say "Watch out, Andy's going for the food – we'd better get in before it's all gone!"
Raucous laughter would follow. I remember feeling a mix of emotions, partly happy to be the
centre of attention, partly happy to have a role in a family where I was most often one of the
youngest (at least in this I was important), but I was also really upset to be the one laughed at.

I have always been good at capitalising on position, and I must have spotted a real opportunity in
this eating business. It became uncommon in my family for a group meal to occur without some
reference to my eating prowess; often my aunty would say "you can't really eat all of that food
Andy" or someone else would pull out the classic "your eyes are bigger than your stomach".
(Research journal, MF-FC, April-08)

My main purpose in introducing this material is to draw attention to my psychological development, to show that eating and eating behaviours are rooted in the neural connections established whilst trying to establish relations between signifiers. As I described in chapter two Lois Shawver (1998) does an eloquent job explaining this when she talks about the young child being told that he is selfish for wanting the last cookie. What this points to is that prior to assimilating language a subject does not distinguish between being selfish and not being selfish. The two possible positions only come-to-be through the language of the Other.

The second autoethnographic account appears directly from a presentation I was required to give as a 21-year-old undergraduate student in 1998. Figure 1 is a scan of the original pages.

As an expert in the field of both losing and gaining weight I would like to strike from the usual path and do a presentation on the three best ways to GAIN weight. These are, choosing the correct genes, eating high fat content foods, and doing as little exercise as possible.

1.) Choose the correct genes.

It is important when selecting your parents to biochemically screen their DNA for the all-important feature, a slow metabolism. A slow metabolism is a very important weight gaining measure.

It enables your body to leave important weight gaining metabolites such as fatty acids (fat), poly, and oligosaccarides (sugar), and triacylglycerols (fat) alone so they can be included into your adipose tissue (fat) and hence, with a slow metabolism, will probably never resurface.

It is sort of analogous to the blue ice in the centre of huge icebergs, which formed in the last iceage (approximately 10,000 years ago).

Like the fat deep within my adipose tissue, it would take a mammoth geomorphological event to melt it.

2.) Try and eat only food with a fat content above 50%.

These do exist. Foods such as butter, margarine, peanut butter, and oil are fantastic, the higher the saturated fat content the better. Possibly the best food to eat would be lard. Lard contains well above 80% saturated triacylglyerines, in other words animal fat.

Foods such as lettuce, carrots, corn and most fruits should be avoided at all costs because the are harmful to your weight gaining measures. Avocado is one exception to the fruit rule, it contains a good decent amount of fat.

I understand the difficulties people have to face in this area, with 'health' food companies pushing their ideals on what is O.K to eat

and what is not. I found that a proven way to eat fatty food is to invert the 'healthy eating food triangle'. Eg)

*Fats and Oils: Eat as much as possible, and
*Fruit and Vegetables: Preferably two to three times a week.

3.) Do as little exercise as possible

This is probably the hardest weight gaining measure to master. You are all probably thinking WHAT? Doing no exercise is EASY!!!!!

Well I am afraid you are sadly mistaken, let me ask you these questions:

1.) Do you walk to your letterbox when you could drive?
2.) Is your lounge suite as close to the fridge as humanly possible?
3.) Do you have remote controls for all electrical appliances, including the jug, coffeepot, and electric frypan?
4.) Do you buy zip flies because buttons take to much effort?
5.) Do you have either a cell phone or a long life walkie phone?
6.) And the big one, why are you internal when you could be extramural?

These as well as many other questions are ones that you must ask yourself before you make the final commitment to gaining weight.

Thank you.

Figure 5.1: Scan of the original presentation given in 1998

My main purpose for introducing this second piece of autoethnographic data is give the reader insight into the same subject, 'Andy', about seventeen years after the family Christmas events. To me this shows how Andy's conscious mind attempts to represent the desires of his unconscious through the medium of humour and public expression.

5.4.   *Jouissance* **and the anxious fat man**

In this section, my intention is to analyse my autoethnographic data using Lacanian theory. I am trying to explain the relationship between desire, lack and *jouissance* to go some way towards understanding anxiety related to weight and the operation of the weight loss industry. To do this, it is first necessary to build on the brief description of Lacanian subjectivity and selfhood I gave in chapter two.

In the previous section I introduced Lois Shawver's description of how a young child can come to regard himself as being selfish based on his early food experiences and the judgement of his Other (Shawver, 1998). In this example, it is possible (even likely) that the adult will attach anxiety to food signifiers that reside in his symbolic world; moreover, he will probably come to see his self as fundamentally selfish. His relations to food have the potential to take on a self-surveillance characteristic – and will likely result in neurotic eating patterns forming in adolescence or adulthood – which may or may not prove problematic for the subject. By necessity, this is a highly simplified overview of the development of neuroses in eating patterns, and my main reason for giving it is simply to highlight that the driver for this process occurring in the first place is, anxiety, that finds something to attach to – in this case, food and eating.

Lacan has contributed significantly to our understanding of anxiety. In the Lacanian system, anxiety is a result of 'symbolic completeness'. This is not a comfortable position for a subject to be in, because a Lacanian subject should be fundamentally lacking. This 'normal' lack arises post-castration when a child begins to form their subjectivity as a separate being from their mother. This occurs when the child begins to gain language and as a consequence begins to invest in the symbolic realm, which is characterised by lack. As I read it, lack provides us with something to desire (we search for the thing that will fill our desire and fill our lack – though we never find this) and so life goes on. Without lack, a subject is left lacking lack – a truly agonising place to be, Lacan says in his seminar on anxiety (seminar X): "What is most anxiety-producing for the child is when the relationship through which he comes to be – on the basis of lack which makes him desire – is most perturbed: when there is no possibility of lack, when his mother is constantly on his back" (cited in Fink, 1995, p. 83).

As a developing self gains more literacy in the symbolic, the anxiety created by the lack of lack, gifted by an overbearing mOther becomes represented as relationships between signifiers. I have purposefully used Fink's term 'mOther' here (Fink, 1995) because it is used to demonstrate that a mother is often the Other, but not solely. In Andy's case, the Other also comprises members of the extended family, for instance, the following is drawn from the first autoethnographic entry:

My cousins called it 'Andy's power chunder'…

…often my aunty would say "you can't really eat all of that food Andy" or someone else would pull out the classic "your eyes are bigger than your stomach".

My contention is that Andy's mOther was constantly "on his back", specifically around eating patterns – so that the anxiety that arose in him became attached to my relationship to food, eating and associated behaviours.

It is also important to understand how desire and *jouissance* are related to this messy process of anxiety attachment. Desire, in Lacanian terms, is a tricky notion; it exists as the remnant after need is subtracted from demand. In Lacanian theory, the tripartition (Arnaud, 1998) of need, demand and desire have different functions. A need can be understood as the biological requirement for certain things, such as an infant requiring food. Demand and need are entangled in a very young infant in that the biological need is expressed vocally as a demand. It is through this relationship that desire begins to emerge. As the infant grows, the satisfaction of the need, as a result of the vocal demand, becomes associated with interaction with the mOther and therefore with the reward of love (Nosubject.com, 2008). Over time, the demand becomes two things, a demand for the fulfilment of a need but also the demand for complete love. However, the demand for complete love can never be entirely filled because the subject is characterised by a lack – desire comes to represent this lack, it is never fulfilled, though we never stop desiring its fulfilment.

Lacan's concept of *jouissance* is usually interpreted, broadly, as being something akin to extreme pleasure/pain. Fink says: "This pleasure – this excitation due to sex, seeing and/or violence, whether positively or negatively viewed by conscience, whether considered innocently pleasurable or disgustingly repulsive – is termed jouissance, and that is what the subject orchestrates for him or herself in fantasy" (Fink, 1995, p. 50). For me, Lacanian *jouissance* represents that which occupies the limits of my tolerance, be that

pleasure or pain. It is not related to any specific act but instead to all acts. It is not necessarily sexual as we understand it in society's shared symbolic world, though it can be. Certainly, it does not only relate to physically-experienced pleasure/pain of our bodies but also, and more importantly for my reading, pleasure/pain of our symbolic embodied experiences – what it means to be inside this sack of blood, flesh and bone. This reading of *jouissance* is central to understanding the desire (and failure) by anxious fat men attempting to lose weight.

The complex relationship between anxiety, *jouissance* and desire can be developed by reference to Lacan's *objet a*. This enigmatic device is used by Lacan to designate a range of things throughout his work; I am particularly interested in its function in Lacan's theory of subjectivity. In this way, the *objet a* can be understood as representing a fragment of the unity each subject phantasises they once had with their mother. Thus, it functions as the object cause of desire (Fink, 1995) in that everyone unconsciously desires to have this unity once again. What form does the *objet a* take? Lacan said: "Man's desire is the desire of the Other" (Lacan, 1998 (1964-65), p. 235); which to me says that the *objet a* exists as a symbolic representation of the Other's desire.

In the next few paragraphs I am going to lay out the Other's desire by using Andy as an example, to symbolise men who attach anxiety to food.

For Andy, the Other's desire in relation to food and eating had two parts: first, a desire for Andy to eat more appropriately and lose weight; and second, in contrast, a desire to observe the spectacle of overconsumption provided by Andy. This can be seen in the behaviour of the adults in Andy's world:

I have very strong memories of us all standing around a table haemorrhaging with food, I move towards the table, eager for goodies, and one of the adults would say "Watch out, Andy's going for the food – we'd better get in before it's all gone!" Raucous laughter would follow.

Following Lacan, my desire is the desire of my Other, which became symbolically represented by my *objet a*. *Jouissance* enters the fray at this point because it functions as the thing that rewards the subject when searching for the *objet a* − it is through the intense, almost unbearable, feelings generated via the quest that one continues to search for the object that causes desire.

But where does anxiety fit in this story? Harari (2001) makes the following statement:

> "Anxiety appears in the central position [between desire and jouissance] and as such fulfills [*sic*] its function of being in the middle, compressed, as it were, between desire and jouissance. It is situated as the signal that appears when the division between those it borders starts to be erased. Desire and jouissance threaten to become mixed up and anxiety operates as a warning" (cited in Muller, 2007, p. 691)

My interpretation of Harari's statement is that anxiety emerges in this relationship when we begin to think that the *jouissance* we experience is what we desire. Our anxiousness grows as we are constantly let down by the *jouissance*, it is never satisfying, and the cycle continues. It is to this odd relationship between anxiety, desire and *jouissance* that I now turn.

If we fast forward about 17 years from Andy's family Christmas table to his third year at university we can better understand the resultant anxious fat man. 21-year-old Andy was not the biggest bloke on campus, but I think he may have been in the running for the most weight/food obsessed. The second piece of autoethnographic data I include in this chapter is useful to see how desire relates to *jouissance* in the symbolic world of anxious fat men. I view the entire presentation as a way for Andy's unconscious to create a spectacle of his struggles with food and eating, in an attempt to satisfy his desire to be recognised. For instance, the introductory sentence reads:

As an expert in the field of both losing and gaining weight I would like to strike from the usual path and do a presentation on the three best ways to GAIN weight.

In this sentence, he uses the term 'expert' to claim status as someone worth paying attention to and the phrase 'strike from the usual path' to again set himself apart as something worth observing. In this way, he was using humour to create a spectacle of his eating behaviour. Humour is clearly a theme in this presentation, and it also provides an insight into the other of his desires – weight-loss.

When I asked one of my supervisors to comment on the presentation, she read the use of humour in 1998 as a way for Andy's unconscious to ridicule the dominant science-based weight loss discourse which privileges the role of genetics in pre-determining weight gaining tendencies and recommends eating less fat (and food) and doing more exercise as the best way to lose weight. The weight loss industry uses this same scientific discourse almost exclusively when promoting their products and services.

I think what my supervisor saw was Andy's unconscious seizing an opportunity to break through his stale-mated conscious (that of yo-yoing dieter) in the form of humour. Since *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (Freud, 1976), psychoanalysts have taken an interest in what humour can tell us about a person's unconscious processes; psychoanalytic scholars see humour as providing a mechanism to understand "the unconscious as a transformational system that addresses issues of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and the limits imposed by biological and social reality" (Newirth, 2006, p. 557). Lacan saw comedy as a way of demonstrating the fundamental gap between action and desire (Lacan, 1992 (1959-60)), which I interpret in Andy's case as being a gap between the desire to lose weight and the 'mysterious action' required to satisfy this desire (which, of course, cannot be achieved). It is this 'mysterious action' which assumes the pivotal role in the symbolic world of anxious fat men because it is the pursuit of this that the anxious fat man desires, but it becomes represented by *jouissance* – the intense feeling of reward one gets when they think they have finally put their finger on it. This process exacerbates anxiety because the *jouissance* is not what they desire at all, and they are left feeling empty. They soon join the fray again, seeking the new answer, and the weight-anxious consumer emerges.

The point I am trying to make is that the focus of the weight-anxious consumer is *jouissance*, in particular, *jouissance* subject to the order of the phallus. In seminar XX, Lacan distinguishes between two types of *jouissance*: phallic (or symbolic) *jouissance* and feminine *jouissance*. Lacan's conceptualisation of the pursuit of phallic *jouissance* is important in order to understand, psychoanalytically, the tendencies of weight-anxious consumers outlined above. Lacan says: "Phallic jouissance is the obstacle owing to which

man does not come (*n'arrive pas*), I would say, to enjoy a woman's body, precisely because what he enjoys is the jouissance of the organ" (Lacan, 1998 (1972-73), p. 7). I think what Lacan is saying is that phallic *jouissance* is characterised by the enjoyment of the 'wrong' thing – his attention is displaced from the true object of desire, so his satisfaction is temporary, and is left thinking that there must be something better. The weight-anxious consumer displaces their attention from what causes them to desire to the reward they get through the *jouissance* they experience which, being phallic in nature, leaves them unsatisfied.

In seminar XX, Lacan essentially uses the terms phallic and symbolic *jouissance* interchangeably, as he understood this type of *jouissance* as existing in the symbolic register, which is constituted by the slippery and incomplete chains of language. As Hoedemaekers explains: "A set of signifiers in which a subject comes into being gives rise to certain significations, but these are not singular or even consistently meaningful" (2008, p. 61). Lacan contrasted this with feminine *jouissance*, which does not exist in the symbolic register and therefore cannot be adequately conceptualised in language, though it is possible to say that if it does not exist in the symbolic register it is not subject to the same incompleteness and fundamental failure that characterises *jouissance* affiliated with the phallus. I suspect that a re-symbolisation of weight anxiety can be found through a partial transition from phallic to feminine *jouissance* (though this may be better termed 'de-symbolisation'). I will attempt to elaborate on this a little more below, and more extensively in chapter six.

Weight-loss is a goal articulated by many individuals, it is one of the most 'acceptable' things to pursue in our society. We gather in groups to talk about the difficulties of weight

loss, and swap and seek recipes and regimes that we hope will help. It is revealing to read the words of Laura Fraser, in her book, *Losing It*: "I'd been practicing this feminine ritual ever since I started counting calories in kindergarten; I can't remember a time I wasn't on a diet" (Fraser, 1998, p. 1). Dieting in an attempt to lose weight has become part of symbolic normality in western cultures.

The *jouissance* that anxious weight loss consumers are chasing is phallic in nature, in that inherent in its promise is a lie – it will constantly let us down whilst 'revealing' (falsely) that if we keep searching, we eventually will find the answer. Hence, the search continues, generally in the realm of scientific discovery – which is most often understood by the subject as 'the truth'. Because the pursuit of phallic *jouissance* is so all-consuming, anxious weight loss consumers (yo-yo dieters) can become almost fetishistic in their obsession with finding the diet or pill or regime that will result in a slim embodiment.

5.5.   Knowledge as truth and the flow of desire

In the following comment, Bruce Fink explains the relationship between pleasure and knowledge:

> We find the pleasures available to us in life inadequate, and it is owing to that inadequacy that we expound systems of knowledge – perhaps, first and foremost, to explain why our pleasure is inadequate and then to propose how to change things so that it will not be … Knowledge, according to Lacan, is motivated by some failure of pleasure, some insufficiency of pleasure: in a word, dissatisfaction. (Fink, 2002, p. 27)

If we read 'pleasure' here as *jouissance* (which is an incomplete translation), we can interpret Fink's comment to mean that we generate knowledge in order to attempt to satisfy a lack. We want to plug the gap left by what we lack with complete *jouissance*. Unfortunately for us, "Desire's object will not sit still; desire always sets off in search of something else" (Fink, 2002, p. 37), so we are constantly left with a feeling of dissatisfaction, whilst *still believing that satisfaction is possible*. This in itself is not a problem because without it we would not be motivated do anything. The problem is when that what causes desire (*objet a*) becomes particularly associated, through the effect of anxiety, with phallic *jouissance*. My contention is that as the cycles of 'search for knowledge then dissatisfaction' repeat, phallic *jouissance* creates, in the anxious fat man, a growing sense of dissatisfaction, urgency and desperation.

Spoken in terms of rationalist capitalist enterprise, this unconscious mechanism is capitalised by the weight loss industry supplying its consumers with products masquerading as *objet a*. They regularly produce a new 'knowledge-as-truth' when dissatisfaction with the previous emerges. They are in fact selling empty signifiers that each consumer fills with their particular imaginary cocktail of signification (desire-anxiety-phallic *jouissance*).

These 'new knowledges' take on a variety of forms. They might be an entirely new regime, or simply a re-branding of an existing product. What seems to be common among them is the reliance on science as a master signifier that functions in the symbolic register of anxious fat men as a powerful legitimating force. It is also well utilised by media organisations that regularly 'interpret' scientific research by spinning stories of newness –

constantly reinventing obesity science and drawing links with lifestyle that are ambiguous at best.

In my view it is this relationship between anxious unconscious mechanisms and rational but exploitative capitalist enterprise that has created the consumerism western societies have seen in the weight loss industry since the 1980s. The relationship is what Stavrakakis calls the relationship between the subject and the 'organized Other', I see the organised Other in this circumstance as the collective weight loss industry – including slimming organisations, recipe book producers and government anti-obesity health units. As Stavrakakis remarks, the subject "and organized Other become inter-implicated in the institution and reproduction of social life" (Stavrakakis, 2008, p. 1038). The way this occurs can be found in the fundamental lack that exists within the subject, both in the imaginary alienation developed during the mirror stage and within the symbolic – signified by the lack in the Other. The subject seeks unity and associates the power of the 'organized Other' with access to what will fill their lack. This "predisposes social subjects to accept and obey what seems to be emanating from the big Other, from socially sedimented points of reference invested with the gloss of authority and presented as embodying and sustaining the symbolic order, organizing (subjective and objective) reality" (Stavrakakis, 2008, p. 1045).

Almost without exception, the 'organised Other' of the weight loss industry has, and continues to ignore the unconscious instead positioning the fat subject as conscious and rational. This organised Other is not aware of what they co-construct unconsciously with their consumers; it would seem probable that they view the relationship purely on a cognitive level, assuming that the consumer rationally judges their wares and selects

products and services from amongst alternatives. In this imaginary world, 'knowledges-as-truth' are things to be advertised, branded and marketed to recruit consumers. Similarly, my experience with anxious fat men shows that they do attempt to rationally judge the available resources and select an alternative. Clearly, however, this does not work, as anxiety around weight loss and body shape continues to haunt a growing number of people.

I imagine that some of my readers might be thinking at this point, 'so what?', because trading in unconscious desire could be seen as serving the consumer well. In the rational sense, it is reasonable for organisations in a market economy to recognise demand and supply it, if consumers are willing to part with their money for a weight loss product or service and the organisation is operating within the law then what right do I have to say anything at all about their ethics? However, I also speak from the position of one who has suffered at the hands of the organised Other of the weight loss industry. These *anxious* subjects manifest at the reception counters of weight loss organisations and read public health messages promoting weight loss as rational consumers wanting to lose weight but their particular fantasy is adorned with weight-anxiety. All subjects' fantasies in a Lacanian sense will fail, that is the pleasure and the pain of being a lacking subject. The crucial point of departure for weight-anxious consumers, in my experience, is the lack of lack I described when discussing anxiety earlier – for these subjects, anxiety is attached to the fantasy of weight loss and failure to lose weight is experienced as a failure to restore lack and increases the intensity of anxiety. So, for those non-anxious weight loss consumers the weight loss industry is like many others – providing a service. But for those whose anxiety is attached to the fantasy of weight loss it is not so sparkly.

I am purposefully differentiating between two groups of subjects above, one that is not weight-anxious, but does partake in weight-loss activities for a number of reasons and one that is specifically defined by weight-anxiety, whose life revolves around attempts at weight control in an attempt to restore lack. Membership to this latter club is not related to a subject's Real embodiment but is characterised precisely by a lack of lack – which is most easily recognised by the intense *jouissance* that is defined by the function of the phallus. I am not trying to say that weight-loss is the cause of this fundamental anxiety – other 'desires' can equally come to occupy this symbolic space – what I am trying to say is that by promising weight-loss as a symbolic solution to restoring lack the weight-loss industry does not help these subjects.

Lacan identifies phallic *jouissance*, which resides in the symbolic register, as directly associated with the masculine structure (Lacan, 1998 (1972-73)). My analysis, therefore, implicates a masculine structure as underpinning the weight-anxious consumer. If this is so, what is interesting is why so many of those who identify as biologically female are caught up in the anxious inter-play with the organized Other of the weight loss industry. Susie Orbach wrote *Fat is a Feminist Issue* in 1978. At that time, she was specifically interested in girls and women, though in more recent times she has expanded to include people who are biologically male (see Orbach (2006) for example). It is good to see the feminist movement providing scope for fat blokes to 'appear' (as evidenced also by Bell and McNaughton (2007), discussed earlier), though I say this not because I want men to play a part in the feminist project but rather because it may open the door to a more critical dialogue of what gender might mean psychoanalytically when considering weight issues. My analysis above suggests that perhaps 'Fat is a Masculine Issue', would be

equally as valid and provocative as Orbach's original. I see these ideas as an opportunity to explore Lacan's conceptualisation of feminine *jouissance* as perhaps there is something within the not-whole of the feminine structure that can skirt around the painful weight-anxiety experienced by a growing number of male subjects. This is the subject of chapter six.

5.6. Some concluding remarks and new research questions

In this chapter I have actively aimed to interpret the structure of the language of the unconscious in relation to male weight anxious subjects, via the interpretation of my own stories through the body of knowledge that is psychoanalysis. This has resulted in an entirely new re-theorisation of men's relationship to fatness and the weight loss industry, perhaps this provides a start to de-veiling Bell & McNaughton's invisible fat man (2007).

In addition to specifically re-thinking the plight of the anxious fat man this chapter also contributes in a number of ways towards the study of organisations:

Through my analysis I have demonstrated how the circuits of desire and phallic *jouissance* operate for the weight-anxious consumer. This is a direct challenge to theories of consumer behaviour based on a conscious rational individual. Further, even those theories that view the consumer as produced through discourse do not place emphasis on the primacy of the signifier of the unconscious that constructs the symbolic and enables the individual to develop a coherent fantasy of identity. In contrast to these approaches a Lacanian take on subjectivity radically challenges the purpose and direction of all weight loss industry organisations, as they cannot resolve anxiety – regardless of any weight lost; in fact they only exacerbate the anxious subject's experience of anxiety. I say this

particularly to anti-obesity public health organisations that function directly as the organised Other (Stavrakakis, 2008) for everyone who does not fit into their categories of normality (the Body Mass Index) – their message to the population aggravates the experience of alienation for the weight-anxious subject. This aggravation of anxiety caused by the organised Other of the weight loss industry can also be seen operating directly within organisations as they increasingly roll-out employee weight-loss programmes targeting their 'problem' employees regardless of their unconscious desire. This occurs in the context of contradictory food ceremony rife in organisational life (see Driver (2008) for example) which again furthers the alienation of the weight-anxious.

In terms of method the ethics that exist within the process of autoethnography and psychoanalysis are emphasised by this chapter. Certainly the process of considering one's self in relation to the research process is not a new thing within organisation studies, both Harding (2007) and Driver (2008) for instance undertake this to different extents. I do think that as researchers we can push the boundaries further and attempt to hear the resonance of our unconscious within our own texts – that is what I have tried to do within my analysis. For me (and Lacan) the only ethical means of approaching an anxious subject is via the social bond of the analyst's discourse (Lacan, 2007 (1969-70)), as this places the emphasis on bearing a subject's unconscious desire, not on elaborately facilitating their fantasy as the weight-loss organisations do so effectively. I have tried to do this in this chapter by focusing my analysis on the cause of desire (my *objet a*). The tension that exists in this position is not able to be resolved as by its nature this quest will fail, perhaps by falling under the discourse of the university.

Also in this chapter I both question and enact the discourse of the university which has the dual-effect of destablising the 'knowledge' that underpins the university and allowing a channel for the alternate knowledge of the discourse of the analyst (Kovacevic, 2007). In terms of organisation studies this demonstrates the efficacy of making every attempt within research to question the discourse of the university as it attempts to present its totalising knowledge by "making products (outputs, students) that also 'speak product' and thus intellectualize their alienation" (Nobus & Quinn, 2005, p. 125). Although it is impossible to avoid this as a researcher, psychoanalysis provides a channel for the subject's desire to have a voice in the discourse of the university, even if the final product appears incomplete and constitutes a failure of sorts. This paragraph is perhaps a good summary of the politics of this chapter and perhaps my thesis, I obviously take issue with the knowledge produced as 'truth' by the weight loss industry but I also take issue with the dominance of the discourse of the university within the academy.

In the final section of my literature review I wrote my research question as: *How does the form and function of the wider weight-loss industry work to position men for whom weight is an issue?* This chapter has been my first attempt at addressing this question, by looking closely at the psychoanalytic mechanism via which the weight-anxious subject becomes entrapped in the machinations of the weight-loss industry. However, as often happens in the research process, I am not satisfied with this answer. In particular I feel that the gender aspects of this are under-theorised, that gender needs more consideration if I want to be able to understand how my anxiety, and that of other biological men becomes so closely affiliated with what is often known as 'women's business'. Specifically I have new research questions to ask: firstly, *Am I a man?* secondly *How come so many*

biological women are caught in a competitive masculine enterprise like weight-loss and then finally *What does it mean to be biologically male but involved in the (primarily) female sport of competitive weight-loss?* These are the questions I tackle in the next chapter where I pick up on the gender confusion that features in this chapter and Real-ly place it under a Lacanian lens.

6. Perhaps fat is not a feminist issue? Masculine fat in the phallic-symbolic order

I imagine it is clear now that for years I have been searching for the thing which will explain why I feel so anxious about being, remaining or becoming fat. The first time I can consciously remember feeling like a fatty was in 1991 when the boys in my gym class chanted "boomba, boomba, boomba" as I started the run-up to the long jump. From this moment on I saw my weight as an issue and my body as a problem I had to live in. After many attempts at trying to discover the 'cause' and 'cure' for my problem within the world of science (diet and exercise) I came across Susie Orbach's text *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (1978, p. 335) and read it and others like it with high hopes for my personal recovery – I thought 'just because I am not a woman it doesn't mean that it won't apply to me'. Unfortunately like so many other stand-ins for the *objet a*, Orbach's words just seemed to reinforce my lack. In particular I think that this was because Orbach's focus on women at the expense of men was so frustratingly tempting for a fat bloke; for me her words are still simultaneously compelling and repelling – all because of gender.

Gender is featured heavily in the weight-loss industry: 'weight issues' are sold first and foremost as women's business. My aim in this chapter is to re-theorise gender as an institution of body weight. My plan is to do this by applying the logic of the phallus to show how the socio-cultural use of the signifier 'gender' functions as a *point de capiton* (Lacan, 1993) structuring the Symbolic register lived by weight anxious subjects who identify as either male or female. In part this involves reading Orbach's original text and

subsequent writings through the logic of the phallus set out in Lacan's Seminar XX; *Encore* (Lacan, 1998 (1972-73)).

The logic of the phallus is a foundational aspect of Lacanian theory, developed through his entire body of work. Primarily in this chapter I follow the reading set out in *Encore*. In this seminar Lacan "equates the phallus with the bar between the signifer and the signified" (Fink, 2002, p. 37). More specifically the phallus functions as the disconnect between how desire is articulated (signfiers) and the 'thing' that would satisfy that desire. This relationship underwrites the function of phallic *jouissance* I described in the previous chapter. It is the engine of the weight-anxiety industry, creating and reinforcing the competitive nature of weight-loss attempts.

Lacan provides a very different reading of gender throughout his body of work and particularly in and around *Encore.* Lacan's theory encourages the analyst to consider gender as a negotiated phenomenon that is not specifically tied to biology – instead gender, like all other negotiated phenomenon, operates according to the logic of the phallus and this has very specific roles for boys and girls and women and men (Lacan, 1998 (1972-73)). This means that although I (Andy) may be biologically male I am not necessarily bonded to masculine logic, aspects of my 'self' (and other weight anxious men) may in fact be ordered in terms of the feminine structure and the same applies for people who identify as biologically female (Fink, 1995). You can see here that Lacanian psychoanalysis views the masculine and feminine structures in a way that is quite different to other analytic models, and this view does not fit very neatly into our current society's logical conception of gender, that is what social and cultural theorists would call

hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity; so in this chapter the logic of gender hegemony is also under scrutiny.

Biology and gender hegemony tend to exist side by side in the conscious lived experiences of the weight anxious subject. This becomes obvious when engaging with those for whom weight is an issue (including the weight loss industry as I have defined this earlier) as the main mechanisms of explanation for 'weight issues' revolve around a discussion of the scientific and the gender-specific influences impacting on weight. There is a clear tension between these logics and phallo-logic conceptualisations of gender in weight loss; it is this tension that frames the ordering of this chapter.

In the first section I tackle the question 'am I a man?' by considering how, if at all, a psychoanalytic perspective on gender fits within notions of hegemonic masculinity or as Hearn prefers "the hegemony of men" (Hearn, 2004, p. 49). In the second section I re-read Orbach's text as one of the founding doctrines of the feminist movement against the weight loss industry via the phallologocentrism that is often associated with Lacan's take on language. In the third section I interrogate the history of sexuality by engaging with Lacan's notion of feminine *jouissance* in an attempt to see whether the "invisible fat man" (Bell & McNaughton, 2007) within the feminist discourse is in fact a man at all. Finally I summarise the structuring role of the master signifier 'gender' for weight anxious subjects and contrast this with the notions of hegemonic masculinity/femininity and consider the validity and usefulness of the anti-thesis: Fat is a masculine issue.

6.1. Am I a man?

The first thing I automatically want to say when I read this question is – well I have a penis! Unfortunately that doesn't really end the argument because it is well known that many people exist sans-penis who would call themselves men, and on the contrast some of those that do have the organ who would be very offended to be called a man. It seems that possession of a penis does not underwrite the answer.

Stepping outside the realm of biology seems like the obvious next step to try and re-veal/de-veil the essence of men. Probably the most well-known and cited social theory of masculinity is Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995, 2000; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell's position is built on the understanding that certain ways of being masculine become dominant, and these 'ways of being' become required reading for a developing bloke (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). On face value it is difficult to argue with this idea of masculinity – that there is a selection of possible 'ways of being masculine' some of which become winners and others that do not. In the New Zealand context this method of conceptualising masculinity has been applied to sporting knowledge/prowess (Nauright, 1996; Pringle & Markula, 2005) romance (L. Allen, 2007) and social drinking practices (Campbell, 2000) for instance to show how Kiwi men 'really' are like in thought and action. From my perspective, a particularly clever and adaptive use of this idea comes in the form of Brendan Hokowhitu's paper *Tackling Mäori Masculinity: A Colonial Genealogy of Savagery and Sport* (2004). In this text Hokowhitu deconstructs the hegemonic idea that links some kind of inherent Mäori savagery with sport and masculinity. Hokowhitu's auto-ethnographic style is very alluring and what shines through particularly in his text for me is how ethical his analysis of

hegemony is *because of his own experiences*. I think that by focusing on his experiences Hokowhitu avoids what seems to me to be a typical fantasmatic trap at the core of the concept of hegemonic masculinity – that is the fantasy that we can hope to usefully understand the Other's imaginary identifications with already articulated discursive structures.

Another way to represent masculinity is through discursive methods, Madill and Gough describe these as tending to "focus on the detail of the text, explicating the ways in which phenomena are brought into being through the use of linguistic resources and applying forms of discourse theory" (2008, p. 257). The most well known of these in terms of masculinity might be Nigel Edley and Margaret Wetherell's project on masculinity (Edley & Wetherell, 1995; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Madill and Gough's explanation of discursive methods is a good start point to understanding this approach to studying masculinity, however it needs to be expanded to include not just an analysis of text but also a consideration of what Wetherell and Edley describe as a "more global form of analysis derived from poststructuralism" (1999, p. 338). In practical terms Wetherell and Edley gathered groups of men in interview settings and asked them about how they related themselves to masculine concepts using questions such as "'Would you describe yourself as a masculine man?' and 'Are there moments in everyday life when you feel more masculine than at other times?'" (1999, p. 335) and by asking them to comment on images of men taken from magazines. In their 1999 paper *Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity: Imaginary Positions and Psycho-Discursive Practices* Wetherell and Edley describe three imaginary masculine positions that 'emerged' from their research; heroic, ordinary and rebellious. They suggest in this paper that this approach to identifying these

imaginary masculine positions "provides a concrete route to specifying and then studying the norms that make up hegemonic masculinity. It specifies an empirical site for investigation and can explain the conundrum of men who appear to be both hegemonic and non-hegemonic, complicit and resistant at the same time" (1999, p. 353). Although I can see the appeal of this approach in terms of pinpointing hegemony it seems peculiar to assume that these positions are 'masculine' hegemony, why not 'feminine' hegemony? Wetherell and Edley ignore the unconscious in their approach. They take a man's conscious gender as an empirical given and then use this to, in a pseudo-psycho-discursive manner, 'read' hegemonic positions into that man's Imaginary. What they fail to do is leave a space for the unconscious, which is not structured according to a consciously articulated biological sex or solely according to the hegemony of masculinity. Their subject's unconscious is structured like a language, and governed by desire. Furthermore, the signifying relationships that construct that language are defined by the desire of the Other; therefore by ignoring the history of that particular man in favour of the discursive structures that surround them Wetherell and Edley see only a small part of their subject's puzzle.

It is also essential here to discuss the important and salient work of Lee Monaghan, a sociologist from the University of Limerick. Monaghan has published widely since the late 1990s on men's issues in relation to fatness and the 'so-called' obesity epidemic. He is passionate about the impact the war-on-fat which currently pervades the world is having on men for whom weight is an issue. His research background draws from a range of areas including Connell's hegemonic masculinity and also from a symbolic interactionist perspective which considers the interactions between people as being the

primary driver of self. I feel a real kinship with Monaghan's work, probably because he and I seem to share a goal – to de-veil the pain that fat men experience. Here are his own words:

> "little is known about how men, who potentially risk injury in this realm of not-so-subtle symbolic violence, talk about weight-related issues, and the putative role of physical activity in promoting so-called healthy weight loss. Indeed, there is an absence of sociological knowledge on how men, as embodied subjects, exercise agency and perhaps resist and challenge authoritative messages that tell "big" people their bodies are inadequate" (L. F. Monaghan, 2008, p. 101)

I completely agree – and like Monaghan my aim is also to further our understanding of men's weight issues without necessarily trying to undermine the project of feminists like Susie Orbach or indeed Lee Monaghan's work itself. But I do think that a Lacanian take on sexuality, on masculinity and femininity, can shift the entire view by providing a spectrum of analysis that is new. My spectrum of analysis in this chapter does not only consider a person's gender (either on-the-surface physical gender or their emotionally experienced gender) but considers subjectivity through a Lacanian lens.

Judith Butler's primarily Foucauldian project on gender as 'performance' is in part informed by a Lacanian take on subjectivity (Butler, 1988, 1990). Butler sees gender as constituted in the routine ways that we live our lives; it is an unconscious performance that is constantly reinforced by the daily acts of living. Crucially for Butler: "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized

repetition of acts" (Butler, 1988, p. 519). I see a great deal of merit in Butler's perspective, mainly because it locates the elemental aspects of gender in multiple 'little' things that are consistently repeated throughout a subject's life. I see Butler's conceptualisation of gender as performance being a representation of the discourse of the master/university; as these discourses promote consistent repetition, and a towing of the line. When the hysteric or analyst approaches gender the backlash from the standard line promoted by the master/university can be significant. For me this is what Butler is saying in here: "As a corporeal field of cultural play, gender is a basically an innovative affair, although it is quite clear that there are strict punishments for contesting the script by performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations" (Butler, 1988, p. 531). It would be fair to say that my analysis in this chapter 'contests the gender script' by thinking gender through a Lacanian perspective on gender.

Lacan's ideas on sexual identity do not fit particularly well with the conceptions of hegemonic masculinity discussed above, and even within the circles of scholars critical of 'hegemonic masculinity' per se the masculine still seems to be seen as something for those that identify, consciously, as male, regardless of their biology. You can see this in the words of Wetherell and Edley: "The man… who describes himself as original, as beyond stereotypes, as having a personal, worked-out philosophy of masculinity or indeed as just ordinary and average has not escaped the familiar tropes of gender" (1999, p. 353). I don't mean to suggest that these approaches do not have significant validity, they certainly do; particularly in the sense of interrogating the signifying relationships that constitute what it means to act and appear as a man. To me what is lacking in this approach to understanding masculinity is a consideration of the masculine that exists in

the unconscious; which includes the men *but also the women* wholly defined in the function of the phallus.

Returning to the question I posed as the title to this section 'am I a man?' I now have a more revealing picture. In terms of the hegemony of New Zealand men the answer would have to be yes – I watch rugby, I enjoy drinking beer and I have been known to partake in the linguistic sport Hugh Campbell describes as "conversational cockfighting" (2000, p. 572), often when in a pub(lic) space. However analysis of my personal history against ideals of hegemonic masculinity focuses on my conscious lived experiences as a man in New Zealand but crucially ignores (or continues to repress) my unconscious. In terms of the male weight anxious subject generally I would answer similarly – the majority of the participants in Lee Monaghan's research programme would likely attest to being 'a man' and certainly their male-ness is not irrelevant. However I am interested in their unconscious mechanisms, which I do not think are arranged as man *or* woman but rather masculine *and* feminine. In this sense they are not *simply* men. I will use Collette Soler's words to explain this:

> "Contrary to what hasty thinkers imagine, the fact that someone is not a woman does not mean that person is a man. For example, Lacan says that Socrates is not a man: instead, he occupies a third position, that of having a symptom vicariously through a man, so to speak, and that, Lacan clarifies, does not imply bodily contact" (Soler, 2002, p. 52)

I think that weight anxious men are like Socrates in that they, and I, also are not *just* men, but we are not *just* women either.

The perspective on 'men' that I describe in this section de-veils the highly problematic nature of the signifier 'gender'. Like all quilting points in our society's signifying chains my argument is that it functions to structure the symbolic in a very particular way – specifically it has forced the problems 'fat' and 'weight' into association with one of its facets – the feminine, hence Orbach's title *Fat is a Feminist Issue*. In the following section I am going to re-read this text with a different view of gender – one that links it not to biological status – but to the logic of the phallus.

6.2.   Precisely how is Fat a Feminist Issue?

Before embarking on my re-reading of Orbach's text I need to address a question that was posed to me by one of my PhD supervisors: Why have I 'selected' Susie Orbach's text? It seems to me that this was a question not for my conscious rational academic mind; it wasn't addressed purely from the university's discourse. It was as analyst that my supervisor addressed my unconscious in an attempt to pluck away the cover of rationality and ask for me to unveil the irrationality of my selection. Months later I have an answer – to explain I need to use a piece of data taken from my research journal:

In 1993 Susie Orbach wrote the following words, quoted by Helen Malson in her book "The Thin Woman: Feminism, post-structuralism and social psychology of anorexia nervosa":

No one is much disturbed by statistics that show that 80 per cent of woman in countries like the USA, the UK, New Zealand and Australia are dieting at any given moment. The anguish and distress behind these figures are concealed behind an attitude that accepts this as the norm and sees the need for no further questions. Women like to diet. Women

expect to diet. Women are accustomed to diet. Women have a tendency to fat. Women are

vain. Women are always so self-involved. (Malson, 1998, p. xi)

Orbach is talking about my mother and my mother taught me about food more

than any other person. Next in line is probably my auntie, and clearly she also

knew Orbach. Is it any wonder I developed a bizarre and twisted relationship with

food? (Research Journal, 13-3-08)

What I now see from this piece of data is the unconscious truth (as in the master's discourse) I saw in Orbach's assessment of our society's compartmentalisation of 'woman' as dieting machine, but more so my Mother as dieting machine. I said above that Orbach was talking about my own Mother's condition – I think my selection of Orbach is an attempt by Andy to reach his mOther's desire as the object cause of his own desire. Somehow I saw (see) Orbach as having an insight into my Mother's desire that I do not. Another piece of data can perhaps triangulate my unconscious selection of Orbach; this also comes from my research journal:

Maybe I made a fatal mistake. The scene is a seminar on psychoanalytic clinical

practice. The speaker is alluring, calming & assured, at least enough to be

convincing without being arrogant in the face of his patient's pain. He talks about

something I find difficult now to recall – something about truth, about what truth

exists and its ontological status. He breaks and asks for questions; I'm scared but

not enough to be put off asking about my own interests. The day before I had

presented at the conference and had told a story about my own life – my battles

with food around my family Christmas table. I used this story to ask a question

about why the truth I felt was so dissimilar to my brothers and yet resonated with

my Mother. Many of the psychoanalysts in the room piped up, saying that it is my truth that matters for me. Then the speaker, silent before states 'I think this, (referring to my story from the conference) is a letter to your Mother'. I genuinely do not know how I feel about this, except to say that right now I am confused. Later on a colleague comes to talk to me, I do not know her well but she asks if I am ok? Good question. I feel inadequate, like I should have kept my mouth shut. Liked I've been told off. I feel silenced. (Research Journal, 16-2-09).

I really struggled with why I felt so battered by this rather direct comment, but I now see, ironically given the nature of the question I addressed to the speaker, that it was a statement of truth in the sense of the analyst's discourse. The speaker, as agent of the analyst's discourse, revealed and de-veiled the master signifier that authored the story I told of my family Christmas *and* drove my selection of Orbach's text:

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \longrightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1}$$
$$/\!/$$
$$A$$

Predictably, in choosing Orbach's text to re-consider gender in relation to fatness, I still seek the object cause of *my* desire – my mOther's desire – which is in accordance with Lacan's famous quote "Man's desire is the desire of the Other" (Lacan, 1998 (1964-65), p. 235).

The original version of *Fat is a Feminist Issue* is not a long or overly complex book. It has only 6 chapters and much of the text is simple and easy to read. Orbach doesn't tie the language down to literary references or indeed use complex jargon to explain complex

ideas. It is neat, direct and rather compelling. Orbach uses selected case references from her own experiences in working with women who have had weight issues, sometimes individually and sometimes in groups. In the introduction to the 2ⁿᵈ edition of *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (released in 1988, ten years after the original) she provides a good overall summary of what her text did that other 'solutions' to a woman's fat problems had not:

> Owing to the emotional distress involved and the fact that the many varied solutions offered to women in the past have not worked, a new psychotherapy to deal with compulsive eating has had to evolve within the context of the movement for women's liberation. This new psychotherapy represents a feminist rethinking of traditional psychoanalysis. (S. Orbach, 1998, p. 21)

This mix of ideas clearly proved advantageous as her text was well received – it touched the lives of many thousands of people worldwide – and continues to do so today.   In the passage above Orbach talks of 'women's liberation' in terms of the feminist movement, this is a constant theme that runs through her text, that a 'feminist rethinking' provides a way through the mire of weight themed issues and specifically that the problem is the patriarchal society that expects certain things of women. I will present a re-reading of this theme in the second half of this section. First I will tackle another, possibly the other, major theme in *Fat is a Feminist Issue* that is the idea of bodily alienation experienced by women with weight-issues.

~~Woman~~ as alien: Is alienation from the Other Imaginary, Symbolic or Real?

In this section I am going to interrogate Orbach's rather elegant idea that a woman's fat represents a barrier between her 'self' and the world. Here is a picture that I have taken directly from Orbach's text:
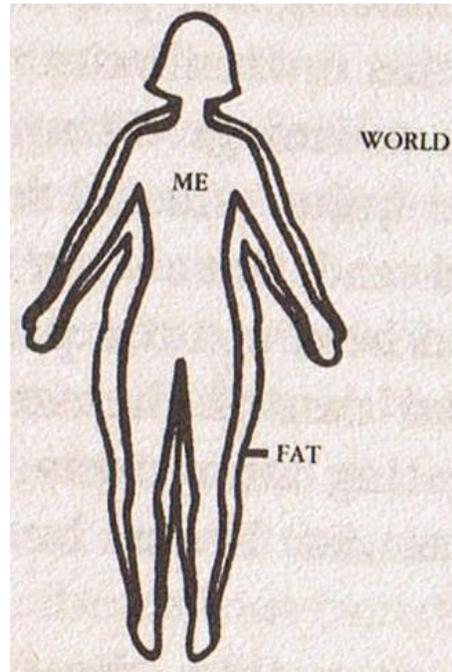
Figure 6.1: Picture taken from *Fat is a Feminist Issue*
Taken directly from: (S. Orbach, 1998, p. 74)

Orbach's idea was that through therapy a woman could come to understand her fat as part of her self rather than as a barrier keeping out the world, in this way when losing weight (the ultimate goal) the woman would not see her protective covering slipping away but rather her self becoming "compressed" into the new slim form (1998, p. 75). The idea that fat on a woman is a barrier keeping out the world (often described as keeping out men or intimacy or sexuality etc…) has become a very common pop-psychology idea, for some reason we seem to find the idea compelling.

Part of the rationale for this idea of fat as a barrier is the idea that women are fundamentally alienated in our society; that women are labelled as 'other' and that men are 'normal people'. Here are Orbach's words:

> "Women are seen as different from normal people (who are men), they are seen as "other." They are not accepted as equal human beings with men. Their full identity is not supported by the society in which they grow up. This leads to confusion for women. Women are trapped in the role of an alien" (1998, pp. 26-27)

When viewed through the logic of the phallus the gender terms within this paragraph become fairly murky. Clearly contained within Orbach's thesis is a notion that is very central to Lacanian theory – this is the idea that a subject is alienated from their 'self'; specifically by their ascension to the symbolic via the attainment of language (Fink, 1995). However this alienation is bought about via the symbolic function of the phallus, which is specifically masculine. Bruce Fink explains it as such:

> "Those who, from a psychoanalytic perspective, are considered to be men – regardless of their biological/genetic makeup – are wholly determined by the "phallic function"... the phallic function refers to the alienation brought about by language" (1995, p. 106)

Although Orbach was writing about gender relations generally at that point of *Fat is a Feminist Issue* her subject of study and her experience as a therapist focuses the attention onto the people suffering with weight issues, which were in her experience at that time exclusively women. Some 'minor' signifier alterations to her words might perhaps identify another focus of her work:

*Fat women are seen as different from normal people (who are men), they are seen as "other." They are not accepted as equal human beings with men. Their full identity is not supported by the society in which they grow up. This leads to confusion for **fat** women. Fat women are trapped in the role of an alien*

Or even perhaps as:

*Fat people are seen as different from normal people (who are **thin**), they are seen as "other." They are not accepted as equal human beings with **thin people**. Their full identity is not supported by the society in which they grow up. This leads to confusion for **fat people**. **Fat people** are trapped in the role of an alien*

I find this transition from an issue of feminism to one of fatism revealing in terms of the gender relations and particularly the impact that texts such as *Fat is a Feminist Issue* has had on men with weight issues such as me. Specifically what this re-signification of Orbach's words allows is a re-thinking of the nature of gender in relation to weight anxiety. When read through a Lacanian lens the fundamental and complete alienation experienced by the women (fat people) Orbach discusses and the associated 'fat barrier' they possess as a spacer between their self and the world can be interpreted as being entirely defined by the phallic function, which is specifically *not* feminine, but is instead masculine. This phallic function can be seen operating in the disconnect that exists between the signifer and what is signifed for these people (inluding me). Fat people (at least those who are weight-anxious) feel alienated because there is a disconnect between the 'correct' signifer, which is 'thin' and what is signifed – a fat body. Rather than understanding the signifer 'thin' as particular rather than universal the weight-anxious

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attempt to bridge the gap to create 'thin'. These attempts are wholly defined by the function of the phallus.

The feminine structure by contrast is characterised by what Lacan calls being not-whole, in *Encore* he states "any speaking being whatsoever situates itself under the banner "women", it is on the basis of the following – that it grounds itself as being not-whole in situating itself in the phallic function" (1998 (1972-73), p. 72). This last sentence is perhaps more easily understood as "it grounds itself as not-wholly situating itself in the phallic function" as Bruce Fink notes as an alternative translation. What Lacan proposes in *Encore* is that something exists outside of the function of the phallus and that this something he locates within the feminine structure. I will elaborate on this in relation to weight anxiety within section three on the allure of feminine *jouissance*.

In tracing the outline of alienation in relation to weight Orbach pinpointed one of the most crucial issues with weight and gender, that is weight-anxious people who are theorised by Orbach as potentially wearing fat as a barrier against the world are actually "wholly alienated within language" (Fink, 1995, p. 106) and, in psychoanalytic terms, exist in the masculine. Hence fat, for the biologically female individuals in Orbach's text and for weight-anxious blokes like me is a masculine issue, wholly defined by the phallic function.

The heading to this section reads "~~Woman~~ as alien: Is alienation from the Other Imaginary, Symbolic or Real?" Following the re-focusing I suggest above, this title is perhaps more accurately written as "Fat people as aliens: Is alienation from the Other Imaginary, Symbolic or Real?" Not only have I changed the signifier 'woman' to 'fat

people' thus more correctly (at least in psychoanalytic terms) representing Orbach's audience but I have removed the cross-out to represent that the weight-anxious subjects of Orbach's experience (and my own) do not have a supplementary *jouissance* not-knowable (not able to be signified) but live their weight through cycles of phallic *jouissance* as I argued in the previous chapter. This still leaves the question – is the alienation experienced by weight anxious subjects Imaginary, Symbolic or Real, or indeed present in different ways in all three of these registers, and what does this mean for biological males with weight issues?

As a way into this topic I want to explore an interaction that occurred between Nicky Diamond and Susie Orbach in 1985. In that year Diamond wrote an article critical of Orbach's text (1985). Diamond's general argument was that *Fat is a Feminist Issue* unfortunately and insidiously promotes slimness as an ideal form and fatness as pathology – that it is in fact just another reproduction of anti-feminist weight loss messages. I am not going to make an attempt to join with or dispute Diamond's arguments, this is not my project; rather I find her re-reading of the 'fat as a barrier' idea I discuss above and Orbach's response to Diamond useful in terms of trying to understand how alienation works in the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real for weight anxious subjects. Here are Diamond's words as commentary on the 'fat as a barrier' idea:

> "…the social imagery suggests that on removing layers 'you will feel you have become compressed' (Orbach, 1981:93) for what is uncovered is a compact true self within, an inner core more pure and transcendent. This true self-body revealed is like the smallest, complete and most detailed Russian doll that stands hidden

beneath those larger false models. It is as if the real woman arises like the Phoenix out of the flames" (1985, p. 57)

For me this feels like Diamond is echoing the disjunction inherent between the three registers. Diamond uses terms such as 'true self', 'inner core' and 'real woman' to describe what can apparently be uncovered through Orbach's project; a complete woman, a healthy slim woman, a Real woman. As Diamond's critique continues you can see her perspective on the disjunction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic:

> "The idealization of 'ego'-ideals is important, for they are seen as always set apart, more perfect than we can ever be - occupying an impossible place. Without this analysis, it is difficult to comprehend a woman's psychical perceptions of a discrepancy between 'self and 'thin ideal'. In fact, it is no wonder that many women see themselves as always larger, 'less perfect' than their ideal, irrespective of how others see them" (1985, p. 60)

Tied up in this conflict between what Diamond refers to as ego-ideal and self is of course desire, which as I argued in the previous chapter is linked with the pursuit of 'phallic' *jouissance*, *jouissance* of the Real that has been distorted and appropriated into the register of the Symbolic in relation to weight.

The Imaginary is the register of the conscious subject, the women that Orbach quotes in her text speak from this register. What they say represents their ego-driven fantasies, these may be conflicts, pain, triumphs and others, but they all are presented as coming from their 'self'; Hoedemaekers describes it like this "[t]he Imaginary functions as a temporary narrative by which the subject assigns itself the place of the one who is in control" (2007,

p. 67). This is not to say that they are in control of their actions, in fact 'lack of control' is often given as a reason for weight gain, but rather that they are knowledgeable about 'who they are'. The anxious weight loss subject most often assumes an Imaginary position in which they claim authority over their anxiety via their articulated and enacted attempt to control their body weight. This however is only a façade of control, a fantasy that allows the subject to present a seamless self to the world, a self that is in fact riddled with fractures. In the Imaginary register of weight anxious folk a spacer exists as a mechanism to establish a coherent slim identity that can still be physically fat, you can see this in operation in one of the quotes Orbach provides "Maggie, a thirty-eight-year-old clerk, put it this way '*If I don't have all this weight on me, people will get in real close and I won't have any control or protection*'" (1998, p. 68). Read in terms of the register of the Imaginary Maggie can be seen to be distancing the weight (on me) from her 'real' imagined identity as a slim woman by justifying its use as a method of control or protection; fat as a spacer between me and something else.

In Maggie's comment above the particular use of the phrase 'on me' in relation to fat is, in my interpretation, the Symbolic poking through one of the fractures in Maggie's Imaginary construction of her identity. The Symbolic is the register of the unconscious, the site of the anxious weight loss subject's encounter with the slim Other. The subject attempts to negotiate the Symbolic in a constant search for meaning – through the metaphoric and metonymic rites of signification. I interpret Maggie's choice of words 'on me' as a mechanism that her unconscious is using as an to attempt to reconcile the lack – in this moment by spacing the fat layer from her self so that it resembles, more closely, the thin Other, briefly alleviating anxiety. This is a common mechanism for those with

weight anxiety; it manifests in several ways but always revolves around the unconscious positioning the self as close to the thin Other as possible. A classic example of this came from a bloke I had only one conversation with about his attempts to lose weight. Below I recall the story sometime after the event:

> *I had a really interesting exchange with one of the participants in my second 'fat bloke's group'. 'Alex' had asked to join the group explaining that he had struggled to lose weight and was worried about his health. During the opening of the meeting I said something along the lines of 'what works for you will be different to the guy beside you, everyone's journey is different'. This started a general conversation and then Alex said "I know what I need to do to get down to my normal size, I just need to cut out the carbs, carbs gone, weights gone, simple as that". Frustrated with the low-carb frenzy us men were in I replied with something like "well why haven't you just done it already?" I never talked to Alex again.* (Research Journal, 13-12-09)

My insensitive response to Alex still bothers me, because it was a comment not to him, but in fact to me. It was a standard self-flagellation that I tend to gain phallic *jouissance* from engaging in, i.e. "Why haven't I just done it (diet) yet?" Alex, like Maggie was positioning his self close to the thin Other by the idea of getting down to his 'normal size'. Furthermore in this you can see the metaphor he was using to space his weight from his true self – the evil 'carbs'. I see this as a highly prevalent metaphoric substitution in our current Symbolic structure in New Zealand, one in a series of metaphoric substitutions that have been used to space fat bodies apart from true selves – another noteworthy substitution is 'saturated fat'. What did come from Alex bearing the brunt of

my issues was the no-contact that I have since experienced. Perhaps in this untactful comment I unwittingly exposed Alex to the Real inherent in his Symbolic structure.

I have run into several issues when trying to write about the register of the Real in relation to the organisation of weight anxiety. It is probable that this is partly to do with having to confront my own trauma. For example in the above exchange between myself and Alex I had constructed an imaginary account of the situation for myself, a coherent narrative that located the problem with him. However I think the Real-ity of the situation is that by positioning me as agent of knowledge, by saying to him 'why haven't you done it already?' I was speaking from the position of the university:

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \xrightarrow{\hspace{1cm}} \frac{a}{\cancel{S}}$$
$$U$$

Fuelled by my own Master Signifier in the position of truth I addressed Alex as the object cause of my desire (a subject with weight anxiety) with the outcome of reproducing me as the split subject – lacking and incomplete once again. In describing this interpretation of the social exchange I have had to accept that my search for the object cause of desire has consequences, some of which I feel bad about – Alex is one of those.

Having described my exchange with Alex within the structural confines of the discourse of the university I can offer another interpretation, this based on Alex as subject, with me in the position of analyst addressing him as the split subject with the result of Alex producing a new Master Signifier – one that questions and re-writes his statement *"I know what I need to do to get down to my normal size, I just need to cut out the carbs, carbs*

gone, weights gone, simple as that". I don't know whether either of these interpretations reflect what happened between Alex's unconscious and my own, but I do know that an "ultimate antagonism" (Leggatt-Cook, 2005, p. 86) exists between these two Symbolic perspectives; I am left confused, frustrated and tense by this antagonism and no matter how much I attempt to resolve it, it remains. This antagonism is for me an example of how the Real appears in the Symbolic network of signifiers we use to communicate weight anxiety with others. Chez Leggatt-Cook would perhaps describe it is as "the shift, in itself, from one perspective to the next" (2005, p. 86) the shift between attempts to explain why we look one way but are in fact another. This means that the Real for us weight anxious subjects appears to mark the fundamental contradiction we have between our embodiment and our 'real' self somewhere inside.

I think when *Fat Is a Feminist Issue* talks of the alienation that women experience in our society and the 'fat barrier' between self and world that results Susie Orbach was in fact circling around and attempting to describe what Žižek might descibe as the trauma central to the Real (Zizek, 1989) that sits within each subject's relationship with the Other. For me this is why this 'fat as barrier' concept in Orbach's text is so provocative and alluring to us weight anxious folk. Nicky Diamond's critique, although interesting from a feminist perspective, does not provide a compelling explanation of the allure of this message within *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, either to women with weight issues or indeed to blokes like me. This is where re-theorising Orbach's thesis with Lacan's register of the Real can be most useful. What follows are three excerpts from Orbach's short and snappy reply to Diamond's critique:

"…social practices in which women are derogated mean that no woman has an uncomplicated relationship to her body" (Susie Orbach, 1985, p. 119)

"…the use of such terms as 'the self' or 'the real you' are examples of the language of therapy. These terms speak to felt experiences not philosophical paradigms" (p. 120)

"…By examining women's relationship to food, to fat, to thin, we are forced to confront the devastating cruelty that patriarchal modes of living instil in us and inflict on us" (p. 121)

Like much of her writing these words are again intensely compelling and repelling to me. I have selected these three phrases to consider further because for me they mark irruptions of the Real through the gauze of the Symbolic. I will discuss the second phrase first in relation to the discourse of the analyst and then the first and last phrases in relation to the Real-ity of gender relations and the implications for men with weight issues.

In the second phrase Orbach talks of the use in the therapeutic relationship of the idea of 'the self' and 'the real you', which speaks to 'felt experiences'. It is clear that here she is talking about what Lacan would call analytic discourse; the psychoanalytic process where the analyst (therapist) speaks as agent from the position of the objet a, the position of surplus *jouissance,* in order to confront the patient with their object cause of desire:

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \longrightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1}$$
$$A$$

This discursive structure has the unique position of partially-tolerating the emergence of the subject's Real. The result of this painful relationship can be a subversion of the meanings that the subject places to important signifiers, in this case the ideas of 'the self' and 'the real you' (Horne, 2005). This is what I think Orbach is trying to say when she establishes the dialectic between 'felt experiences' and 'philosophical paradigms'. She is saying to Diamond *'Put aside the theory, women just feel better after therapy'*. In this sense I side with Orbach, there is something compelling about the discourse of the analyst in terms of real change, or perhaps more accurately Symbolic change. It requires the subject to be confronted with their *objet a*; clearly the 'fat as barrier' idea is a metaphoric mechanism by which this can be done in the therapeutic relationship. In her critique Diamond misses this, possibly because she is highly invested in the knowledge production associated with the discourse of the university – Diamond seems so firmly appended to the 'paradigm' that the discourse of the university was supporting at that time she was unable to appreciate that Orbach was intentionally shelving theory in favour of practice.

The partial emergence of the Real in this analytic sense perhaps suggests that by using the 'fat as barrier' metaphor to articulate (and partially resolve?) the alienation experienced by women *Fat is a Feminist Issue* seems to demonstrate that the alienation experienced by women (read: fat people) with weight issues is an Imaginary and Symbolic phenomenon – but is not Real, in fact exposure to the Real through therapy is argued by Orbach as providing a mechanism for resolution of this alienation.

The conclusion I reach above sits uncomfortably with the discussion I have below. This is because I now want to tackle the gender issues within this and what it means for men with weight anxiety. When removed from the feminist discourse that spawned her original text

and instead translated as I have done above into a 'fat-ist' discourse Orbach's ideas make sense to me. However the backdrop of anti-patriarchy makes for a painful read for men with weight anxiety. When I read "no woman has an uncomplicated relationship to her body" I was initially lured and confronted by the idea that someone (me, for instance) could (should) have an uncomplicated relationship to their body. The comment disrupts the path of the Symbolic for us weight anxious men and the *point de capiton* 'gender', because by stating 'no woman' Orbach is inferring that some men have an uncomplicated relationship to their body – immediately I feel like that could (should) be me, but what would I do if I had an uncomplicated relationship with my body, what would I think about all day, every day? Why would I exercise? What would I eat? I see this as an irruption of the Real through the Symbolic for men with weight anxiety.

This irruption is reinforced by the comments Orbach makes in the third quote, in this she says that when you look at women's relationship to food and weight you also have to look at the 'devastating cruelty that patriarchal modes of living instil in us and inflict on us'. In the opening to this section I identified that in choosing Orbach's text I was seeking the object cause of *my* desire – my mOther's desire. This means that my Mother's relationship to food and weight and her accordant desire is the first author of my own desire so following Orbach I too have to look at the devastatingly cruel patriarchal modes of living for a cause of my weight anxiety and a rejection of these for a cure (or perhaps just an explanation?) I find this idea peculiar and untrustworthy, not just because I feel like I should feel guilty as a complicit man, but because it doesn't make sense in relation to the experience I have with weight anxious men, in Orbach's own words there is an

increasing number of men and boys with weight anxiety (2006) even as 'patriarchal modes of living' should be helping us blokes avoid the weight anxiety trap.

The focus on patriarchy is, in my view, a red herring in Orbach's thesis; the focus should instead be identified as being on 'phallic modes of living' – symbolic modes of living around weight and fat where the subjects are wholly alienated within language and are therefore confined to the "paltry jouissance" (Fink, 2002, p. 35) offered by the phallic function which Lacan neatly describes as being "just barely successful" (1998 (1972-73), p. 64). The difference between the notion of patriarchy as used by feminists and the function of the phallus is vast; patriarchy suggests that biological status (as man or woman) structures modes of living, the phallus does not. Phallic modes of living can explain why an increasing number of boys and men are developing weight anxiety; the issue lies not with patriarchy but with feminist emancipation. In the following section I will tackle this rather thorny subject.

Hystory, 'gender' inequality and embodiment: Is being a fat bloke emancipatory?

In this section my intention is to take a broader view of Orbach's thesis in *Fat is a Feminist Issue,* by extending my analysis to consider her later works, including recent text *Bodies* (2009), and to consider the broader feminist project against the industry of weight loss. My reasons for this are three: First, *Fat is a Feminist Issue* is now more than 30 years old and much as changed since then, I want to capture an understanding about how Orbach's ideas about gender have reshaped her perspective on the issues she presents in 1978. Second, Orbach's recent works approach the concept of embodiment more directly, and re-thinking embodiment is a key focus for this section. Third, much has been written

about the feminist movement since Orbach neatly summarised its perspective on fat in the late 70s. Possibly there now exists a broader understanding of the effects the attempt to emancipate women from patriarchy has had on both women and men and their associated symptoms.

Embodied experiences can be understood through the theoretical perspectives of a number of discipline areas. In the introduction to this chapter I talked about two disciplines, biological science and social/cultural studies (via gender hegemony), that have quite different perspectives on embodiment. Biological sciences see 'the body' as a biological organism with a genetically defined gender, in contrary many of the social/cultural studies see 'the body' and gender as historically constituted and socially constructed. Psychoanalysis, as Charles Shepherdson describes it, occupies an odd position between the biological determinism of the natural sciences and the social constructionism of many of the cultural and social sciences (Shepherdson, 1999). This position seems to sit somewhere in the obscure abyss between the 'known' categories of nature and history. This position places psychoanalysis both as a target for criticism and also in a unique position to say something new with regard to the embodied experiences of people who are weight anxious. My intention in this section is to utilise a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective on embodiment as an alternative to the more 'normal' social/cultural perspective utilised by Susie Orbach and others researching in the field of weight loss.

One of the grounding premises in *Fat is a Feminist Issue* is this idea that compulsive overeating and by association weight anxiety is women's business: "The fact that compulsive eating is overwhelmingly a woman's problem suggests that it has something to do with the experience of being female in our society" (1998, p. 22). Orbach extends

this explanation to sex roles and gender equality by stating that "[f]eminism argues that being fat is an attempt to break free of society's sex stereotypes" and subsequently describes fat as "a response to the inequality of the sexes" (pp. 22-23). This perspective, which has received sustained attention since its first airing in the late 70s, has had an effect on men for whom weight is an issue. My intention in this section is to re-read the feminist notion of women's fatness as emancipatory through a psychoanalytic perspective on men's embodied experiences of being fat and losing weight. In effect I want to consider whether being a fat bloke is emancipatory, and if it is what are we emancipated from?

In 2004 Orbach published a paper in the journal *Attachment & Human Development* entitled: *What can we learn from the therapist's body?* By 2004 Orbach had become a well known and outspoken critic of the diet and fashion industries; however rather than an attack on the industry this paper presents Orbach's theory of embodiment, which is centred around the concept that a developing subject internalises the image of the bodies of its 'others' (caregivers and others) and subsequently mirrors those in its own life. Certainly this idea resonates with me (as Orbach tends to do) but her words around gender provide an interesting entry point into the gender and body analysis that I am pursuing in this section: "The body of a woman comes from the body of her mother, both literally and in terms of the psychic history, which bequeaths her relation to that body" (p. 148) appended to this comment was the endnote: "Of course women also give boys their bodies which raises very interesting questions about the nature of both female and male sexuality and the role of the mother in the development, acceptance and integration of that sexuality" (p. 149). For me this innocent endnote is probably the most salient reflection of

gender and sexuality I have read in Susie Orbach's texts. This is because it has an underlying vulnerability; it identifies the existence of an unknown (the bodies of fat boys and men) and doesn't attempt to make it known. As a weight anxious man this statement leaves me confused and lacking, but also hopeful. This lack (of knowledge about the bodies of boys and men) is in my view also present in Orbach's latest text *Bodies*. In particular she recounts the therapy of a patient 'Jerry' (2009, pp. 153-157). I will not be so presumptuous to offer any different interpretation on the content of Jerry's case as represented in the text – rather I just point out that within Orbach's discussion of Jerry's predicament I see the same vulnerability and lack. It is as if Orbach is practising caution about what her words might mean for men.

It seems that men (and fat men in particular) are an enigma for the feminists working in the field of weight anxiety. Certainly you can see this in the text of Bell & McNaughton who do a fine job of identifying the 'problems' with theorising fat blokes within the feminist literature (2007). However even in their text the body of the "invisible fat man" remains elusive, you can feel this enigmatic remnant in their conclusion: "fatness has long had threatening implications for men, given the ways it potentially undermines normative forms of masculinity. Clearly, men articulate their weight concerns differently from women and their experiences need to be explored in more detail" (2007, p. 127).

I am attempting to answer Bell and McNaughton's call to reveal the invisible fat man. Though ironically my intent is to do this through *What Lacan said about Women* (Soler, 2006). In this text Collette Soler presents a compelling re-theorisation of the effect of feminist emancipation. For me this idea is essential for re-thinking the feminist idea of fat

as a mechanism of emancipation for women and what this might mean for weight anxious men. Take the following passage:

> "The evolution of our ways of thinking, mores, and social groups is placing this field of reality more and more under the sign of unisexuality. Women, whose jouissance was for a long time confined by the dominant discourse to the home – including husband and child – are now finding themselves in a new situation: they have seen the opening of all doors of competition, which is always phallic. These changes, specific to our age, have had indirect consequences on conduct and sexed ideals… and have especially new subjective effects. Most often, these are effects of discordance: the division of the subject is intensified in women by an accentuated division between her jouissances" (Soler, 2006, p. 40)

In this passage Soler talks of the 'opening of all doors of competition' provided through the development of a unisexuality which is she says 'specific to our age'. I think this idea is particularly important to understanding the rapid growth in weight competition reproduced through the diet and fashion industries. This particular form of phallic competition is confined almost solely to relatively wealthy, connected women in western societies.

The prevalence of competitive thinning has caused some significant confusion to many people, including evolutionarily minded sociobiologists. Smuts (1991) for instance made the following comment in relation to this movement towards a desire for thinness:

> "If human nature evolved under strong selective pressure to strive for and admire fatness, especially in women, then the reversal of these traits in modern industrial

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societies – the inverse correlation between female fat and social class, the idealization of thin females, the growth of a multi-billion dollar weight-control industry supported mainly by affluent young women – is indeed perplexing" (1991, p. 526).

I'm not surprised by this comment, because from an evolutionary perspective it doesn't make sense, one decent famine and the average over-thin woman in the west would struggle, it is as if they are rejecting their evolutionary instinct. In trying to resolve this quandary, Smuts discusses a variety of possible answers stemming from an understanding of evolutionary theory. One avenue of enquiry leads to this peculiar but revealing comment, based on the premise that the wealthy use their 'thinness' to show the poor (who in western society are fat) that they are still in control:

> "If the rich in developed nations are now using thinness to enhance their wealth and power by impressing the poor, then devotion to weight control should be even greater among affluent men than among affluent women. That the reverse is true suggests that if thinness is indeed a form of competitive display, there must be unique ways in which, despite appearances, it serves women's competitive interests better than men's" (1991, pp. 530-531)

In this rather odd suggestion I think we can in fact see a signification trace of the explanation that Collette Soler might give for this quandary – that these women who are involved in a sport of competitive dieting are in fact wholly defined by the phallus with regards to their weight control attempts – which is of course competitive – and are, at least in relation to weight control, located within the masculine structure. Thus we can

assign particular significance to one specific comment in Smuts' words above: "despite appearances" – it is precisely 'despite the appearance' of the competitors (wealthy women) that we can understand their compulsion to partake in the phallic sport of weight control.

This trace can also be found in action within writings on eating disorders and men courtesy of the clinical psychology tradition. In 2008 two eating disorder clinical practitioners wrote the following words when trying to answer a question which is also the title of their paper "How do the Principles of the Feminist, Relational Model Apply to Treatment of Men with Eating Disorders and Related Issues":

> "As gender roles and expectations for women have been dramatically transformed
> in the past quarter century, these changes have reverberated into the lives of men.
> If women turn to their bodies as the way to modulate and resolve these stressors
> and mixed messages, it is only logical that men would also express some of their
> distress through their bodies and would be at greater risk to develop eating
> disorders" (Maine & Bunnell, 2008, p. 187)

In this article the authors generally discuss the rapid transformation of 'gender roles and expectations' experienced by women in the last 25 years and they use this as an explanation to attempt to make sense of why reported cases of eating disorders in boys and men are increasing.

In all of the examples I have discussed in this section, from Orbach herself, the evolutionary sociobiologists, the clinical eating disorder practitioners, and also from social theorists such as Bell & McNaughton we can see the tentative position occupied by

fat men as analytic subjects in their own right. In Smuts' analysis, it should be commonplace for men to be competitively engaged in weight loss regimes, but we see this instead mainly in women, for Maine & Bunnell disordered eating practices are emerging in men precisely *because* of women's experiences, men in their analysis are just an effect. But perhaps this is most clearly seen in Bell & McNaughton's work – here fat men are provocatively labelled as 'invisible', compressed by the weight of the vast numbers of fat women.

What is common to the various modes of analysis I discuss in the above section is the uncanny allure that the fat man seems to inspire from these theorists; in different ways they all seem to be perplexed by the fat man, but manage to achieve only a fleeting glimpse of his psyche and function. These theorists have tended to position the fat man in a similar way to how the weight loss industry itself positions the fat man – rather than starting from 'what the fat man wants' instead the weight loss industry tends to re-package its extant female-focussed products with what they decide is a 'masculine formula' – taken from common discourse about what men want; different colouring, different eating plans, more exercise and an element of competition are common changes. It is as if the fat man is a bastardisation of the real (correct) fat subject – the fat woman.

Seen from my perspective, as the fat man in question, this treatment of me as subject is polarising. My interpretation is that it actually makes my unconscious ask "am I a man?" hence the same question I posed in the first section of this chapter. With this idea I see the anxious fat man in hysterical terms. Renata Salecl's words here are particularly salient as she describes her perspective on the male hysteric:

"[T]he subject's urgent question is: what kind of mask am I wearing? In other words, what kind of an object am I for her? Am I a man or a woman? This would be the question for the male hysteric. He has doubts about his sex and his being, therefore he expects to get an answer from the Other, just as a female hysteric does. And, in order to obtain this answer, he places himself as the ultimate object of the Other's desire, but the object whose allure is linked to the fact that he always vanishes and can never be possessed" (Salecl, 1997, p. 21)

The link to hysterical discourse is not one I make lightly, as the traditional association of hysteria as a female problem runs a risk of offering a too easily made link to the question of the weight anxious man – that is he is suffering a feminine condition. Lee Monaghan points out how this is occurring readily in our society by giving a range of examples – such as citing a weight-loss researcher who has called fat men "pregnant" (2008, p. 101). It can also be seen in the increasing prevalence of the signifier 'moob' used to refer to the chest fat that has as become signified as representing fat men's female-like 'breasts'. My intention is not to add support to the feminization of men's fat bodies in any way. What I want to do is to consider how the structure of the hysteric's discourse might be enlightening when considering the situation of the weight anxious man that so perplexes the feminist discourse (including Susie Orbach):

$$\frac{\$}{a} \xrightarrow{} \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$

$$//$$

$$H$$
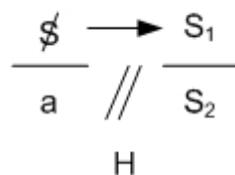
In the above passage Renata Salecl might be speaking in terms of the pathological male hysteric subject but my intention is to step from pathology into what Gerard Wajcman calls "normal hysteria" which he goes on to describe generally as "an essential characteristic of the speaking subject" (2003, see "the discourse of the hysteric" section paragraph 2). Hysteric discourse exists then in all speaking subjects to some extent. For me the social bond that the hysteric's discourse defines is illuminating when considering the specific hystory of weight anxious men like me within the framework of the feminist envelopment of weight anxiety.

In her 2004 paper on embodiment and in her most recent text *Bodies* Susie Orbach points out the differences experienced by baby boys and girls:

 "Boys are breast fed for longer than girls, each feed lasts longer, boys are weaned more gradually, they are potty trained later, they are held more. In work with mothers specifically around gender and appetites we know that where mothers are gleeful about the appetites of their sons, they are wary of daughters with large ones" (2004, p. 147)

Obviously here Orbach is recounting 'empirical facts' about how mothers interact with sons differently than with daughters, and it seems to make sense – in that if girls grow up watching the Other carefully watch how much they eat they are likely to mirror that behaviour in themselves. However the plight of those bearing the organ might in fact be equally or potentially more traumatic, depending on the specifics of the situation; what happened in the relationship between my mOther and me was I think a hybridisation. In many ways whilst I was growing up my appetite was not responded to with 'glee' but

with concern by those in my close family environment (see chapter 5) however it was responded to with glee and with admiration by Others – most notably my male peers, but also generally by society. This created in me an uneasy relationship to my own gender, in that if I was treated like a girl (in relation to food and eating) but generally was expected to be and act like a boy, what would happen? I see this fundamental sexual identity disjunction as being enacted in an embodied sense, in that it first manifests in the body of weight anxious men; as obese, or anorexic, or bulimic or bodybuilder and this symptom is best understood in terms of the hysteric's discourse; imaginary, somatic → embodied.

There is no doubt that my analysis in the above section and generally within this thesis could be comfortably positioned within the following phrase:

> "In crude terms, I suspect that a suitably adapted attachment interview research project looking at the body would discover many aspects of transgenerational transmission of insecure bodies, particularly from mothers to daughters (but also from mothers to sons)" (Susie Orbach, 2004, p. 147)

Although my specific plight is once again bound at the end of the paragraph within brackets it is still there – clear and concise. I have received, via transmission, an insecure body courtesy of my mother. She also gifted me a practical do-it-yourself attitude, some significant sporting prowess, a sharp wit, an understanding of the role of a good husband and an enquiring mind, and all of these things (and many more) are represented within my subjectivity. I have no argument here with Orbach but I do question what purpose this theoretical research project would have as confirmation of the 'answer' would only work to draw more attention to the effects of the gaze of the Other. Is the purpose then to re-

direct this gaze? Is it to try and prevent the transmission of insecure bodies to the next generation? For me this is the classic action of the discourse of the university, we have a theory; we need to produce more knowledge to confirm the theory. Orbach, here, has become a subject of the discourse of the university, she calls for 'knowledge' to answer a question she claims to already 'know'. The result perhaps is predictable, a further alienated subject:

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \quad // \quad \frac{\longrightarrow \quad a}{\$}$$
$$U$$

It is pointless to ponder what discourse would be like without the action of the discourse of the university – after all without it I would not be writing this. That said, I asked in the title to this section 'Is being a fat bloke emancipatory'? My main reason for writing this title was to work through the idea in *Fat is a Feminist Issue* that being fat as a woman might work unconsciously to emancipate that woman from a patriarchal society. My conclusion here is that the development of embodied weight anxiety in an increasing number of male subjects has come about as a result of the changing symbolic structures available for a boy or man to construct a stable fantasy of identity. My theory, as argued previously, is that one of the new forms of phallic *jouissance* available to women as a result of the feminist movement is competitive weight control. I see this as a "new symptom of contemporary women" (Soler, 2006, p. 172) that further analysis might align with Soler's existing identifications of debasement, inhibition and women in charge of fatherhood (Soler, 2006, see section 172-174). Over time this has come to impact on boys, as Orbach identifies, but that this impact has landed some boys and men into the

hysteric's discourse in relation to their bodies, as I describe above. Is this emancipatory? Well, perhaps; for instance I might argue that it is a privilege to have a hysterical relationship to my body, different from many other men. Bruce Fink might even suggest that we hysterical fat men have access to Other *jouissance* as a result of an affinity with hysteria (Fink, 1995). That said it is also painful to be constantly anxious about whether, contrary to evidence, I am in fact getting fatter and fatter until one day I will explode like the fat bloke in the Monty Python sketch[7].

The tension that remains in my analysis in the above section is the disjunction inherent within all discourse. There is a paradox in that, as Dany Nobus and Malcolm Quinn have said "the truth both is and is not spoken" (Nobus & Quinn, 2005, p. 132). The hysteric in me "speaks from the place of confusion and disorder, yet reconstructs the master as an idol" (p. 131). However, I guess, somewhat ironically I am attempting to occupy this place of the master by surreptitiously assuming a position as agent of knowledge and enacting the discourse of the university whilst writing these words. Thus the discourse of the university can claim another scalp in its aim "to make products (outputs, students) that also 'speak product' and thus intellectualize their alienation" (p. 135). But I really don't want to tie myself too tightly in knots here in the concluding remarks of this section. So perhaps just a final note on the discourse of analysis, again from Nobus & Quinn: "The only epistemology adequate to this knowledge [here I believe the authors are referring to the body of knowledge that is the unconscious] is an epistemology that encounters the

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[7] In this sketch from Monty Python's "The Meaning of Life" an enormously fat man is dining at a restaurant. He eats a huge amount of food and at the conclusion of his meal the waiter presents him with a tiny wafer, drawing attention to its tininess. The man eats the wafer and explodes.

horror of this 'speaking truth' head on, as well as the traumas of the disarticulation of knowledge and loss of meaning that it introduces" (2005, p. 137).

6.3.   The approach of the Real… towards feminine *jouissance*?

In the previous section two main reformulations emerged from my reading of Orbach's texts through *Encore*. Firstly was the idea that the alienation Orbach describes women with weight issues experiencing is actually alienation that all subjects with weight issues experience – it is not just a feminist issue, but primarily a phallic issue. The second was theorising differently the historical phallic-function that *Fat is a Feminist Issue* describes: That is feminine fat not as a method of protest against patriarchy as Orbach's theories argue but as an example of the women's liberation movement providing "more and more access to" new forms of phallic *jouissance* that were previously not available (Soler, 2006, p. 67). One of these is the anxious sport of competitive weight control. The final part of my analysis in the previous section considered how the men caught up in this mass movement experience their weight anxiety – my conclusion was that they found themselves defined with respect to the discourse of the hysteric; their symptom is a contemporary version of male hysteria.

My intention in this section is to be a bit bold and attempt to point towards a new way, perhaps a pathway towards resolution for weight-anxious blokes. I am going to do this by considering Lacan's idea of feminine *jouissance* and the notion of the Real. Lacan's Real register and the affiliated feminine *jouissance* he describes in relation to the formulae of sexuation in *Encore* sit in opposition to the Symbolic register and its affiliate phallic *jouissance*, which together which make up the phallic-symbolic universe inhabited by us weight anxious folk.

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In *Encore* Lacan suggests that a subject who is located on the feminine side of the formula of sexuation has access to what he terms, at different times, the Other *jouissance* or feminine *jouissance*. Near the end of chapter five I indicated my intention to tackle this with these words 'perhaps there is something within the not-whole of the feminine structure that can skirt around the painful weight-anxiety experienced by a growing number of male subjects'. The key here is the differentiation between something that is 'whole' and something that is actively 'not-whole'. The phallic function attempts to tie-up the system into a whole; in relation to weight-loss attempts this occurs via the assimilation of correct ways of being (I associate these with The Sovereign Good and the goods of the weight-loss industry in the following chapter). This does not allow for the irreducible nature of the lacking subject. Julia Kristeva writes the following passage in relation to how women experience and react to this totality required by the order of the phallus:

> By tracing the twists and turns required of the female subject by her accession to the *secondary oedipal phase*, we can understand the irreducible strangeness that a woman feels in the phallic-symbolic order and that leads to a display of anxiety or conversion symptoms in the hysteric, when she settles for denial of the phallus and castration. At best, this strangeness takes on the aspect of anti-authoritarian dissatisfaction, incomprehensible to social rationality, hence, "What do women want?" – the insistent question that Freud is not alone in having posed. But this strangeness can be refined into revolt or insubordination, what Hegel acclaimed in women as the eternal irony of the community. If this exile that establishes the woman in the phallic-symbolic universe turns out to be irreconcilable, it can shift into chronic depressivity, or even incurable melancholia. Alternatively it can lead

to anorexia and bulimia, those failed suicidal consequences of the "refusal of femaleness" (Kristeva, 2004, p. 66)

It should be with no surprise that we read of the strangeness experienced by women who find themselves within the phallic-symbolic order. It should also not be a surprise that the woman exiled in the phallic-symbolic order can suffer the symptoms of anorexia and bulimia. Although Kristeva does not say it specifically, I think it is clear that the more common symptom of weight-anxiety, regardless of actual embodiment, could belong with clinical categories above. This leads to the conclusion that weight-anxiety, associated as it is with the phallic-symbolic universe is also a "refusal of femaleness". But what does this mean for the growing number of weight anxious blokes like me? We also are heavily invested, also exiled in this phallic-symbolic universe, perhaps it is the refusal of our own feminine potentiality that has landed us within this space. This of course works directly against the often-touted but poorly thought-through assessment that many fat men are 'a bit feminine'. What I am arguing opposes this, perhaps men with weight-anxiety (like women with weight-anxiety) are troubled because of their own unique refusal of their inherent femaleness. The question remains, how can we move past this point?

One of the central features of the Symbolic register in Lacanian theory is its fractured nature, and particularly the uncertainty that exists in the Symbolic in relation to the register of the Real. In the *Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"* Lacan makes the following statement in relation to things 'hidden' in the Symbolic:

It is the imbecility of the realist who does not pause to observe that nothing, however deep in the bowels of the world a hand may shove it, will ever be hidden

there, since another hand can retrieve it, and that what is hidden is never but what is *not in its place…* For it can *literally* be said that something is not in its place only of what can change places – that is of the symbolic. For the real, whatever upheaval we subject it to, is always and every case in its place; it carries its place stuck to the sole of its shoe, there being nothing that can exile it from it (Lacan, 2006b, p. 17, emphasis in original).

In true Lacan style this paragraph leaves the attuned reader intrigued and perplexed, me included! What I want to do is tease out the main differences between a 'thing's' place in the Symbolic and its place in the Real. The difference is actually very simple – in the Symbolic a 'thing' can be in a multitude of places, and can be displaced, willy-nilly, by the shifting sands of the chains of signification that hold it in its (temporary) place. This is what provides the fuel for the weight-loss industry; by flipping terminology they create demand (I shall unpick this idea in chapter seven). In total contrast when a 'thing' is in the Real its place is immutable, "it carries its place stuck to the sole of its shoe" but more importantly it is immune to any attempt to "exile it from it". To me this indicates the promise that holding Real knowledge (as opposed to Symbolic knowledge) about one's body may offer as immunity from the industry of weight-anxiety.

The final part to this puzzle is demonstrating how feminine *jouissance* can provide access to Real knowledge about one's body. To do this I turn to Slavoj Źiźek. He writes this in his chapter in *Reading Seminar XX*:

"Bess' jouissance is a jouissance "of the Other" in more than one way: it is not only enjoyment in words but also (and this is ultimately just another aspect of the same

thing) in the sense of utter alienation—her enjoyment is totally alienated/externalized in Jan as her Other. That is, it resides entirely in her awareness that she is enabling the Other to enjoy." (Zizek, 2002, pp. 59-60)

This anecdote comes from a movie storyline where the main female character Bess's male partner Jan is hospitalised. He requires Bess to seek sexual relationships with other men and then report her experiences to Jan. She gains *jouissance* from this experience, and in Źiźek's analysis, only when she recounts the experience to Jan. She is aware that she is enabling the Other to enjoy. I think something akin to this situation can be shown in a recent experience I had with my GP. Here is the story:

> *I went to visit my GP today. It was her that started me on the weight-loss journey (back in 2006). Then she convinced me to try a weight-loss medication that had an immediate effect. It had been almost a year since I had seen her in person, we chatted for a while about my new son (just over a year old) and she mentioned that she had seen me out running and that I looked like I was keeping up a good pace. I glibly replied that I was actually pretty slow; because I had gained about 10kgs since my son was born (it seems that being a Father is more fun than running long distances). She said "oh well, you can sort that out with portion control – just cut out one piece of bread at lunch and one potato at dinner"!*

A few years ago this type of statement from a health authority figure would have been difficult for me to place. The signifying chains of the Symbolic would have made this about me, told me I was wrong and exacerbated my anxiety. Strangely it didn't do this to me this time (except a little), mostly I just enjoyed the moment – that is I enjoyed

watching my GP enjoying her attempt to 'correct' my 'aberrant' behaviour. This was, perhaps, an example of feminine *jouissance* in operation, like Bess in Źiźek's analysis above my *jouissance* came (surprisingly) when I became aware I was 'enabling the Other to enjoy' and more importantly I had not gained *jouissance* prior to this by dieting and exercising excessively (as has been usual for me). Is this the *jouissance* experienced by not-anxious fat people who resist the healthy discourse? Do they gain feminine *jouissance* when they see their fatness enabling the Other to enjoy? If so the knowledge they subsequently hold about their body is grounded in the Real – residing outside the Symbolic, it cannot be shifted by the healthy discourse. This knowledge about one's body is immune to the weight-loss industry's *point de capitons* such as the BMI – these things are external to Real knowledge of one's body.

6.4. Concluding remarks on gender

It isn't difficult to find material in society that reminds us that fat is women's business. It fills the pages of magazines, and our television screens. It is reposed and reconstructed in most of our conversations, in otherwise benign discussions of food preparation and control; healthiness and what is appropriate to wear; how to groom. Increasingly it looks like men are being appropriated into these same constructions of society, our athletes provide bodies and actions for us men to judge ourselves against and we too are becoming increasingly involved in the 'healthy' discourse (including me). In this chapter, I have theorised that this 'healthy' discourse is in fact just another contestant in the harem of phallic *jouissance* and is therefore a masculine structure subject to the order of the phallus. It is perhaps a peculiarity of the feminist movement to emancipate women *from* patriarchy that seems to have made accessible this particular form of phallic *jouissance*.

Collette Soler talks of these new forms of phallic *jouissance* available to women in terms of competition, which can be seen throughout the weight loss industry – possibly the most classic is the popular TV program *The Biggest Loser* – but this theme is repeated throughout the industry in all of its institutional forms; between women and men in weight loss groups, health clubs and even in the organisation of the family unit the competition to be the biggest loser is rife. The term 'gender' and its associated hegemonic network of signification provide a pathway for us to question the proliferation of this form of competition. It is a peculiarity of gender hegemony that the current promotion of competition in weight loss attempts sits so far from traditional notions of femininity – we do not seem to question why biologically female contestants are so keen to participate in this obvious phallic game. Rather we gain confidence in our accepted gender hegemony by watching weight anxious men, who previously suffered symptoms regarded as 'feminine' (fatness), regain their 'masculinity' though their competitive attempts to lose their girly fat.

Also in this chapter, I have theorised the allure of a feminine *jouissance*. A *jouissance* outside the competition inherent within the phallus is like a beacon for us weight anxious folk, one that is elusive and unspeakable. I have attempted to describe its function, but this by necessity results in a resort to language, and the consequent Symbolic.

In the next chapter, I tackle the ethics of the weight-loss industry, moving away from the individual hysteric fat bloke to the approach the weight-loss industry takes to making money.

7. The Ethics of the Weight Loss Industry

In this final data chapter, my plan is to 'pick at the seams' of the ethics of promoting weight loss from two perspectives: psychoanalytic and political-social. To be direct: my project in this chapter is a political project, in that at some level I am attempting to undermine the function of the weight loss industry in a vain and possibly fruitful attempt to implement some new order. I am attempting to do this by confronting the weight loss industry with the specific anatomy of its own inevitable failures. Not to demonstrate how these should be avoided, but to demonstrate the structure of the failures in their own right, complete with the pain of loss experienced by the weight-anxious subjects who enact them. Through this demonstration I expose the ethics of the weight-loss industry as it currently stands – so it can be seen not as a set of organisations attempting to promote weight-loss education and/or mechanisms to reduce a reportedly expanding population but as an "Organised Other" (2008), as Yannis Stavrakakis would say, providing an active Symbolic marketplace for the acquisition of a weight-anxious subject's surplus-*jouissance*.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, this chapter should be read in the context of the Master's discourse and particularly as an attempt to allow the Master's voice within my subjectivity to emerge. This provides me with a quandary because as I have theorised in chapter three what underpins the Master's discourse in the position of truth is me as an alienated split subject, and the impossibility of the act of communication I am attempting:

Impossibility

$$S_1 \longrightarrow S_2$$
$$\overline{\$} \;//\; \overline{a}$$
$$M$$

Ironically the product of the master's discourse is the *objet a*, surplus-*jouissance*, so not only am I attempting to show that the current function of the weight loss industry is designed around the acquisition of a subject's surplus-*jouissance*, but through this attempt, by allowing and encouraging my master's voice, I might end up simply providing the weight loss industry with another scrap of surplus-*jouissance* to consume. Thus I believe that I will end up feeling very unsettled by this approach (in fact I am feeling this now) but as I see it the ethics of psychoanalysis demands it.

Coming at the notion of ethics from two very different positions raises an important question, particularly: what is the relationship between psychoanalytic ethics and what we might understand as the political-social ethics of the business practices of the weight loss industry. In effect these two perspectives on ethics are polarised within this chapter; this is because throughout my writing I am attempting to be productive in two quite different ways. Firstly, my thesis is about my own experiences as a fat man who has lost weight in a society obsessed by weight loss. As I see it assuming a psychoanalytic stance on ethics in this chapter allows me a chance to heal, through voicing the change in my Master signifier that has resulted from the project I have undertaken. This is where a Lacanian take on ethics proves its worth, as it focuses on the true desire of the subject (*moi*) and

thus in promoting my Master's discourse I am acting as 'subject-supposed-to-know' at least for me and therefore placing my *objet a* in the position of agent – this is the impossible communicative action of the analyst's discourse:

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \longrightarrow \frac{\cancel{S}}{S_1}$$
$$// $$
$$A$$

So, my theory is that for me encouraging the Master's discourse evokes the analyst, with all of the benefits that entails. In contrast, on another level my thesis is about all subjects (particularly those who identify as men – regardless of their sex) who suffer the tyranny of the Organised Other of the weight-loss industry. At this symbolic level, it is likely that allowing my Master's discourse to author this chapter is not going to be conducive to change, precisely because of the impossibility of communication that characterises the Master's discourse. Other weight-anxious subjects might read this chapter and feel 'preached at' just as they experience from the Organised Other of the weight loss industry – with a different message of course. This presents something of a paradox between these two important ethical positions, as I feel compelled to express my Master's voice both because of and regardless of the consequences. I will elaborate further on this paradox at the end of the chapter.

The first section below outlines how the ethics of the industry of weight-loss can be seen through Lacan's discourse of the university as an industry sector obsessed with the notion of 'healthy weight' as both the Truth and as a marketable good. To do this I use a critical analysis of the ethics of public administration put forward by Michael Harmon (2005) and

elaborated usefully with a Lacanian bent by Thomas Catlaw and Gregory Jordan (2009). I will then consider how a psychoanalytic perspective on ethics changes the lens on the function of the weight-loss industry – to do this I will consider Lacan's take on ethics, the analyst's discourse and the radical reading of ideology as described by the project of Slavoj Zizek. In the final section I will return to Catlaw and Jordan's take on Lacanian ethics in public administration by discussing a relationship I have had throughout my PhD project that in some ways demonstrates how Catlaw and Jordan's "ethics of collaboration" (2009, p. 290) can renovate the experience of weight-loss for a desiring subject.

To reiterate I want to define what I see as the weight-loss industry. For me it is broad and includes any organisation, be that profit-focussed, government, not-for-profit, association, commission and others, that works to promote weight-loss for any reason. All of these organisations claim authority to legitimate their widely disparate activities on the basis of the 'healthy' discourse which has as one of its founding principles the Truth of the 'healthy weight'. In New Zealand these organisations include, but are not limited to: Weight-loss organisations, Gyms and other types of health clubs, Government organisations such as the Ministry of Health and PHOs, associations such as 'Fight the Obesity Epidemic' and the 'Obesity Action Coalition' and the various media institutions that report and reinforce the suppositions of this group. All of these organisations emphasise the general importance of losing weight for a significant proportion of the population via their particular adoption of the 'healthy discourse'.

7.1.   The ethics of the weight-loss industry

As I see it, the ethics of the weight-loss industry operate in two spheres, as do most public administration arenas. I will use Catlaw and Jordan's words here to describe these:

> "ethics in public administration is more or less divided into two realms that we will call "ethics of the Good*s*."… They are: "the ethics of the Sovereign Good," which is, in essence, a principle-based ethics, and "the ethic of the servings of goods," which is a market-based ethic" (Catlaw & Jordan, 2009, p. 291)

In terms of the weight-loss industry I see Catlaw & Jordan's second ethic of the 'servings of goods' as the standard 'market-based' business ethic practiced by organisations promoting weight-loss. The market here is constructed from the demand of the weight-anxious consumer – which is premised by the Sovereign Good – the weight-anxious consumer demands goods that will help them move closer to the Sovereign Good and the industry of weight-anxiety responds accordingly. As I have described earlier in my thesis the weight-loss industry responds with more and more variants of the same phallic *jouissance*, generally complete with different packaging.

The Sovereign Good of the weight-loss industry is based on the principle that there is a correct weight, and if you are not at the correct weight you are fundamentally un-principled, in fact the more you drift from this 'norm' the less principled you become. 'Correct weight' is governed by the measure of the Body Mass Index, complete with variants, which functions, as I argued in chapter six, as a *point-de-capiton* structuring the Symbolic. This allows society to judge those who are not the correct weight on moral grounds as they deem fat people to be un-principled. I argue that this ethical basis is the

reason why New Zealand, for example, has rejected citizenship applications based on Body Mass Index ("`Too fat' to live in New Zealand," 2009). Although the ostensive basis is one of health costs, I believe that we accept this dubious-reasoning precisely because what underlies it is the more profound and sustained ethic of the Sovereign Good 'if this person has a BMI of 55, they must be un-principled and therefore not a good citizen'. This is also evidenced by an exercise I have used with sports studies students – I write two numbers on the board – 22 and 38 then say, 'these are BMI scores, who would you rather have as a house guest?' Their reactions support the ethic of the Sovereign Good as they all would prefer the house guest with a BMI of 22. Stripped of any other information the BMI operates as an effective *point-de-capiton* in this instance and is metonymically related to other signifiers such as moral worth, governed by the authority offered by the ethic of the Sovereign Good.

This Sovereign Good (BMI) forms the basis of the weight-loss industry and reflects the accepted morality of our society; a morality legitimated on the basis of conscious rationality. You can, for example, see how this morality operates in the reaction society has to people who want to undertake lawsuits against weight-loss organisations after they fail to lose weight. The typical reaction is that pursuing such a legal avenue is ridiculous because ultimately the agency lies with the individual's un-principled and immoral choice not to follow the programme offered by the weight-loss organisation. An example of this can be seen in the following comment made by the American website TMZ when a woman sued a weight loss organisation "You know the story ... Creer didn't lose a pound so she's suing" (TMZ.com, 2010, para. 3) This view places the individual's conscious rationality as the prime (and possibly the only) mover in operation within their psychic

life. Along with this, society attributes individual blame to those who 'fail' to lose weight and in concert attributes 'success' to those people who have fought the (Sovereign) 'Good fight' and lost weight. An example of this comes from a bloke ('Eric') I talked with last year about the weight he had lost (about 65kgs). The following conversation occurred after I asked him about the reactions he had received after losing weight:

E: "I think the biggest reaction I have is my own personal reaction, and that is when I see somebody who is grossly overweight… I get quite disgusted…"

A: "right"

E: "…and I think… why are you like that, why have you let yourself get like that?"

A: "mmm"

E: "and… I'm very critical of them, um, in fact I'm disgusted sometimes"

A: "mmm"

E: "ah… it depends on my mood of the day I think more than anything but… um… I feel very intolerant of them" (Research Diary, 29-10-09)

Kristeva's concept of the abject arises for me in relation to the experience of this bloke, and it is the abject that I think propels the 'fat-ist' regime that reinforces the normalisation of body weight as a Sovereign Good in our current society. Kristeva says in relation to abjection:

A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. The abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2)

In the last part of this quote Kristeva specifies the usefulness of those things abject – as things that act as safeguards, preventing the annihilation of (her)self. In effect they are acting on the boundary between the Symbolic and the Real as spacers that allow us to inhabit the safety of the Symbolic and to keep the violence of the Real at bay. Kristeva goes on use the phrase 'primers of my culture', which I see as a reference to the 'objects' that reflect abjection as actors that enable Symbolic reality. For weight anxious individuals like Eric I think that 'fat people' are objects that reflect the abject. For Eric, his loathing and disgust allow him to keep the Real reality of his previously un-principled immoral fat body at arms length from the Symbolic reality of his now normalised principled and moral Good body. Megan Warin has written about the fear of contamination experienced by anorexic subjects, contamination by the abject labelled as 'calories' and 'fat'; she concludes that the fear of fat generally associated with those suffering anorexic symptoms is actually a fear of contamination by the abject, here are her words:

"food refusal and fear of fat amongst those who are considered anorexic has another level of meaning beyond the desire to lose weight. Rather than simply being fattening, the fear associated with saturating fats and miasmatic calories was also related to the dangerous proximity of contamination" (Warin, 2003, p. 88)

There is no denying the similarities to the experiences of Eric, as he (and many others in our society) observe fat people with disgust so the anorexic subjects in Marin's research observe fat food with disgust. The intriguing difference is the tendency of the 'reformed fat' or the 'scared of becoming fat' subject to associate the abject with the totalised body – so rather than assume anorexic-like behaviour and fear contamination from food Eric fears contamination from fat people. Throughout my discussion with him he emphasised his new found control of his own eating and exercise behaviour and his new found circle of normal-sized friends – it is exposure to what he perceives as an un-principled immoral fat Other that most profoundly confronts him with the abject.

I think, for Eric, his commentary contains a metonymic displacement, specifically that when he observes the vision of the fat Other this object as signifier sits contiguously with the signifier of his own fat body, which contains for Eric a traumatic encounter with the Real. Thus in disposing of his fat body he has managed to place a spacer between the trauma of fatness and the Symbolic normality his body now represents for him. When he encounters the body of the fat Other he registers disgust and revulsion because it sits on the boundary and threatens his new found 'normal' existence in the Symbolic.

The emotion of disgust displayed by Eric is something of a typical anxious reaction to the abject that forces a subject into observing that a limit exists to the safety of the Symbolic. Eric's reaction then is typical and efficient and is certainly not one that occurs in isolation; it is shared by many subjects who lose a lot of weight and indeed many 'normal-sized' subjects, who are anxiously scared of the horror of obesity and the movement away from the Sovereign Good that the horror promises to deliver. In fact this reaction to spectacle of the fat person even made it onto the pages of the immensely popular book *The Secret*

(Byrne, 2006). The following passage from the book is quoted by Barbara Ehrenreich in her blog on the Huffington Post website: "If you see people who are overweight, do not observe them, but immediately switch your mind to the picture of you in your perfect body and feel it" (2007, para. 1). This reeks of the emotion of disgust and the contamination potential of the spectacle of the fat person. It also demonstrates how the weight loss industry (clearly Byrne is part of this) plays on the metonymic structure of the anxious weight loss consumer; Byrne's words recognise the contiguous relationship that her readers' signifiers have to the signifier of the fat person she refers to. Her answer could also be written: 'look away from the trauma of the Real people, pretend it does not exist. Instead find sanctuary in the image the Sovereign Good demands of you'. This is more insidious in 'reality' television shows such as *The Biggest Loser* or TV3's *Downsize Me*. Here audiences gain relief from anxiety by watching fat folk being 'rescued' from immorality and un-principality by the guardians of the Sovereign Good. In effect on 'reality' shows like this we see in action something we take to be the ejection of the abject from the body as object – I will pick up on this later in this chapter in relation to imitation surplus *jouissance* and the discourse of capitalism.

I want to turn now away from this primarily Kristevian explanation as to why we are so hard on fat people to look more closely at the flawed ethics of the weight-loss industry via Michael Harmon's analysis of public administration policy. I will return to suture the abject and this coming strand of analysis together in the final section.

Our society, and the weight-loss industry, implies that success or failure to lose weight is fundamentally the 'choice' of the individual. Those 'successful' tend to look at people who they deem are 'too big' and see failure – regardless of that individual's choice of

action (in that the set of large people does not equal the set of people trying to lose weight). This idea of a 'conscious agent' who fronts up to the weight-loss organisation and who fails to lose weight because they allow their emotions to get in the way of reason aligns most closely with the ethics of Immanuel Kant. Michael Harmon calls this the "the common sense view of morality" (2005, p. 243) and goes on to describe it as depicting:

> "the *passions* (in more contemporary terms, emotion and feeling) as a, perhaps *the*, chief barrier to preserving a moral, or at least a stable, social order. Reason or rationality, according to the common-sense view, is what keeps the passions at bay. As products of reason, principles—which is to say, rules and standards for guiding moral conduct—serve *general* interests, while passion and feeling threaten the moral order by leading individuals to act upon purely personal wants and interests" (p. 243)

Thus if a man is instructed to lose weight but 'lets himself down' by giving in to emotional eating, say, our society judges that action and attributes it to a person's failings – where emotion won over reason. Crucially however, we do not accept that this is *beyond the control* of the individual, instead we see it as a lack of *self-control*. The ethics of the weight-loss industry are closely aligned with this "vulgar-Kantianism" (Harmon, 2005, p. 239), which Catlaw & Jordan argue is representative of the general ethics of public administration (2009) as I outlined above. To reiterate, Catlaw & Jordan's perspective on the ethics of public administration and vulgar-Kantianism revolves around the concept of the Sovereign Good, which they describe as:

"…the familiar mode of ethics according to which one acts according to or in line with a principled conception of the Good. We basically can think of the ethic of the Sovereign Good in terms of *values* or the assertion of a superordinate position from which competing claims of the Good can be adjudicated" (Catlaw & Jordan, 2009, p. 297)

At the risk of repeating myself, for me it is easy to see this in operation in the organisation of the weight-loss industry as the superordinate position is one of 'healthy weight', regulated predominately by the normative BMI. The various competing claims of the different parties in the weight-loss industry are adjudicated as Catlaw & Jordan say via the Sovereign Good represented by the BMI. Any claim must show how it can transform a fat person into a normal-sized person defined as weight divided by height squared. The problem with the idea of the Sovereign Good, argue Catlaw & Jordan, is that this "ethic basically assumes that people can be appropriately disciplined to hold the correct value set and so apply the principle of the Sovereign Good appropriately" (2009, p. 300). This has the end point of creating a position for the subject where-by their choice is removed – under a position of Kantianism the only ethical position for a fat person in our society today is one of consciously demanding weight-loss, because that is what the Sovereign Good demands that we demand.

In his seventh seminar, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis,* Lacan begins a critique of Immanuel Kant's ethics that he continues in his text *Kant with Sade* published originally in 1963 and which can be found in the *Ecrits* (Lacan, 2006a). In Kant's text *The Critique of Practical Reason* he presents a scenario in which a man is provided the opportunity to 'bed' a woman that he desires only to then be immediately (in Lacan's terms) "bumped

off" (Lacan, 1992 (1959-60), p. 109). Kant's ethics come to the conclusion that one's desire will be resisted in this circumstance because of the obvious threat to life. Kant presents this thought experiment as a mechanism to prove that when we claim that we are overcome by desire the problem is actually, "that we have chosen to regard the desire as a force beyond our control" (Baron, 1995, p. 189). The Kantian view is that when someone remarks 'I couldn't resist doing…whatever… because I was overcome by desire' what they are really saying is they chose to allow the desire to overcome them. As agent, they are in control.

My argument is that this Kantian perspective attributing control of desire to an individual is consistent with that promoted in the weight-loss industry. Self-control is a key message repeated throughout the industry; by the classical weight-loss programmes emphasising self-control in relation to resisting eating and motivating oneself to exercise the 'correct way' and for the 'correct' amount of time; and by the lobby groups attempting to regulate the advertising and sale of junk food so that people have a better chance of exercising self-control in what they call an 'obesogenic environment'. For this industry, ethics revolves around the agency of the individual. This means that most criticism of the ethics of a weight-loss organisation is also viewed as a criticism of the notion of conscious agency; these invariably stall before they begin. A recent example of this is the psychotherapist and anti-diet industry advocate Susie Orbach's project to sue Weight Watchers for false advertising (ABC News, 2003). The legal analysis in relation to this action by Orbach said that a "lawsuit against a company that tries to help people lose weight through lifestyle changes for which the user is ultimately responsible" (para 10) is unlikely to succeed – precisely because the ethics of the weight loss industry define the

conscious 'user' as 'ultimately responsible' for their own behaviour and in charge of their desire (whether they choose to resist or not).

The root-problem of this Kantian view of ethics followed by the weight-loss industry is the perspective that a weight-anxious subject is *in charge of their desire*. This is reflected in the position of desire within the discourse of the university – that is the discursive structure that attempts to organise 'knowledge' generally, including knowledge circulating as truth in the weight-loss industry. What the weight-loss industry does is produce a flurry of communication along an impossible communicative route:

Impossibility

Knowledges $\longrightarrow$ the cause of desire (Lacan's *objet a*)

Thus the industry generates 'knowledges' (many different kinds) which they aim towards the *objet a* (the cause of desire) in the position of Other. This is, unfortunately, impossible because the true object of a subject's desire is that what eludes signification. Therefore the product of this impossible discourse is "an ever-increased division of the subject: the more knowledge one uses to reach for the object, the more one becomes divided between signifiers, and the further one gets away from home, that is from the true cause of desire" (Verhaeghe, 1995, p. 12). Thus for all of those working to understand and provide a 'cure' for the 'obesity epidemic' – such as the nutritionists and epidemiologists generating knowledges as to the cause of a 'real' epidemic or slimming organisations providing 'solutions' for weight-anxious subjects, the result of their endeavours within the university discourse is *not* a better understanding of 'reality' or a useful representation of the object of desire but simply a further division of the subject – that is both the fat

anxious subject and themselves as university researcher – in this way the university discourse is structurally doomed to fail in its task to satisfy desire.

This "failure of the university discourse" (Nobus & Quinn, 2005, p. 135) can be felt within the New Zealand government's actions towards those classed as overweight or obese (by BMI). Nobus and Quinn describe how modern governments produce "students of all of their citizens, without exception" who are expected also to "speak product and thus intellectualize their alienation" (p. 135). For instance, the 2005-2008 Labour government introduced 'HEHA' (Healthy Eating, Healthy Action) and 'Push Play'; both policies spoke with substantial underpinning evidenced-based 'bodies of knowledge' but managed to produce, as Nobus and Quinn describe above, citizens who now 'speak those products' and use them to 'intellectualise their alienation'. Hence we get a common view in society that corresponds to the university discourse associated with being overweight and obese, which is immense amounts of 'knowledge' produced, reiterated, re-formed and re-packaged by the government's loyal students, citizens of our society. Crucially though, we do not see a satisfaction of desire, or indeed a reduction in body weight! This is very typical of the action of the university's discourse, it is highly generative in terms of 'knowledge' about how to lose weight but produces failed consequences. Discourse from the university will never result in a reduction in body weight *and* anxiety associated with weight, because it does not focus on the cause of desire.

The ethical question that the university's discourse raises for me is its specific relationship to the desire of the subject. The university's discourse directly addresses the cause of desire as the 'Other' in the structure of the discourse and is fuelled by its own master signifier in the position of truth (S_1). This master signifier then drives the agent (which

can be seen as the knowledge-production-machine) to produce a steady stream of knowledges that it (the master) decides are what the subject desires, none of which actually place the subject's desire in the place of agent. The type of desires the master seems to believe are held by weight loss consumers equals uncannily the moral of Catlaw & Jordan's Sovereign Good. These are morals held by the big Other in relation to body weight, in particular they include the desire to have a slim embodiment, the desire to resist gluttony, the desire to have a BMI in the 'healthy weight range', the desire to wear nice fashionable clothes and so on. But all of this is just a reflection of the Symbolic and means that the weight-loss industry, operating as it does under the discourse of the university, is structurally determined to be ignorant of the Real desire of its subject – but not the kind of ignorant that psychoanalysis considers ethical. For this, we must turn to the discourse of analysis and Lacan's take on ethics, which is neatly described by Catlaw and Jordan:

> With desire as its focus, Lacanian psychoanalysis does not aspire to an ethical practice concerned with moral principles or providing goods or services per se; it does not aim "to do good" in these traditional senses. Indeed it opposes such "do-good" ethics. Rather it suggests collaboration between subjects in the project of bearing their desire. That is, it is concerned with orienting the subject toward the truth of her being and disentangling the subject's desire from externally imposed demands, values, wants, or ideals not in order that we can get what we really want but to reveal the singular way in which we will never get it. (Catlaw & Jordan, 2009, p. 292)

The de-veiling of a subject's desire is what occurs during the process of psychoanalysis, through the action of the discourse of analysis:

Impossibility

The cause of desire (*objet a*) $\longrightarrow$ The (split) subject

From their position as *objet a*, the cause of desire, an analyst interprets the subject's speech, their networks of signification – metaphoric substitutions and metonymic slippages – to identify the "irreducible, traumatic, non-meaning" (Lacan, 1998 (1964-65), p. 251) signifier the subject is made of at their core. Thus, the question Lacan would ask of any interpretation of myself or any other weight-anxious subject is: to what signifier am I (are we) "as a subject, subjected" (p. 251)? This process forms the crux of the ethics of psychoanalysis because it places the *objet a*, the cause of desire, as the agent of discourse.

Underpinning the agent in the analyst's discourse is S_2, or knowledge, in the form of what the analyst knows about the situation. But this knowledge is frustrating for the analyst because it is structurally forced into a position *under the bar*. For Paul Verhaeghe at least, this means that the analyst necessarily takes the position of "*Docta Ignorantia*" or 'learned ignorance' (1995, p. 13). This is what I mean when I say the type of ignorance that psychoanalysis considers ethical. This 'learned ignorance' is the lynch-pin of the practice of psychoanalysis, and for me should inform the practice of the weight-loss industry, as it forces the analyst (read: therapist, counsellor, personal trainer) to put aside their 'knowledge of the subject' and focus instead on working collaboratively to bear their subject's desire, regardless of weight lost or not. I realise that this particular conclusion,

coming as it does from me, is somewhat ironic given that right now, I am speaking from the position of the master. I will discuss this in more detail at the end of the chapter.

For now I want to return to the problem of the ethics of the weight-loss industry as it stands, to 'flesh out' the ramifications of the growing intensity of demand to be a 'healthy weight,' and to think about why a man who has lost such a large amount of weight feels he can demonstrate a potent reaction to others he decides have not 'fought the good fight'.

7.2.   So is promoting weight-loss a fundamentally fascist undertaking?

Despite the psychological suffering and struggles of a weight loss anxious subject, it is questionable to draw parallels between the weight loss industry and fascist regimes. Having said this I do think there is something that we can learn about the industry of weight-loss via Slavoj Zizek's analysis of fascism in the context of Lacanian ethics, Here is a quote from Zizek's text *The Sublime Object of Ideology*:

> "[t]he Fascist ideology is based on a purely formal imperative: Obey, because you must! In other words, renounce enjoyment, sacrifice yourself and do not ask about the meaning of it – the value of the sacrifice lies in its very meaninglessness; true sacrifice is for its own end; you must find positive fulfilment in the sacrifice itself, not in its instrumental value: it is this renunciation, this giving up of enjoyment itself, which produces a certain surplus-enjoyment" (1989, p. 82)

He goes on to say that the obscenity that lies at the heart of the fascist regime is that it "perceives directly the ideological form as its own end, as an end in itself" (p. 82). I see this operation in action within the institutions that promote weight-loss in our current capitalist society – with the proviso that their imperative to obey without question is

masked by the powerful legitimating force offered by the discourse of the University – as it appropriates scientific knowledge. Through this appropriation of science, the weight-loss industry quotes 'facts and figures' that support their imperative, and ignore or attempt to discredit dissenting views (of which there are many). But, putting this obsessive action of the discourse of the University (knowledge production, followed by more knowledge production) aside, underlying the 'rationality reasoning' for attempting weight loss is a fundamental meaninglessness of the enterprise. The totalitarian fascists tend to be a little more direct with their approach, as Zizek describes "… remember Mussolini's famous answer to the question 'How do the Fascists justify their claim to rule Italy? What is their programme?': 'Our programme is very simple: We want to rule Italy'" (p. 82). Those that promote weight loss might claim something similar: 'Our programme is very simple; we want people to lose weight'. This stands regardless of the ethics of the imperative and the impact on the individual subject at the level of desire. It is a fundamentally meaningless programme – weight-loss for the sake of losing weight is what underwrites this industry and in my view the surplus-enjoyment that Zizek talks about is also what underwrites the tolerated fat-ist regime of the weight-loss industry, as people converted feel comfortable expressing incredibly polarising views such as Eric did in my interview:

"…when I see somebody who is grossly overweight… I get quite disgusted… I am very critical of them… I feel very intolerant of them…"

But why is the weight-loss industry's message so popular? Here I think the answer lies in Zizek's reference to surplus-enjoyment, Marx's surplus-value and the modern transmission from the fascist discourse of the Master to the capitalist enterprise of weight-loss under the veil of the discourse of the university.

Forgive my oversimplification of Marxist theory in relation to surplus-value but the basics of the capitalist economy involve the reinvestment of the surplus-value of the worker in the development of the production-consumption machinations of the organisation. Put simply the capitalist puts the worker's surplus-value to work to create more production which leads to more consumption, the net result being the accumulation of wealth for the capitalist. I certainly do not want to offer a political critique of the capitalist economy on the basis of some moral or ethical ground; instead I want to consider how Lacan used Marx's concept when thinking about the results of the discourse of capitalism as a social relationship. In 1972 Lacan said, and I am quoting here from Anthropologists' Biehl and Moran-Thomas, that "capitalism was now the new discourse of the master" (2009, p. 271) and further, following Alenka Zupančič, we can see that the discourse of the university, as a proxy for the Master, is the "predominant social bond that we live in today." Zupančič continues by demonstrating a "fundamental affinity between the university discourse and the capitalist economy" (2006, p. 168). What the discourse of the university does that is different from the old discourse of the Master (here I am referring to the traditional Monarchies, master-slave relationships and totalitarian regimes) is the re-investment of a subject's surplus-enjoyment.

The Zizekian perspective is that in a Fascist regime, for example, a subject gains something peculiar out of the subjection they experience at the hands of a meaningless enterprise – a certain surplus enjoyment or what Lacan calls surplus *jouissance* – which implies pleasure *and* pain. It is this surplus that affords the regime the power to control its subjects, as they want to experience it even in its fleeting nature as it is accumulated by the regime (as wealth, power or perhaps, fat). Alenka Zupančič's perspective extends this

analysis by considering what happens to the surplus-enjoyment under the watch of the university. Rather than an accumulation in the coffers of the Monarch or the armies of the dictator, the university puts surplus enjoyment back to work in the production of knowledge, which we know immediately attempts to address the cause of the subject's desire and thus creates in the subject an increasingly suffocating (this is Zupančič's term) imperative to enjoy, consume, enjoy, consume ad infinitum. This Surplus enjoyment, under the university, then takes on a different façade, which Lacan calls an imitation surplus enjoyment that at a productive level simply frustrates desire, probing at the wound that is the split in the subject. This is the ethical problem I have with promoting weight-loss for the sake of losing weight. I now want to look more closely at this structural shift from the Master to the University in relation to hyper-capitalism in the weight loss industry and the associated shift from surplus-*jouissance* to imitation surplus-*jouissance*.

Zupančič talks about things in our current society such as "fat-free pork roasts and coffee without caffeine" as comprising practical examples of imitation surplus *jouissance,* these she calls "enjoyment without enjoyment" (2006, p. 172). The danger she sees in the offering of these types of imitation surplus *jouissance* is the fact that they are "deprived of the very impossibility that structures the enjoyment and gives it its form". Specifically they do not have as one of their constitutive elements the danger that must be intrinsic to any enjoyment for it to fulfill its place as "the inherent limit of pleasure" (p. 172). This 'danger' (which Zupančič ties to Freud's death drive) is what gives enjoyment its unique exhilarating character. Possibly the most obvious example of this is extreme sports pursuits, tied as they are to the possibility of death or serious bodily injury; they provide the subject with a true source of surplus *jouissance* which toys with, and therefore

reinforces, but crucially *does not frustrate* desire as imitation surplus *jouissance* does in the discourse of capitalism.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the image promoted on 'reality' TV shows such as *The Biggest Loser*. Specifically I said that the action-image of representatives of the Sovereign Good 'rescuing' fat people was anxiety relieving for the weight anxious as it appears like the expulsion of the abject from the body as object. However, I think that this is pleasurable in the same way that Zupančič argues a de-café coffee or fat-free roast is, as imitation surplus *jouissance.* In watching the constructed and artificial ejection of the abject from these images we gain the semblance of surplus *jouissance* but it simply frustrates our desire and we return for more: *The Biggest Loser* is currently in its 10th season in the U.S. and many other countries have variants.

Renata Salecl goes a step further by referring to the discourse of capitalism in our current times as "hyper-capitalism" (2004, p. 49), so called because of the ever increasing variety of products, services and regimes that erupt from the production – consumption machinations of capitalism. For me the weight-loss industry is an excellent example of this hyper-capitalism, as it is indeed characterised by an ever-increasing variety of products, services and regimes. These indicate that there must be a way I can get exactly what I want – that is not just a way to lose weight, but a way to lose weight, and apprehend the form my Imaginary assumes the super-ego wants me to be. Salecl says in relation to this "the more choices there are, the more it appears possible to achieve an *ideal* result in every case" (Salecl, 2004, p. 54, my emphasis). Thus, expanding choice in consumer behaviour (such as weight-loss products, methods and indeed viewing experiences) brings me ever closer to an encounter with the real lack of lack that

characterises my perception of my own body as inadequate. As we know from chapter five anxiety results in this void between my desire and the phallic-*jouissance* I experience when trying to shed the pounds. However, this is not the end of the deal – because this phallic *jouissance* that I talked at length about in chapter five, under the productive nature of the discourse of the University and Salecl's hyper-capitalism, is in fact just an imitation of true surplus *jouissance*. Importantly the productive step that follows in the discourse of capitalism is that this imitation surplus *jouissance* is subsequently reinvested or put back to work by the weight loss industry in the production of a slightly more anxious and thus slightly more valuable consumer.

To summarise, the totalitarian regime that is the weight loss industry, masked by the discourse of university, continuously serves the goods (products and services) based on the Sovereign Good that promise their weight anxious subjects what appears to be surplus *jouissance.* What is experienced by the subject however bears only a semblance to surplus *jouissance*, it is an imitation. This experience is captured by the Organised Other of the weight loss industry and reinvested to create more production to serve the growing demand – demand created by the remnant that remains – the slightly more weight anxious and therefore slightly more valuable subject.

What is left to describe is how the abject functions here in support of this mode of operation. It is I think actually a rather benign explanation: The fat body has come to represent, for the weight-anxious amongst us, a physical manifestation of what Kristeva calls the abject. This abject is viewed with disgust, horror and contempt. The Organised Other of the weight loss industry capitalises on the relationship the weight anxious has with the abject fat body by selling things that 'demonstrate' how the abject can be

banished, expelled from one's physical embodiment. This is alluring to us weight anxious folk as it allows us to temporarily re-insert the plug that prevents the trauma of the Real disrupting the comfort of the Symbolic. However the weight loss industry's 'demonstration' is only a semblance of the ejection of the abject – it imitates it – and the phallic *jouissance* experienced by the consumer when consuming the weight loss industry's products and services is only an imitation of surplus *jouissance* which frustrates desire and creates the ideal consumer – more anxious and more valuable.

One thing that I have struggled with in this chapter and the thesis generally is that I come across as an anti-obesity-campaigner. A moralist who believes that fat folk have a right to be fat and that society must not discriminate against them, as that is not politically correct. Certainly the comments regarding fat-ism I make above have a moralistic tenor to their claims. With regard to this struggle I want to engage briefly with the later Žižek; in his recent text *Living in the End Times* (2010) Žižek includes the following passage:

> As every close observer of the deadlocks arising from political correctness knows, the separation of legal justice from moral Goodness – which should be relativized and historicized – ends up in an oppressive moralism brimming with resentment. Without any "organic" social substance grounding the standards of what Orwell approvingly referred to as "common decency" (all such standards having been dismissed as subordinating individual freedoms to proto-Fascist social forms), the minimalist program of laws intended simply to prevent individuals from encroaching upon one another (annoying or "harassing" each other) turns into an explosion of legal and moral rules, an endless process (a "spurious infinity" in Hegel's sense) of legalization and moralization, known as "the fight against all

forms of discrimination." If there are no shared mores in place to influence the law, only the basic fact of subjects "harassing" other subjects, who – in the absence of such mores – is to decide what counts as "harassment"? In France, there are associations for obese people demanding that all public campaigns against obesity and in favour of healthy eating habits be stopped, since they damage the self-esteem of obese persons… The problem here is the obvious arbitrariness of the ever-new rules… it is thus for necessary structural reasons that the "fight against discrimination" is an endless process which interminably postpones its final point: namely a society freed of all moral prejudices which as Michéa puts it, "would be on this very account *a society condemned to see crimes everywhere*" (2010, pp. 38-39, emphasis in original)

Žižek's point is well made here – the inclusion of every single possible item of discrimination makes for a troubling future. A full examination of this issue is beyond the scope of my thesis – but it certainly does open the door to new avenues to think about what it means to discriminate against, well… anything! (including fat).

In the following section my intention is to step away from the damnation of the weight loss industry and instead to think about what an alternative might be, by asking the question – what is an ethics of unconscious desire?

7.3. What is an ethics of unconscious desire?

The conscious articulated desire to lose weight repeated like a mantra by more than 80% of our population is a symbolic representation of their desire – created by the moralistic ethic of the weight-loss industry's "vulgar Kantianism"; crucially it is not their, or my,

Real unconscious desire, indeed 'knowing' that I need to lose weight instead masks my true desire, it neatly skirts around it. So what? My problem is the dependence I see (and experience myself) on the Organised Other that is the weight loss industry. On this dependence, Yannis Stavrakakis states:

> "Our dependence on the organized Other is not reproduced merely at the level of knowledge and conscious consent, and thus a shift in consciousness through knowledge transmission is not enough to effect change. What is much more important is the formal (symbolic) structure of power relations that social ordering presupposes. The subject very often prefers not to realize the performative function of the symbolic command — the fact that what promises to deal with subjective lack is what reproduces this lack perpetuating the subject's desire for subjection. Most crucially, the reproduction of this formal structure relies on a libidinal, affective support that binds subjects to the conditions of their symbolic subordination. What makes the lack in the Other 'invisible' — and thus sustains the credibility of the organized Other — is a fantasmatic dialectic manipulating our relation to a lost/impossible enjoyment" (Stavrakakis, 2008, p. 1053)

I have said in the past that perhaps the only ethical weight-loss industry organisation is the psychotherapist (my analyst colleagues would here say a Lacanian psychoanalyst!). I'm not so sure on this point. For instance I do like how Catlaw and Jordan talk of working collaboratively to "bear desire". They do this when thinking particularly in terms of public administration; however, I see this action of the analyst's discourse operating in a wide variety of life situations. Following from Catlaw and Jordan's notion of working collaboratively to 'bear desire,' I want to discuss a relationship that I have had during the

course of my PhD studies where I see this notion in operation. This is a relationship I have had with a bloke who has been a significant contributor to my autoethnographic data, both as a participant within one of my weight-loss groups but also as someone with whom I have shared many of my experiences over the past three years. I met Phil very early on in my project, less than a month after I began studying. Here is a diary entry I wrote about Phil's experiences in June 2008:

The Heaviest Twins in the World!

In my course a couple of weeks ago I showed my guys a short piece I had written about my early family life and talked a little about how I thought it had impacted on my life and specifically on me gaining weight during my late teenage years and into my early twenties. I showed them this because I wanted them to think a bit about how their family life might have 'performed' them into their current bodies. This was a pretty emotional session for us blokes – it was mainly emotional for me because it is rare that I actually share these psychosocial moments with other men and I think it was emotional for them because they got to see some of my inner turmoil.

Last night we met for the ninth time, when I had finished talking about the calorific terrors of butter chicken and other Indian delicacies Phil spoke up and said something like "I have been thinking about your story the other week, and I think I can see something that has had this kind of impact on me and my brother". I asked what impact and he told a brief story about being an identical twin – and

that when he was born he and his brother made headlines by being the heaviest twins born in the World, both of them weighing in at over 9lbs.

Despite the fact that neither Phil nor his twin brother was spectacularly large (both my normal sized brother and I were over 10lbs for instance), Phil feels that this social relation has had a serious impact on how he and his brother relate to food and weight. He also talked about looking into the Guinness book of records in the 1980s at the World's heaviest adult twins – thinking that he and his brother might be able to make headlines again!

Phil and his brother have clearly managed to form an identity and position themselves (and be positioned) as big blokes based on birth weight even though it seems this is inaccurate information. Babies born between 9 and 10lbs are on the large size, with the average being around 8lbs but they are still within the 'normal' range. The astounding bit was that Phil's mum managed to grow two 9lb babies in her womb at the same time. When taken as individual babies there is nothing interesting about them – what has happened is a slight deflection of signification from two slightly larger than average babies in one normal womb to a set of signifiers that say "Phil and his twin brother are just big blokes – they have always been this way". To me this shows the power of the slippery chains of signification we negotiate when constructing a meaningful existence.

What is interesting is that I have never used my large baby status (I was 10lbs 12ounces) because my older brother was 2 ounces heavier than me, and has never struggled with weight issues, either in reality or psychologically. In my family

birth weight was not a good excuse for explaining adult weight (Research Diary, HT 17-6-2008).

Phil and I both struggle with our sense of our bodies; we met under these circumstances and most of the time our discussions are held while one or other of us is wearing out a piece of cardiovascular exercise equipment at our gym. What Phil has done for me over the last three years is demonstrate how effectively someone can live happily with a high level of weight anxiety. Phil has talked with me on many occasions about his attempts to lose weight – through diets, exercise plans and others – every time ending up still feeling fat and despondent. Alongside these experiences his life with his wife and children and his business interests continues. The weight anxiety is just one of the pieces of his life – coded I think (as I theorised in the diary entry above) in his early ways of representing his own body – as a big baby, and a big man. It is the Organised Other of the weight loss industry that has taken this set of signifiers and informed Phil that they are not the right ones – and specifically that he is wrong to be big.

In our early relationship Phil was just one of a number of blokes who had responded to an advertisement I had written in an attempt to recruit fat blokes into a weight loss programme run by me at our local gym. I thought that Phil was a great target for my weight loss machinations; he was about 40kgs above the top of the healthy weight scale (according to BMI) and seemed to be exhibiting all of the touted 'fat people' problems – he didn't eat breakfast, ate lots of takeaways, drank a fair bit and was basically anti-exercise. A personal trainer's dream! I set about beating him and the other blokes over the head with the Sovereign Good (altered by me to what I considered a more appealing 'Andrew' version) and began serving the goods by promoting healthy food, a reasonable

exercise programme and analysing their diets in an attempt to install change in their lives. Despite my efforts no-one achieved any lasting change, and their anxiety appeared to grow almost as quickly as my own did. Ethically I was partaking in this sport of vulgar-Kantianism. The result is predictable. That is until Phil and I stopped talking about weight loss and started talking about our lives. For me as subject, this has been one of the most healing experiences – perhaps we began collaborating to bear each other's desire?

Catlaw and Jordan's idea is that there can be a different way of theorising ethics in public administration – an ethics of collaboration based on the psychoanalytic principles of Lacan. They say that "collaboration can be understood as making space for the desire of the subject. It is most basically concerned with *creation* or clearing away, which is why it stands apart from the ethics of the two Goods both of which operate through a kind of installation" and go on to describe the ethics of collaboration as involving a type of violence "a kind of *tearing* away from the Goods and its economy of judgment" (2009, p. 305, emphasis in original). This they say has the productive effect of "creating space to come together" thus in this theory "collaboration is, first, a coming undone. It does not proceed from the security of the Good but is made possible by the indeterminacy of desire, the open contingency of being-with" (2009, p. 306)

This ethic of collaboration that Catlaw and Jordan describe resonates with my experiences with Phil. Our relationship had the start point in the pleasure of failure, which is acceptance of the fact that I could not install change in him – that is I could not make him choose to lose weight. This uncomfortable, yet oddly pleasurable experience I think created space, or cleared away the debris of the Sovereign Good that governs the weight loss industry to make available something else, particularly to make space for the desire

of the subject, *moi*. In their concluding remarks, Catlaw and Jordan make the following comment that I think captures the change in ethical direction I have experienced with Phil: "To bear one's desire, there must be a willingness to let go one's identity and symbolic attachments, to recognize the kind of common suffering endemic to modern human consciousness, and to collaborate with the other in creating spaces that neither seek the Good nor pursue the goods" (2009, p. 307). In particular our relationship experienced a transition from me in the position of 'subject-supposed-to-know' to 'just-another-weight-anxious-subject'. For me this required letting go of my symbolic attachment to the notion that I was legitimated in my attempts to convey the message of the Sovereign Good and serve the goods of the weight loss industry. This was not a conscious choice of mine, rather Phil's unconscious for some reason had the ability to stare (and steer) through the barrage of knowledge from the discourse of the University and to hystericize my discourse; this had the effect of plunging me back into a search for my desire, rather than just demanding that I attempt once again to serve the goods. The transition here is from a demand, which emulates the demand required by the Organised Other of the weight loss industry, to desire.

I decided it would be interesting and cathartic to present the above analysis to Phil (and another of my male recruits) and get his perspective, I am not sure what I expected to receive – perhaps I hoped that Phil would say "yep you certainly helped me bear my desire, thanks mate" – his response was less dramatic. Here are his words:

> "I must admit when I first read your story I didn't get it, but I have read it 3 times and also thought about it from a readers point of view and not from someone who was involved in the story and started to understand the point you were making.

Here's my understanding of what you were saying, you have sucessfully achieved your weight loss goal, you wanted to help others with their weight issues, (a noble and rewarding goal), but along the way realised that doing it yourself and teaching others how to do it were two different things. I think this explains what you have written means to me.

Mate, everything happens for a reason and though the reason isn't always obvious it will be in time. Weight loss is a personal thing and the want and desire have to be there. It's easy to go to a meeting and expect things to change without doing the hard yards but we all know that never happens. We can blame everything and everybody for our weight issues and look for the quick fix but until we address the responsibility issue and have the burning desire to change it will always be easier to grab a burger and fries than to make the necessary lifestyle changes for a healthy body weight. Giving up smoking was much easier than weight loss"

I think it must be obvious from this response that at least at a conscious level Phil is still firmly imbued with his weight-loss ambitions. He seems to have interpreted my story in quite a different way than I imagined he might. This has the potential to be illuminating in the sense that my imaginary has been successful in constructing a conspirator out of Phil, someone whom I felt a certain kinship with, someone whom I saw as a fellow traveller in my journey away from suffering the demand of the organised other, the weight-loss industry, to shed the fat. I look a little more closely at this in the final part of chapter eight.

Although I have not presented a new formula for what the weight loss industry might look like operating with the ethics of collaboration as a guide above, it does show how the failures that will inevitably result from the machinations of the weight loss industry can function as a start point for desiring weight anxious subjects. By resisting the demand imperative governed by the Sovereign Good (BMI) and rejecting the goods of the weight-loss industry perhaps the debris can be cleared away to make room for the desire of the subject. I am sure we all would find something different in that clearing.

In the following final section, I want to discuss the paradox of the master's discourse in a little more detail.

7.4.   Last words: The paradox of the Master

Earlier in the chapter, I said that the ethics of psychoanalysis demanded that I assume the voice of the Master within my subjectivity when confronting the ethics of the weight loss industry. The paradox of this approach lies in the product of the Master's discourse – surplus *jouissance*, but particularly if the *jouissance* I gain in the process of writing this chapter turns out to be a semblance of surplus *jouissance* for me – if this is the case the discourse of capitalism might gain value via the frustration of desire and the fulfillment of their demand. It is not my desire that is frustrated by this process; ironically, it might be other weight anxious subjects. As they search for the goods that will allow them to assume a less anxious position vis-à-vis the Sovereign Good they might read my words as 'a good' of the weight loss industry and use them in an attempt to fulfill the demand required by the Organised Other of the weight loss industry. Thus by actively utilising the positive voice of 'Andrew the Master' within this chapter I may simply be providing

another scrap of imitation surplus *jouissance* for the expansive and inclusive weight loss industry.

Further to the above point, my own attempts could certainly be read through Lacan's understanding of the process of resistance and revolution and the call for social change. On this, Russell Grigg states:

> "His contemporary criticism of the French student revolution, in which he referred to the *mois,* egos/months, of May, and his accusation that they were in search of a master whom, moreover, they would no doubt find, is a prima facie indication that all revolt acts within and confirms the law whose claims it thinks it is breaking" (Grigg, 2009, pp. 125-126)

Possibly this means that the change of ethic I am calling for in the weight loss industry can only be phrased within the structure of the industry that already exists. In other words, despite my attempts to suggest an ethic based on collaboratively bearing one's desire perhaps this is simply an elaborate mechanism to facilitate my search for another master to tell me how much I should weigh?

On this rather concerning note I make the transition away from data and discussion to reflections and implications in the final chapter of the thesis.

8. Reflections

In this final chapter, I am going to follow the structure I outlined in chapter two, in that I am going to conclude and reflect in accordance with the four discourses. The order of these discourses matters in this chapter as my intent is to work towards those that Lacan considered to be more generative in terms of change in the Real, being the hysteric and analyst.

I will start with the Master and present the picture that my new master signifier has developed over the course of the PhD. This is a positive voice, imbued with the aura of 'the truth' stating how I now 'know' things to be, both in terms of the function of the weight loss industry and the function of my unconscious. This will appear most closely aligned with what one might expect of a traditional conclusions section. I look to the (conscious) purpose of the research; examine the research questions and compare these to the results to identify what the contributions of the thesis are to the target (the wider weight-loss industry), the patient (me and all other weight anxious subjects) and academia generally. However the function of the Master's discourse will produce the *objet a*, this is structurally determined:

$$\frac{S_1}{\$} \xrightarrow{} \mathbin{/\!/} \frac{S_2}{a}$$
$$M$$

This finishing point is not good enough for a Lacanian thesis as leaving this as the only voice to remain would repress the other, my unconscious. Therefore my aim following

this first section is to move through the other three discourses and finish by reversing the order of the Master and placing (or attempting to) the *objet a* in the position of agent, as in the analyst's discourse. To get to this position I need to rotate the four elements in an anti-clockwise fashion. The first rotation produces the discourse of the University. Here my intention is to consider how the discourse of the university can be considered separately from the discourse of the master. Importantly in this section, I aim to critically consider the role of the thesis in the university as a device for (re)producing 'knowledge'. In the third section, my goal is to rotate the positions one step further to place the barred subject in the position of speaking agent:

$$\frac{\cancel{S}}{a} \xrightarrow{} \mathbin{/\!/} \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$
$$H$$

This subject will specifically address the Master signifier I detail in the first section below. It involves an unraveling of the Master's revelry by revealing my hysteric to once again ask the question of the master: Why am I still so anxious about my weight? When will I be fixed?

In the fourth and final section I will attempt to place the *objet a*, the desire of *moi,* in the speaking position. Here I want to place my produced thesis under the lens of the analyst, to reflect on where my desire is in relation to the topic. This is a very difficult finishing point, probably an impossible one, but through the process I hope to open the door to future change.

8.1.   Mastering weight-loss

Lucy Aphramor in her 2005 paper and more recently in an article in the Guardian (Aphramor, 9 May, 2009) states that there is no tried and tested means to sustainably lose weight, so instead people should aim to be healthy at whatever weight they find themselves. This 'health at every size' movement has been lurking in the opposition ranks alongside the 'fat acceptance' movement throughout the rise of the anti-obesity campaign that has invaded the western (and increasingly eastern) world in the last two decades. These movements are decisively silenced by the overwhelming legitimating force of the WHO and others in the scientific community who scaremonger amongst the community of weight anxious consumers. I am a member of this community and have been since at least 1991. After 15 years of ear-bashing they finally scared/scarred me enough for action and in 2006 I relinquished the battle and (depending on your perspective) began to fight the good fight against the evil and disgusting fat that was ruining my potential to be a proper thin person. It certainly is true that I have lost a significant amount of body weight (the amount fluctuates – shock!). Unfortunately this weight loss has not bought a great deal of relief – aside from the jubilation at watching the measure on the scales diminish and the ability to be beaten soundly at running events by a slightly smaller group of lighter, faster runners. I was still (and still am) obsessed with weight and weight-loss activities. It turns out the bastards sold me a lemon. Like many people who have purchased a lemon-flavoured lie I undertook a mission (mine in the form of a PhD thesis) to expose the cowboys (who in the weight-loss industry are almost uniformly disguised as skinny white female nutritionists/dieticians).

This mission changed over time, and this can be seen in my (r)evolving research question. In the remainder of this section my plan is to look back at this research question, pull it apart, see how I have answered it and then put it back together to summarise the contribution my thesis makes.

At the beginning of the project, my intention was to examine the inherent contradictions and falsities put forward by the greater weight-loss industry when they explain what fat blokes needed to do in order to lose weight. I articulated this using the following research question: *How does the form and function of the wider weight-loss industry work to position men for whom weight is an issue?* I initially tackled this by launching into the psychoanalysis of the weight-loss subject. In chapter five using theory that Lacan developed over his career and published in the inspired Seminar XX *Encore* (Lacan, 1998 (1972-73)) I set about analysing my own experiences to develop a theory of anxiety, desire and phallic *jouissance* to explain the traumatised psyche of the anxious weight-loss subject. This allowed me to conclude that those who suffer with weight anxiety are in fact, in psychoanalytic terms, best categorised as suffering Lacan's masculine structure. I said 'My analysis, therefore, implicates a masculine structure as underpinning the weight-anxious consumer. If this is so, what is interesting is why so many of those who identify as biologically female are caught up in the anxious inter-play with the organized Other of the weight loss industry'.

By reaching this rather perplexing conclusion, I positioned gender at the root of my enquiry moving forward. In framing my study, I had tried to focus the topic of my research on men, and I had involved only men when gathering data – both in the interview process and when running weight-loss classes. The only direct experience I had with

women trying to lose weight (aside from my Mother and other women/girls in my family) prior to undertaking my PhD was being asked by a personal trainer to talk to a group of her clients, most of whom were women. I had a really tough time explaining my perspective to them, to explain in my now Lacan-informed language, they seemed intent on 'bartering' as I attempted to sell them the goods of the weight-loss industry in exchange for their surplus *jouissance.* They offered logic to explain their attempts (and failures) – I now see this was the logic of the phallus, as they attempted to negotiate their desire and anxiety with regard to their phallic *jouissance*. This was quite different to many of the men I had been involved with, who were often less anxious and instead acted as good capitalist consumers, by accepting my teachings as 'truth'. However as my project progressed it became clear to me that some men 'for whom weight was an issue' were more intent on 'bartering' like the ladies. This led me to become suspicious that the gender on the surface of these blokes (and me) was not the entire story. Therefore, in chapter 6 I set out to answer a few different, but related research questions: *Am I a man?* and *How come so many biological women are caught in a competitive masculine enterprise like weight-loss* and then finally *What does it mean to be biologically male but involved in the (primarily) female sport of competitive weight-loss?* I started chapter 6 in traditional auto-ethnographic style by placing my own gender under the microscope, and concluded that the answer to the first was yes and no. Yes, I am a biological man, but no – it is equally likely that aspects of my 'self' are more affiliated with female struggles, certainly in relation to my issues with weight. This does not mean that men with weight issues are located on the feminine side of Lacan's formulae of sexuality; it means that many of them are 'male hysterics' and affiliate more with women's issues with weight.

The change in signifier here from biological to psychoanalytic, from women to feminine, is the key point, and a key contribution of my thesis: By focussing on biological gender (either physically apparent or indeed consciously claimed) we ignore the unconscious of the subject. It is entirely likely that all human subjects are both masculine and feminine (in Lacanian terminology) and this is an essential part of their subjectivity. When studying people we miss this in favour of the obvious characteristics, usually penis or lack there-of. I want to park this generalised organ fascination and theorise instead as Collette Soler does so provocatively (Soler, 2006) where a subject resides in relation to Lacan's formulae of sexuation. In relation to the study of organisations, we should also apply Lacan's sophisticated analysis of sexuality. Instead of gayly critiquing hegemonic classications of military or police industries as 'a man's world' or the industry of teaching or nursing as 'a women's profession' we should think more about the subjects constructing these industries. I have demonstrated convincingly in this thesis that the subjects who construct the weight-loss industry are suffering under Lacan's masculine structure, however they are mostly biological women (except for a few of us unfortunate girly-fat-bokes!). This avenue of research could be applied to any organisation or industry.

The main contribution of chapter seven is in relation to the effect of the discourse of capitalism and the subsequent movement from surplus *jouissance* to imitation surplus *jouissance*. This subtle shift is growing in intensity in our consumer society, no longer are we satisfied as enslaved people under a hierarchy, a monarchy or indeed a totalitarian regime. Now we want to know we experience capitalism's unique form of *jouissance*, and moreso we want to experience each new form of semblance to which our capitalist

masters provide us access. This is most pronounced in the weight loss industry as each new advert on television presents the new version of the previous (for example in September 2011 in New Zealand we have just been informed of the new and improved Ab Circle Pro V2.0 system, apparently an improved version of the original – but still new – Ab Circle Pro). The function of this cruel and in my view unethical way of running an industry, preys on the anxious weight-loss consumer by this process of imitating the *jouissance* they desire – it frustrates desire and intensifies anxiety symptoms. Further, the Sovereign Good that provides the moralistic basis for this industry, Body Mass Index, is a particularly nasty structuring signifier – it drags many things into its orbit, including moral worth, character and intellect. It even dictates granting of citizenship rights! We have to be able to do better than this – there must be a way for the student of the industry of capitalism (I say student here to refer to the underlying discourse of the university that provides the structure for capitalism) to demand more of their teacher than the semblance of *jouissance* currently on offer.

8.2. The burden of the university

In this section, I want to achieve one main thing; to consider how the role of the discourse of the university can be separated as a discursive format from the discourse of the master. Often they are conflated and compared to the hysteric, however they serve different purposes, even though they are clearly related.

The problem with the discourse of the master is that it assumes a privileged position as the one that 'knows' the truth. Crucially this ignores a variety of other ways of knowing, this is the advantage of the discourse of the university, as it places in the position of agent S_2 the 'barrage of signifiers'. The voice of university has featured heavily in this thesis,

partially because by its very nature the thesis must function as a product of the university, but it has also featured as the authority behind much of the argument. So for example, in the Master's section above and in Chapter seven I emphasised the 'broken-ness' of the weight-loss industry, stating essentially that it is nothing more than a fragmented bunch of meaningless phallic dribble aimed at the anxious weight-loss consumer to apprehend their surplus jouissance in the form of capital. The university is not comfortable with the boldness of this statement, it feels the need, as many of us do, to underpin this master-speak by quoting the facts and figures, science and literature that support the assertion. This is what I attempted when publishing chapter five in the journal *Culture & Organization*. This utilises aspects of my own history as data to attempt to demonstrate how the circuits of phallic *jouissance* operate in a weight-anxious person such as me and what impact that has on my life. The dominant voice in this publication is the voice of the university, for all of my rhetoric attempting to allow the hysterical 'Andy' an opportunity to speak in that paper in the wrap-up he is structured into his rightful place by the logic and rationality of the consumable conclusions. This is correct and a predictable way for the university to function and is the general requirement placed on the students of the university when publishing.

My grandfather did not have a formal education, though we talked about him as if he did. This is because he was extremely knowledgeable and opinionated in many areas, including poetry, politics and music. However, we tend(ed) to precede any discussion of his substantial intellectual prowess with the phrase "he had no formal education, but…" Of course this story is not uncommon in families all over the world – it speaks I think, to

the legitimating power of the discourse of the university and importantly its main device – the thesis. Here are Lacan's words on this:

> "And when one thinks like the university, what one produces is a thesis. This order of production is always related to the master signifier – not simply because that discerns it for you, but quite simply because it forms a part of the presuppositions according to which everything in this order is related to the author's name. It is very refined. There is sort of a preliminary step, which lies at the threshold of the university. You will have the right to speak there, subject to the altogether strict convention that you will forever have your thesis pinned onto you. This gives your name its weight. Nevertheless, you are in no way bound by what is in your thesis. Normally, in any case, you content yourself with that. But that doesn't matter, you will always be able to say whatever you want if you have already become a name. This is what plays the role of a master signifier" (Lacan, 2007 (1969-70), p. 191)

Excellent! So assuming that I get this degree then that is enough for me to say 'I am legitimate!' I am not bound by what content I actually include within its covers. The name: 'Dr' is enough to convey its power as a *point-de-capiton*, specifically a structuring signifier under the watch of the discourse of the university, the discourse that rules our current epoch. Unfortunately 'knowing' this about the thesis-as-product is a burden for me as the author of the thesis. I think it would be preferable not to be aware of this particular master signifier and its operation. Then I could progress without philosophical or ethical caution within the field of signifiers, structured by the thesis, which has told me my whole life that the university does actually 'know' things and that if I want to also

'know' things (which clearly I do) then it is the place for me. Unfortunately I cannot now ignore that I 'know' that the university doesn't actually 'know' but that it does insist that I appear to 'know' via the device of this thesis. I am sorry for drawing attention to this inconvenient juxtaposition to other members of the university, especially in this context!

I am purposefully going to leave this idea at this point, because it is very anxiety provoking to think about the process of the university so close to examination of my thesis. But before I move onto the hysteric I feel the requirement to state the contribution I believe my thesis makes to the university itself:

By pursuing what I consider to be a radical psychoanalytic autoethnography I have distanced myself from the traditions of the university and my disciplined area of study. This is my way of reacting to the power that the institution of the university has to suck students into the various forms required by their discipline. Conscious 'knowledge' is one very legitimate way of knowing about things. Science, as the vehicle of conscious knowledge, provides so much to humanity that I cannot be more encouraging of the disciplined way that science works. That said, I have experienced personally the power of unconscious 'knowledge' to break lifelong signification spells and create something new. However, Freud's discovery (the unconscious) is overlooked in so much of what occurs in the university that we need to radicalize, to pursue new things and to critique the university – this is what I have done in this thesis.

8.3.   The enduring voice of the hysteric

"The greatest hysteric is… the one who constantly questions what kind of object she is in the desire of the Other" (Salecl, 2004, p. 77).

What do they want from me? I am so completely unsatisfied with what the Master has said so far in this chapter. There are so many unanswered questions, so many bits of turgid prose that miss the mark. They don't get me, they don't represent me, they leave me feeling lost – emphasising my already obvious LACK.

Frustration doesn't even begin to explain the feeling, I feel unheard, subjected first to the directive impotence of the Master, and then to add insult to injury to the turgidity of the wannabe-scholar, desperately attempting to justify himself to the equally impotent University.

The Master pretends he is so 'sorted', full of definitive descriptions, reflecting back on research questions as if this will cure my symptom. He has FAILED. I still feel horrible and fat – I still search the internet for the latest weight-loss miracle, I almost bought an 'ab-circle pro v2.0' yesterday – I don't know what is wrong with me, maybe I need to stop thinking?

But I can't stop thinking, as soon as I try the university reminds me that I have a thesis to finish, so I get back into it – re-read, read, re-read, remind myself that I was thinner than I am now when I started this bloody PhD. Maybe it was a mistake to start with, maybe I should have just become a personal trainer, and surrounded myself with proper thin people. What do you have to say about that Master?

The problem is he sounds so convincing, the argument that it is all about society and that weight-loss is not the 'Good' thing to do, but is really just a 'good', a commodity of capitalism is really compelling. Maybe this is the answer to my weak

mind. Maybe this will allow me to feel free again (have I ever felt free, indeed have I ever felt less-free?). But how do I do what he suggests? The university has answers here – I can try to collaboratively bear my desire. What does that mean? Collaborate with whom exactly?

I don't understand you Master/University? Please tell me again what is wrong with me? Who am I to you? What do you want from me?

8.4.   The failed analyst

It is extremely difficult to write from the position of analyst with any credibility at all. The discourse of the analyst has as its agent the *objet a*, underpinned by knowledge (S_2) that cannot be spoken in the position of truth:

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \frac{\$}{S_1}$$
$$A$$

The function of the analyst in a Lacanian clinical setting is a fraught position, it requires the analyst (a split and lacking subject themselves) to suspend their judgment and instead allow the analysand to talk. In the speech of the analysand the analyst waits for cues to emerge that provide a glimpse of the unconscious of the subject, they then offer their own speech, as interpretations, in an attempt to reveal (or unveil as the case may be) the language of the unconscious. This process involves the analyst intentionally hystericizing the discourse of the analysand, which is in Lacan's terms "the structural introduction, under artificial conditions, of the hysteric's discourse" (Lacan, 2007 (1969-70), p. 33).

The possible result of this action is lasting change – in particular re-signification of the Master signifier of the analysand (and possibly the analyst).

The discourse of the analyst is not one that is inherently limited to the interaction between the analyst and analysand (this is described in more detail in chapter three). Rather it can be viewed as a social bond that creates change in many settings. Possibilities for emergence of the analyst's discourse outside of psychoanalytic practice include in the teaching profession, during religious counsel, and at times of political instability among many others.

My argument is that an opportunity for emergence of the analyst's discourse also exists when one undertakes extensive introspection of their self in relation to the Symbolic order under the guidance of counsel – for example by conducting an autoethnographic PhD with support from astute supervision (formal and otherwise); the supervisors here can act as analyst, embodying the object cause of desire and hystericizing the student's discourse at appropriate moments. For me this is what has occurred, my astute supervision panel included a range of people, including my formal supervisors Craig and Mandy but also my partner, Mother, Brother and a number of the participants of my project. With this in mind, my aim in this final section is to discuss the products of analysis in relation to the process of this thesis. In effect I am reviewing what I have written and attempting to provide an interpretation (via the interpretations of my supervision panel) of the experiences and discussions I report in this thesis.

The starting point for (not quite) understanding what I write in this section must be the disjunction I have emphasised in the previous sections of this chapter: that is the

continued disjunction between the Master/University and the hysteric. This is because the subject who stands to benefit from analysis is the hystericized subject, as Sköld says below:

> As an inverse of the discourse of the master, the discourse of the analyst 'supposes that there is knowledge in the place of truth' (Wajcman, 2003). This does not mean, of course, that the dominant agent of this discourse really is in possession of some absolute knowledge. Rather does a supposed knowledge on part of the analyst function as a means for the hystericized subject to get something out of analysis—such as a reconfiguration of the predicament that regulates the subject's desire and the generation of a new identity (S1). A supposed knowledge on part of the analyst concerning the subject's situation thus functions as a means for a new symbolic mandate to emerge out of analysis, that will regulate how the subject conceives of itself and its enjoyment. Hence the knowledge in question here could, in Lacan's wording, be said to be 'a means for *jouissance*' (Lacan, 2007: 50). What this dynamic moreover implies, is that the analyst will come to function as the analysand's desired object (*a*) over the course of psychoanalytic treatment (Sköld, 2010, p. 372)

The bind that the function of the analyst's discourse places me in is tricky. As a direct result of my autoethnographic method, I am attempting to inhabit both the position of the analyst (through the interpretations of other analysts) and that of the analysand simultaneously. It is rather obvious to argue that this is simply an untenable position – however I think we can find some value in this untenability. The key is to accept that my hysterical 'self' does actually have faith in the 'supposed-knowledge' (that inhabits the

position of truth in the analyst's discourse) that my analyst 'self' possesses about my situation via my interaction with the analyst Others whom I outlined above. This is both accurate and inaccurate, which is the nature of discourse in a Lacanian frame. Of course, I am going to fail to make accurate interpretations, as I will also enact the discourse of the Master and the University. However by being willing to make the attempt I hope to signify significant change.

The above paragraph contains what I consider to be one of the main contributions of my thesis to management and organisation studies. Most Lacanian minded scholars may see the discourse of the analyst to be something out-of-reach, something they cannot (and should not) have access to. I hope to demonstrate that it is in fact very accessible, and it is not dissimilar to what occurs on the psychoanalyst's couch. The process of individual psychoanalysis is not all about the relation of the analyst to analysand. It starts firmly in the discourse of the Master/University and sometimes never leaves there. Sometimes discourse is hystericized and the analyst's discourse emerges to create new structuring signifiers for the analysand (and analyst) and then the rest of analysis enacts the Master/University relationship. The fact is these social bonds are not ours to play with – we cannot use them as interpretative options as Nobus and Quinn (2005) would say – instead they play with us. But it is by observing, closely, the transitions between the social bonds that we may catch a glimpse of lasting change being made – as per the analyst's discourse, at least this is how I interpret Lacan's comment from *Encore:* "There is some emergence of analytic discourse with each shift from one discourse to another" (cited in, Hoens, 2006, p. 94). It is with this in mind that I continue this final section with my interpretations from the analyst.

In chapter two, I discussed how analytical interpretation could be 'tested' in a piece of social research such as this thesis. I quoted Źiźek as saying that the only method of testing an interpretation is to look to any truth-effect that might have been unleashed in the subject as a consequence of experiencing the interpretation. It is these effects of the truth that I am seeking to explore within the three sections below. Each section follows one of the main data chapters, the first considering chapter five on *jouissance* and desire, the second chapter six on gender and the third chapter seven on ethics and the organisation of the weight-loss industry.

8.4.1. Anxiety and desire, or drive?

I am framing this sub-section around a long and rather involved quote. It comes from Slavoj Źiźek, specifically a discussion he writes on the distinction between desire and drive in relation to anxiety.

> "Miller also proposed a Benjaminian distinction between "constituted anxiety" and "constituent anxiety," which is crucial with regard to the shift from desire to drive: while the first one designates the standard notion of the terrifying and fascinating abyss of anxiety which haunts us, its infernal circle which threatens to draws us in, the second one stands for the "pure" confrontation with objet petit a as constituted in its very loss... In a case of constituted anxiety, the object dwells within the confines of a fantasy, while we only get the constituent anxiety when the subject "traverses the fantasy" and confronts the void, the gap, filled up by the fantasmatic object. However, clear and convincing as it is… Miller's formula… remains within the horizon of desire - the true object-cause of desire is the void filled in by its fantasmatic incarnations. While, as Lacan emphasizes, *objet a* is also the object of

drive, the relationship is here thoroughly different: although, in both cases, the link

between object and loss is crucial, in the case of *objet a* as the object-cause of

desire, we have an object which is originally lost, which coincides with its own

loss, which emerges as lost, while, in the case of *objet a* as the object of drive, the

"object" IS DIRECTLY THE LOSS ITSELF - in the shift from desire to drive, we

pass from the lost object to loss itself as an object. That is to say, the weird

movement called "drive" is not driven by the "impossible" quest for the lost

object; it is a push to directly enact the "loss" - the gap, cut, distance – itself"

(Zizek, n.d., para 9).

In chapter five, I didn't mention drive in very much detail. I only discussed drive in

relation to Lacan tripartition need, demand, desire, and here only to establish the basis for

an understanding of Lacanian desire. I certainly made no mention of the difference

between 'constituent' and 'constituted' anxiety, instead relying on a more general

understanding of anxiety drawn from Lacan's 10th seminar. This additional level of

analysis is useful for two main reasons in this final section of my thesis. The first is it

provides a framework to think more carefully about the subject's experience of phallic

jouissance that I explore in chapter five and second it provides an avenue to consider the

direction that the capitalist weight-loss industry is moving in (desire/drive).

In chapter five I distinguished between two types of weight loss industry consumers: *one*

that is not weight-anxious, but does partake in weight-loss activities for a number of

reasons and one that is specifically defined by weight-anxiety, whose life revolves around

attempts at weight control in an attempt to restore lack. I was uncomfortable about this at

the time, and my supervisors specifically asked me to identify the difference. Upon

reflection, in-line with Zizek's discussion above it seems likely that a more extensive consideration would need to be made for each subject to determine what relationship their anxiety has with the *objet a*. For those with constituted anxiety with regard to their weight symptoms, this would be as I formulated in chapter five, as the object cause of desire. But for those with constituent anxiety with regard to their weight symptoms the relationship to the *objet a* is one of drive – specifically the object of drive. Here the subject's anxiety revolves around the loss directly, rather than the object that comes to represent the loss. The ramifications of this are primarily directed within a clinical setting, as each anxious subject's relationship with the weight loss industry will be specific to their situation. That is not to say that my analysis in chapter five is not useful, as each subject's Imaginary is constructed out of their relationships with the Other, which is the Symbolic.

In another publication, Zizek used the same analysis as in his quote above to consider the different ways that desire and drive are related to capitalism. Again, desire is as I have argued it in chapter five and seven; the subject's consumerist behaviour revolves around the object cause of desire, which shifts, as directed by the weight loss industry. The drive in capitalism is different, Zizek says: "The drive inheres to capitalism at a more fundamental, systemic level: drive propels the entire capitalist machinery; it is the impersonal compulsion to engage in the endless circular movement of expanded self-reproduction" (Zizek, 2006, pp. 117-118). This more fundamental mechanism is very interesting to me, as I can see potential for thinking about this formulation of drive and the weight-loss industry alongside a consideration of drive (particular the oral drive) in relation to anorexia. However, this is beyond the scope of my current study.

8.4.2.   Gendered confusion

At the start of the first section of chapter six, entitled "Am I a man?" I made the following statement: *The first thing I automatically want to say when I read this question is – well I have a penis! Unfortunately that doesn't really end the argument because it is well known that many people exist sans-penis who would call themselves men, and on the contrast some of those that do have the organ who would be very offended to be called a man. It seems that possession of a penis is not an answer.* When my supervisors first read this statement, they drew my attention to my use of the word 'possession' in the final line. They were noting the similarity between my vernacular and the important psychoanalytic concept 'possession of a phallus'.

It seems possible that in this opening my unconscious was attempting to summarise the analysis I presented in the rest of the chapter to answer my own question by saying (correctly) that possession of a phallus is not an answer to the question of gender. This is because a woman's physical lack of the biological organ is not the same thing as her (or indeed my) symbolic lack of the phallus. The main Lacanian point to make here is that the lack of the symbolic phallus is in itself a 'kind of possession' as Lacan states in seminar four. This means that one's relationship to the phallus is always some kind of possession of that phallus (either of it directly or of a lack of it). Both cases underline the fundamental importance of the structuring nature of the phallus. This conclusion is an important contribution of this thesis to the management and organisation studies, as the structuring nature of the phallus dictates how all signifiers are related to each other in the Symbolic world that controls the vast majority of organisational settings (I want to leave a tiny space here for any organisational settings outside of the function of the phallus). This

means that we cannot conduct a reliable or valid psychoanaytic organisational analysis without making some attempt to trace the signifying contours of the phallic function of that organisational setting.

Further on in chapter six I turned the lens to Susie Orbach's text *Fat is a Feminine Issue*. Prior to launching into my re-reading of Orbach I attempted to explain (as a result of my supervisors asking me) why I had chosen this text out of a number of possibilities. My reasoning was that at some point my unconscious had linked Orbach to my mOther – I said: *Predictably, in choosing Orbach's text to re-consider gender in relation to fatness, I still seek the object cause of my desire – my mOther's desire*. Looking back reflexively this answer seems to miss the more interesting issue – that is what does this statement mean for the conclusions I present in that chapter in relation to Orbach's text? Although I cannot identify how this process has occurred my analysis suggests that it is a metonymic relationship where Orbach (generally and *Fat Is a Feminist Issue* specifically) became entrenched as the next signifier in my 'why am I so worried about what I weigh' signifying chain.

8.4.3.   Ethics and No (sexual) relations

I want to offer two interpretations in this section, both related to chapter seven on the ethics of the weight-loss industry.

My first interpretation is a reaction to reflecting on a segment of chapter seven. At one point I introduced a short conversation I shared with 'Eric', one of the men I had involved in my interviews, Eric had lost about 65kgs. Here is the beginning of the exchange:

E: "I think the biggest reaction I have is my own personal reaction, and that is when I see somebody who is grossly overweight… I get quite disgusted…"

A: "right"

E: "…and I think… why are you like that, why have you let yourself get like that?"

A: "mmm". (Research Diary, 29-10-09)

I want to consider my reaction to Eric's statements here, as I think a slip-of-the-tongue emerges. After he makes his first comment I reply 'right'. Subsequently I only acknowledge his statements with a benign 'mmm'. My interpretation is that my unconscious made the first statement – agreeing with Eric's feelings, indeed for a time after I myself lost much weight I looked at images of fat people with disgust. But more importantly I looked at images of my (fat) self with disgust (and still do). I completely agree with my subsequent analysis in chapter seven that it is the abject represented by the fat that disturb(ed) me. Also intriguing here is my quick thinking consciousness, structured by the Symbolic; it required me to say 'mmm' rather than anything else for to falsely appear benign to my subject in case I contaminated his speech; here the discourse of the University's ethical interviewing strategy intervened to correct my aberrant behaviour.

Even though the above is just a short and simple interpretation, it should have significant implications for all social researchers conducting interviews. This shows two things, that when we are looking at our involvement in an interview it is important to read between

the (conscious) lines to look for the unconscious voice – as it provides a window into an agent that is often overlooked. Secondly we should look to the change in discursive direction, such as me changing my reaction from 'right', to 'mmm'. When we look closely at this switch we may uncover a structuring element of the Symbolic (a *point de capiton*) emerging to bring us into line. This is and should be a fruitful avenue for exploration.

For the second interpretation in this section, I want to offer an analysis of my use of Catlaw and Jordon's concept of 'bearing desire' as a more ethical way to approach the industry of weight anxiety. In particular I want to pick up on the obvious 'gap' between my perception of my relationship with Phil that I describe in some detail at the end of chapter seven and Phil's perception of that relationship. In chapter seven I said of this gap '*my imaginary has been successful in constructing a conspirator out of Phil, someone whom I felt a certain kinship with, someone whom I saw as a fellow travellor in my journey away from suffering the demand of society to lose weight*'. I subsequently promised to examine this here and I shall not let you down!

Lacan famously says in *Encore* "there's no such thing as a sexual relationship" (Lacan, 1998 (1972-73), p. 17). This is a catch-phrase that is often used for dramatic effect (and fair enough!) but his words in Seminar XVII on this are, for me at least, perhaps more useful: "What the master's discourse uncovers is that there is no sexual relation" (Lacan, 2007 (1969-70), p. 116). Here Lacan is identifying that there is no relation between the sexes that is not mediated through language. This is directly relevant to my inability to recognise Phil's likely reaction to my story. My fantasy held Phil as a co-collaborator when bearing desire, as if we had some sort of instinctual 'joining' of understanding, an

unspoken understanding that our relationship was based on the Master's lie – being the Soveriegn Good that is losing weight for the sake of weight-loss and the subsequent exchange of goods of the weight-loss industry (give the weight-loss industry your cash AND your fat). Instead, as always, language came between us, as Phil clearly still believes in the same Master he always has believed in.

The question the analyst raises must then be addressed at Catlaw and Jordon's 'collaboratively bearing desire' as Lacan's formulation (best rendered in the original French *l n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*) expressly prohibits collaboration between subjects outside of the specific collaboration available within language.

I started this thesis with a story and in line with my autoethnographic method I want to finish with one. This is something that happened to me very recently, and might shed some shed some light on moving forward with the bearing of desire.

> *Sue offered me a ride home yesterday. We had just completed a very taxing endurance mountain running event together, both taking just over 8 hours to finish the race; we were elated and very sore! Sue and I had trained for the race together and she had specifically asked me to compete so she had a friend out on the course (it was her first time). Sue is a middle-aged woman with two children; she has always been a road-runner and has always been very trim.*

> *In the car Sue asked me to explain what my PhD topic was, like most I love to talk about my thesis but sometimes struggle to make it consumable for someone new to Lacan. This time I decided to start but explaining what I thought about fatness. My introduction followed these lines: 'We seem to take it for granted that if someone*

appears to be fat, they must want to lose weight. The basic premise of a weight-obsessed society is that slim is best. I want to question that premise – to ask if it is in fact our right in society to demand that a fat person must want to lose weight'

Her reply was different to many, she said 'I have never thought about it like that'.

There is an interesting analytical moment in Sue's reply. This relates to Lacan's re-formulation of the famous "I think therefore I am". He re-wrote this to read "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I think not" (Lacan.com, 1997/2006, p. para 7). Lacan here is drawing attention to the fundamental split that acquisition of language creates in the subject. Sue had never thought (consciously) about the premise that 'slim is best'. But, like almost all of society, she was where she thought not, that is her unconscious, inline with the Symbolic, certainly did think slim was best. Sue is not uncommon of course; the prevalence of this unconscious pattern of thinking is unquestionable. What I can do is use language to challenge, and ask as I did of Sue: Is it our right to demand that a fat person want to lose weight? Then do as the analyst would: Suspend judgement; follow desire.

9. References

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Appendix A: Approval Letter from Ethics Committee

Massey University

21 April 2009

Mr Andrew Dickson
14 Donovan Road
PARAPARAUMU BEACH

Dear Andrew

Re: HEC: Southern B Application – 08/61
**   The psychological and social issues associated with men's weight in New Zealand**

Thank you for your letter dated 6 April 2009.

On behalf of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are now approved. Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Dr Karl Pajo, Chair
Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B

cc   Dr Craig Prichard   Prof Claire Massey, HoD
     Dept of Management   Dept of Management
     PN214   PN214

     A/Prof Mandy Morgan
     School of Psychology
     PN320

Massey University Human Ethics Committee
Accredited by the Health Research Council

Te Kunenga
ki Pūrehuroa

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Appendix B: Published version of Jouissance of the Lard(er)

Appendix C: Stories for Group Interviews

Family Christmas

I have a reasonably large extended family. Although my nuclear family consists of only my mum, dad and one older brother all of my family holidays were spent with at least ten of my cousins and a variety of uncles, aunties and grandparents. Like many middle class New Zealand families in the early 1980s Christmas for us (me, at least) was a big deal. My family and I always travelled to be with the rest of the clan in Wanganui; usually we went up a couple of days before Christmas day and the build-up to present opening and (probably more so) binge eating was for me, at fever pitch.

My family reports that for several years in a row, between the ages of seven and thirteen, I ate so much on Christmas day that I ended up throwing up. My cousins called it 'Andy's power chunder'. This series of binging events played a fairly major role in me developing a reputation, in my family and other associated networks (most notably the Presbyterian church community), for being a big eater throughout the rest of my life (it even continues today). I have very strong memories of us all standing around a table haemorrhaging with food, I move towards the table, eager for goodies, and one of the adults would say "Watch out, Andy's going for the food – we'd better get in before it's all gone!" Raucous laughter would follow. I remember feeling a mix of emotions, partly happy to be the centre of attention, partly happy to have a role in a family where I was most often one of the youngest (at least in this I was important), but I was also really upset to be the one laughed at.

Sitting here now recounting this story I am struggling with feelings of rejection, it's weird... suddenly I feel fatter. Maybe I am somehow metaphorically 'wearing' my feelings of rejection.

I have always been good at capitalising on position, and I must have spotted a real opportunity in this eating business. It became uncommon in my family for a group meal to occur without some reference to my eating prowess; often my aunty would say "you can't really eat all of that food Andy?" or someone else would pull out the classic "your eyes are bigger than your stomach".

Three days before the marathon

I have noticed that I seem to struggle with the fat in my mind significantly more when I am anxious about an upcoming event. Today is three days before the Rotorua marathon, which will be my third marathon. It is also almost exactly 12 months since I ran my first marathon (which was also in Rotorua).

For some reason, usually just prior to these events I seem to begin to believe that I am getting fatter, even when there is absolutely no evidence to support this. This feeling is exacerbated by two marathon preparation ceremonies. One is 'the taper', this is when you reduce the amount of training you are doing in the several weeks leading up to the event, culminating in three days of absolutely no running before race day. Today is the first day of my taper, so I am separated from my usual method of anxiety avoidance behaviour (intense exercise). The second marathon phenomenon is 'carb loading', where the athlete actively over-eats in the week leading up to the marathon, particularly on carbohydrate rich food, the science is dubious on the use of this – but it is alluring to a reformed overeater like me.

Right now I am sitting down jogging through ideas in my head – the common theme is what I can do to reduce the feeling that I am getting fatter and fatter. I am tossing ideas around such as, active stretching, going for a swim in the local pool, or going for a walk (it is persistently raining outside!). The funny thing is that writing this makes me feel better, and it kicks off other thoughts. One memory I am having is of a nightmare I used to suffer from when I was a younger adult (15 – 22). In this dream I feel that I am trapped inside an ever enlarging ball, like being the small hard centre inside a gobstopper, except that the gobstopper is continuously expanding while I remain the same size. I used to wake up terribly scared that I would always be trapped. Back then I explained the dream away either as nothing of significance or as a reflection of my concern over being trapped in circumstances of my life, university studies, relationships etc... I can honestly say I never gave any thought to the possibility that this might be a metaphor for the 'real' me being trapped inside an ever enlarging and out of control fat body – yet now this seems probable. Although not as intense as the post-dream feeling, the pre-event feeling is very similar... it seems to be my fear of becoming embodied in an uncontrollably growing fat body.

My Brother's Place

The scene is my brother's house in Christchurch, February 2006. Anna and I had gone down to stay with Mark and Shona to help them put an internal wall into a garage. At this stage I was probably about 118kg – which for me was a pretty low weight. I remember that I had been dieting and exercising quite intensely for the previous two months or so, for instance I had just done a 10km competition run with a colleague from my University in just under 55 minutes (I was really excited about this). Consequently I was probably in a frame of mind that resulted in me talking about my weight with my brother. Mark is about twenty months older than me, a tiny bit shorter than I am and has always been in the 'normal' weight range for his height, between 75 and 82kg. The common theme in my family is that Mark is 'slighter' of frame than me, and that I was always a 'big boned' boy. During the first evening the four of us were sitting around talking, partly about my weight. In the course of the discussion Anna suggested that I try and eat exactly the same food as Mark the next day, her philosophy was exactly that stated above – I needed to eat to support the body of a smaller bloke (i.e. Mark) if I also wanted that body. Anna tells me that she had put this idea to me some months before and that she took this opportunity to suggest a realistic test. Bravado, the threat of losing, or the thrill of a challenge took control and I agreed.

The following day I awoke awash with anxiety (I can still remember the feeling – kind of light headed, bordering on panic). My brother by comparison was positively bouncy, which I put down to him being excited about being able to control my behaviour (also a common theme in my family). In fact I imagine that he was simply excited about the opportunity to help me shed light on a problem I had been suffering with for many years. Anna remembers me dipping chippies in dip in exact unison with Mark – even measuring the amount of dip that ended up on the chip! She also remembers me taking her aside several times during the day, in what she calls "a terrified state, verging on a panic attack" she reports that I said that I thought that if I didn't eat enough food then I might die (this sounds completely ridiculous to me now – but I remember the intense feelings). In hind-sight the day went really well, Mark and I happily managed to get the work basically finished and I ate almost exactly the same food as Mark, and thankfully I didn't die.

The Dirty Scales

I decided to weigh myself after I hadn't been on the scales for couple of months to test a few things. I guess I wanted to know if I was still in the standard ballpark of what I had arbitrarily designated as my 'acceptable weight band'. However I was also a little nervous as I had noticed a few small changes to my body shape (in particular a jacket that has always been a bit small is a bit smaller) that I wanted to test on the scales. I weighed 97kg, which in context is probably about 3.5 to 4kg heavier than a couple of months ago. I was completely shocked. I had expected to be heavier but had dreamed of being lighter. Immediately the anxiousness overwhelmed me and I felt compelled to run and measure my waist, which is another way I test weight loss/gain. My waist was exactly the same at 91cm. Then I ran into the bedroom and took out a pair of trousers I hadn't worn for a few months – they fit me the same as normal. Ok... so I talked to Anna for ages and ran through the reasoning process, here are the highlights:

- Normally I weigh myself after a big run – often after 15kms or more, which would result in a lower weight on the scales – up to 3kgs. This time I weighed myself without having just been for a run.

- Over the last two months I have been on a fairly serious resistance training schedule – with the aim to build muscle and become stronger. As muscle is denser than fat (about 20%) I figured that some of the weight gain can be attributed to additional muscle bulk.

- Still on the muscle front – I am stronger than I was 2 months ago, adding more strength to the muscle story.

So after running through this reasoning process I began to make a plan, first on my plan was to eat virtually nothing (and particularly no carbs), second on my plan was to stop all resistance training and concentrate on running lots of kms. Third was to go for a really big run today, drink no liquid and then weigh myself afterwards to instantly see a difference on the scales.

Writing this I am completely torn – half of me is sitting here thinking: Good plan Andy, get into it. The other half is saying why are you concentrating so much on the scales dipshit? Who gives a shit? It is so frustrating, why are the scales so important to my mental state? Why are they more important than my waist measurement for instance?

Reductil

For me the two psychological things that I needed to 'get' in order to make a permanent change were a) the desire to want to change and b) the belief that I could actually change. I had the first in droves (I wanted to change since I was about 20 I think) but I really believed that I was genetically determined to be fat, that I couldn't change... I just simply couldn't get my head to actually believe that I was not "just a big kiwi bloke". I even thought that my portion sizes were reasonable (trust me mate - they were not!) What the Reductil did for me was to challenge my assumptions by removing the drive to eat; I had to really think about what was reasonable to eat in every meal - man, what a life lesson! It showed me within about 2 weeks that I could really change...

I think that weight loss medication like Reductil can be totally abused... but it can also be used to help people overcome the psychological constructions that support the overeating behaviours... but only in certain circumstances as one part of a multi-dimensional approach (nutrition and exercise being the main-stays, they ensure my continued success!)

As far as I am aware Reductil has never heard of me! (I only took a three month course between April and June last year).

Appendix D: Selection of Articles Published in *Healthy Food Guide*

news
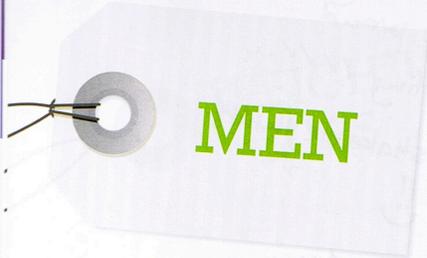
MEN

father figures

*The average age of fathers
of new babies is 33 years, but
one in 100 babies has a father
aged 50 years or over. More than
a quarter (28 per cent) of babies
born in New Zealand last year
were to fathers who were not
themselves born in New Zealand.
this compares with 24 per cent a
decade ago Fathers with children
aged under a year old manage
with 42 minutes less sleep than
the average of 8.5 hours.*

Source: Statistics New Zealand

FAST FACT:
Only 25 per cent of 1016,
25 to 44-year-old surveyed
men were prepared to give
up watching sport on TV if
doing so would help their
partner fall pregnant.
Source: Bayer Healthcare

Listen to your body

An HFG reader recently commented on a tip I included in the June 2009 issue. I wrote, "eat when you are hungry and stop when you are full – a simple piece of advice". the reader commented this wasn't good advice for weight-loss because it's near impossible to trust your appetite when you are trying to lose weight.

When I was over 130kg if someone had told me I should "eat when you are hungry and stop when you are full", there's no doubt I would have had a similar reaction – in fact I still feel that way sometimes! But if you ask a bloke who has never struggled with weight and body image issues, this tip is just commonsense. The difference is in the function of a person's appestat (that part of your brain that tells you when you are hungry and full). In my view, this 'appestat' is both physical and psychological: although we have physical hunger and fullness cues, we can confuse physical hunger with some other type of desire – favourites for men include relieving boredom, anxiety, anger, or frustration. The function of the physical side of

the appestat is the basis of the normal 'portion control' weight-loss advice as this will give your body a chance to physically register the food and respond with a physical signal of fullness. This can work but it's not ideal advice for everyone as portion control will certainly not satisfy psychological hunger. This is not to say I don't attempt to control portions – it's just that sometimes I don't have enough food and other times I have too much, and these days I try to let my body tell me which is which. Recognising feelings of hunger and fullness is a fraught business, and it can be tricky explaining to those trying to lose weight what people who have never had weight issues experience. By allowing your body to call the shots I think you can reinstate the function of your physical and psychological appestat (most of the time) and develop a relationship with food that feels more natural.

Andrew Dickson has a BSc in biochemistry, and he's undertaking a PhD at Massey University looking at the psychological and social aspects of men's weight issues.

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AM I HUNGRY?
BY ANDREW DICKSON

Many researchers believe if we can't naturally recognise when we are hungry and full, we can learn how to identify our satisfaction. A number of techniques to do this have been suggested, but finding one which works is easier said than done. Trust me. I know this from personal experience!

Hunger and fullness continue to haunt me on a daily basis. I constantly ask myself: 'Am I hungry or is it boredom?', or, 'Have I eaten enough? Am I still hungry?' It's very frustrating.

I can't give you a set of skills to accurately recognise your feelings of hunger or fullness, because I haven't yet found the magical set which works. In my opinion, it doesn't exist. What I *am* going to give you is an exercise which takes a different approach than what you may be used to.

If you are struggling with recognising feelings of hunger or fullness, try this. (A warning for men: I know this might seem 'un-bloke-like' but put aside your bench-pressing prowess and have a go – it definitely helps me.)

Satisfaction guaranteed exercise
Basically, this is a conversation with yourself about hunger and fullness.

Try to imagine a time recently when you ate, but you weren't sure as to whether you were really hungry. Or recall a time when you didn't recognise you were full, yet you kept on eating. Write a 'dialogue' between yourself and an imaginary person, giving this other person the right to say whatever they want to you, regardless of how 'mean' it may seem. Your side (of the conversation) argues in support of your actions, validating why you ate or giving reasons why you didn't recognise you were full. The other person answers in whatever way you imagine they would.
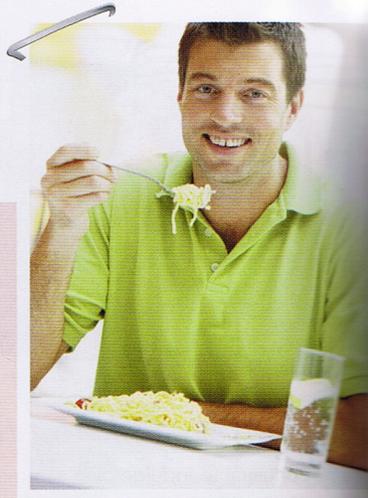
The goal of this exercise is to give voice to your feelings so you can begin to understand what is happening inside your head when you try to resolve feelings of hunger or fullness. You may be surprised at how judgemental you imagine the other person to be. Do you think this reflects reality?
See page 22 for more on satiety.

Andrew Dickson is a 'recovering' obese man who has lost 45 kilos since 2006. He has a BSc in biochemistry, and he's undertaking a PhD at Massey University looking at the psychological and social aspects of men's weight issues.

September 2009:

MEN

Putting weight-loss in persective

Us blokes are not unlike our female counterparts. We, too, struggle to maintain permanent weight-loss. And men's biggest barrier to focusing on fitness rather than body size is the same barrier women have – our society's preoccupation with body size.

One of the blokes I've worked with over the last couple of years has seen significant changes in his cardiovascular fitness and body shape, but he hasn't lost very much weight. I'm totally happy with this because, as I keep telling him, by being permanently fit (which is an achievable target for us blokes), he is basically alleviating any potential risk associated with his body weight. The important thing for me is that by staying fit, he is giving himself a better chance of living longer and better health outcomes – certainly better than if his body weight constantly fluctuated.

So my recommendation for others who may be in the same situation as this bloke is to increase your cardiovascular fitness while maintaining your current body size.

Here are a few of my exercise favourites for us bigger blokes.
Swimming This is a low impact, whole body, cardiovascular exercise. Slip on those budgie smugglers, lads!
Running There really is nothing better for improving overall cardiovascular fitness. Start off slow and mix in sections of walking. Challenge yourself by using a standard course and try to beat your own times every week.
Cycling Another low impact, cardio exercise. Lycra is calling!

And if you're up for it, how about combining the above and working towards a triathlon event?

Andrew Dickson is a 'recovering' obese man who has lost 45 kilos since 2006. He has a BSc in biochemistry, and he's undertaking a PhD at Massey University looking at the psychological and social aspects of men's weight issues.

Eat more processed tomatoes… More lycopene in the diet has been associated with a reduced risk of prostate cancer.